

TOURISM DESTINATIONS ALONG THE AZERBAIJAN SILK ROAD

Report 1/2



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Introduction

The Silk Roads, the most famous trade routes in history, may play a different role today than they did centuries ago, but their magnitude and mythical characteristics did not change. Trade always has been one of the main reasons the Silk Roads are essential in several countries along the passageway from East to West. Furthermore, many people follow Marco Polo's example and travel for cultural and knowledge exchanges. However, today's tourists do not need 24 years to travel across Asia and do not have to face the dangers the 13th century travellers wrote about, and can still experience the atmosphere, cultures, and traditions along the Silk Roads in whichever country they chose (Silk Road Foundation, 2000). With the One Belt One Road initiative of China, the UNESCO's Silk Roads Online Platform and the Silk Road Project of the United Nations World Travel Organisation, many countries along the Silk Roads realised the potentials of tourism focusing on the cities and destinations along the roads (UNWTO, n.d.; UNESCO a, n.d.).

With the rising popularity of cultural tourism and need for memorable experiences (Petroman, Petroman, Marin, Ciolac, Vaduva and Pandur, 2013) it is not surprising that visitors from all around the world and especially from the West started to set their eyes on the unique countries along the Silk Roads. In 2019, the visitor numbers in Azerbaijan increased by 11.4% to 3.1 million, compared to 2018. It was expected to grow more, but it is unknown now how the current situation with the COVID-19 will affect the numbers till the pandemic ends (Guha, 2020). However, the opportunities for Azerbaijan to develop their Silk Roads tourism are undoubtedly there. The following paper will examine the current situation of the Silk Roads projects on a global level and Azerbaijan's situation. It will also list the most famous and popular destinations in Azerbaijan along the Silk Roads, and the tourism products they offer, be it tangible, intangible, cultural, or natural. They are listed as primary and secondary resources where it is appropriate.

1.0 The Silk Road

The Silk Road, also known as Silk Route, was an ancient trade route between China and the West, mainly the ancient city of Rome. According to the Encyclopaedia Britannica (2019), the approximately 6.400 km long road started in Xi'an, and followed the line of the Great Wall of China. After passing next to the Takla Makan Desert, it was crossing the Pamirs and Afghanistan, and in the end the goods were shipped from Levant to Europe through the Mediterranean Sea. However, the UNESCO (b, n.d.) describes the Silk Roads as several roads across both land and sea, criss-crossing whole Eurasia. One of the most famous products carried on this vast network of roads is undoubtedly silk, the origin of its name. However, they not only carried tangible goods throughout history, but knowledge, cultures, and information too. The name, Silk Roads, were given by a German geologist, Baron Ferdinand von Richthofen in the mid-19th century, inspired by the Asian countries most popular product at that time (UNESCO b, n.d.).

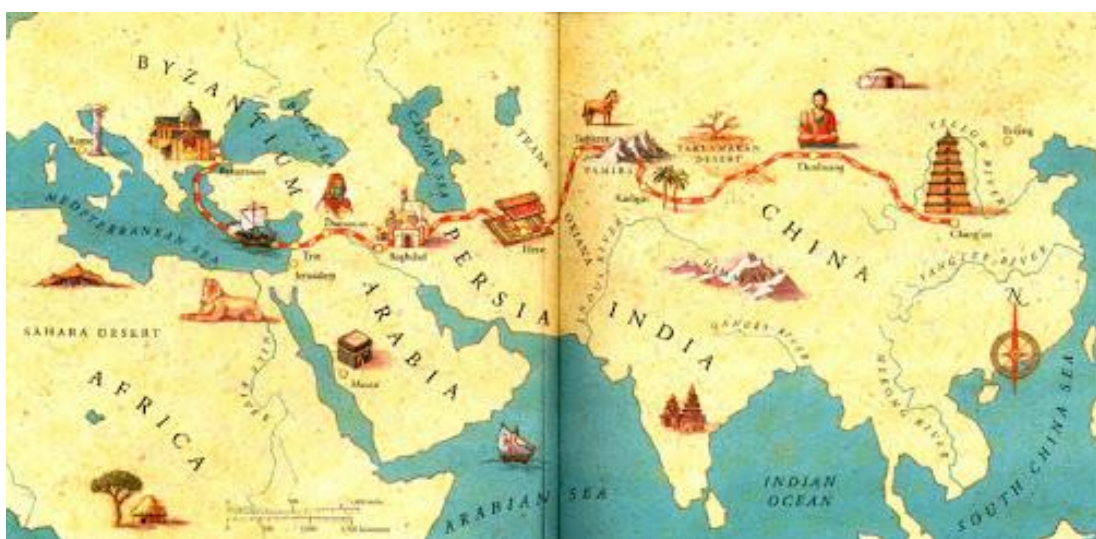
1.1 Importance of Silk Roads

As it was stated before, the Silk Roads were not only important for the possibility of carrying various products from city to city, country to country. It also provided opportunity for knowledge, information, and cultural exchanges. Many cities along the Silk Roads became a hub for these exchanges and developed into outstanding places with arts, sciences and crafts inspired and influenced by other cultures along the Silk Roads (UNESCO b, n.d.)

While not known by this name at that time, the Silk Roads started to appear after 1st century BC., when silk became a known and demanded product in the Roman Empire. At that time, the Chinese Emperors guarded the secret of silk production, but despite their efforts, the knowledge eventually spread beyond China. First India and Japan, then the Persian Empire started to craft silk products, and by the 6th century AD., the western countries also got the knowledge. However, the silk from the East and silkworms were still popular products, along with other ones, like textiles, spices, grain, vegetables and fruit, animal hides, tools, woodwork, metal work, religious objects, artwork, and precious stones. The trades between locals and merchants benefited both parties, and the cities along the Silk Roads not only became popular and busy hub points, but also gained **economic stability** and importance in their respective countries. Thus, the importance and popularity of the Silk Roads grew throughout the Middle Ages. They were still well-travelled in the 19th century, when the roads gained their famous name (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2019; UNESCO b, n.d.).

One of the main **historical importance** of the development of Silk Roads was the fact it connected the Eastern and Western countries, starting with the trading between the Roman Empire and China. The original Silk Road became the symbol of China opening to the world and being known in Europe. Through history, the criss-crossing roads developed because of political, economic, and technological changes. For example, when Roman merchants tried to avoid Rome's enemies, like the territory of the Parthians, they created a new road in the north. That road run through the Caucasus and maritime paths on the Caspian Sea, and added new cities and countries to the Silk Roads network. Natural phenomena, like dried out steppes, rock avalanches etc. also shifted the trade routes (UNESCO b, n.d.).

According to the UNESCO (b, n.d.), probably the most lasting heritage of the Silk Roads is the **cultural legacy**. They brought cultures and people in contact with each other. Merchants learnt languages and customs during their travel, then took it with them to their next location. As it was mentioned before, crafts, technologies, sciences, and arts were shared along the Silk Roads. The similarities caused by shared history can be still found today in those countries (History, 2019). Another "product" travellers on the roads carried around had been religion. Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Zoroastrianism and Manicheism spread, not just by merchants and travellers, but missionaries from their respective religions (UNESCO b, n.d.).



(Image source: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2019)

1.2 Silk Roads Today

The Silk Roads today are rich with tangible and intangible cultural heritage legacies. Monuments, like the caravanserais, crafts and specific cities still carry the history and culture of centuries. Countries along the Silk Roads possess many distinct but interconnected cultures, languages, customs, and religions developed over millennia. However, the trading aspect of these historical roads is not just a thing in the past. While several countries are building tourism around the legacies of it, the Silk Roads are also expected to fulfil their original role, and it shows in recent developments, like the One Belt, One Road initiative.

One Belt, One Road – OBOR

The initiative of OBOR came from the Chinese President Xi Jinping, in 2013. An ambitious economic development and commercial idea, with the aim to improve connectivity and cooperation between several countries in Asia, Africa, and Europe. The idea of this 900-billion-dollar project to restore the ancient Silk Road was born to improve China's interconnectivity to other countries and currently includes 78 of them (Seth, 2020). In the past years, hundreds of contracts were signed with several countries. They worked on creating the wind freight train line between Beijing and London, and introduced key OBOR routes from China to 14 other major European cities. China also invested in the refurbishment of the trading roads in several countries, by offering them low-cost loans (Kenton, 2019, Kou and Kommenda, 2018).

The land-based roads are called the Silk Road Economic Belt, while the sea routes are labelled as the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, and currently contain the following economic corridors:

- The New Eurasian Land Bridge, connecting Western China to Western Russia.
- The China-Mongolia-Russia Corridor, connecting North China to Eastern Russia via Mongolia.
- The China-Central Asia-West Asia Corridor, connecting Western China to Turkey via Central and West Asia.
- The China-Indochina Peninsula Corridor, connecting Southern China to Singapore via Indo-China.
- The China-Pakistan Corridor, connecting South Western China through Pakistan to Arabia sea routes.
- The Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Corridor, connecting Southern China to India via Bangladesh and Myanmar.
- The Maritime Silk Road connects coastal China to the Mediterranean via Singapore-Malaysia, the Indian Ocean, the Arabian Sea, and the Strait of Hormuz (Seth, 2020).

The originally 900-million-dollar project is said to be drastically over that estimation today. Critics also raise concern, saying that China is laying a debt trap for borrowing foreign governments, only focusing on their own gains and aim to reach new markets (Chatzky and McBride, 2020). While it is impossible to judge this, the OBOR initiative is clearly more focused on the trading aspect of the Silk Roads.

1.3 Tourism Along the Silk Roads

While the refurbishment aspects of the OBOR initiative and the establishment of new travel routes can easily result in increased visitor numbers, other projects, like the Silk Roads Online Platform International Network by UNESCO and the World Travel Organisation's Silk Road Project clearly put more emphasise on the protection, restoration and presentation of the tangible and intangible cultural heritages along the Silk Roads.

UNESCO

Opposed to the OBOR initiative, the UNESCO Silk Roads Online Platform International Network focuses on the tangible and intangible cultural heritage legacies of the Silk Roads. It aims to reopen dialogue along these historic lines of communication by collecting and making accessible worldwide scholarships about the Silk Roads. They want to engage a global audience in a deeper understanding of the diversity and interdependency of the cultures and peoples along these routes. They not only wish to share information, but promote the locations, aim to preserve the cultural heritage in the Member States and build a working partnership and network between them. Several countries, like Azerbaijan, already joined the Platform and they participate in conferences and meetings organised with the aim to create development plans and common goals (UNESCO a, n.d.).

UNWTO

The long-term project to revitalize the Silk Roads tourism was developed after the independence of the Central Asian Republics, by the World Tourism Organization. Currently, 34 countries are participating, and attend the International Silk Road Meetings, including Azerbaijan. Furthermore, UNWTO Affiliate Members from all around the world, also work together to promote the Silk Roads as an exciting tourism adventure. The meetings between the 34 countries are aimed to find collaborative opportunities and tourism projects and to strengthen regional cohesion, and the last one took place in Berlin, in 2019 (UNWTO, 2019).

The Silk Road Task Force ensures that every member is represented and given the opportunity to provide input into the program. They also provide feedback on action plans and strategies, work on the implementation of the action plan, be it long-term or short-term initiatives. The promotion of coordinated and clear information sharing, along with effective practices are also a focus point. As of 2017, every member state had been represented in the Task Force (UNWTO, n.d.).

2.0 Silk Road Tourism in Azerbaijan

Azerbaijan, officially called the Azerbaijani Republic is a country in eastern Transcaucasia. The name translates to the 'Land of Fire' referring to the surface fires occurring at specific regions, caused by the ancient oil pools or the natural gas discharges (Central Intelligence Agency, 2020). Azerbaijan shares borders with Russia, Iran, Armenia, Georgia and bordered by the Caspian Sea. The exclave of Nakhichevan is surrounded by Armenia, Iran and Turkey (Sunny, Howe, Allworth and Silaev, 2019). The country's area in total – including water, land, the area of Nakhichevan and the Nagorno- Karabakh region – is around 86.000 sq. km (Central Intelligence Agency, 2020).

Capital city:	Baku
Population (2018 est.):	10.046.516
Ethnic groups (2009 est.):	Azerbaijani 91.6% Lezghin 2% Russian 1.3% Armenian 1.3% Talysh 1.3% Other 2.4%
Religion (2010 est.):	Muslim 96.9% Christian 3% Other <0.1% Unaffiliated <0.1%
Languages (2009 est.):	Azerbaijani (Azeri – Official) 92.5% Russian 1.4% Armenian 1.4% Other 4.7%

(Central Intelligence Agency, 2020)

2.1 Tourism and Silk Road Tourism in Azerbaijan

In the 19th century, new types of travellers started to visit the countries along the Silk Roads. Traders, archaeologists, geographers and adventurers appeared, and the destinations became more and more popular over the next century (UNESCO b, n.d.).

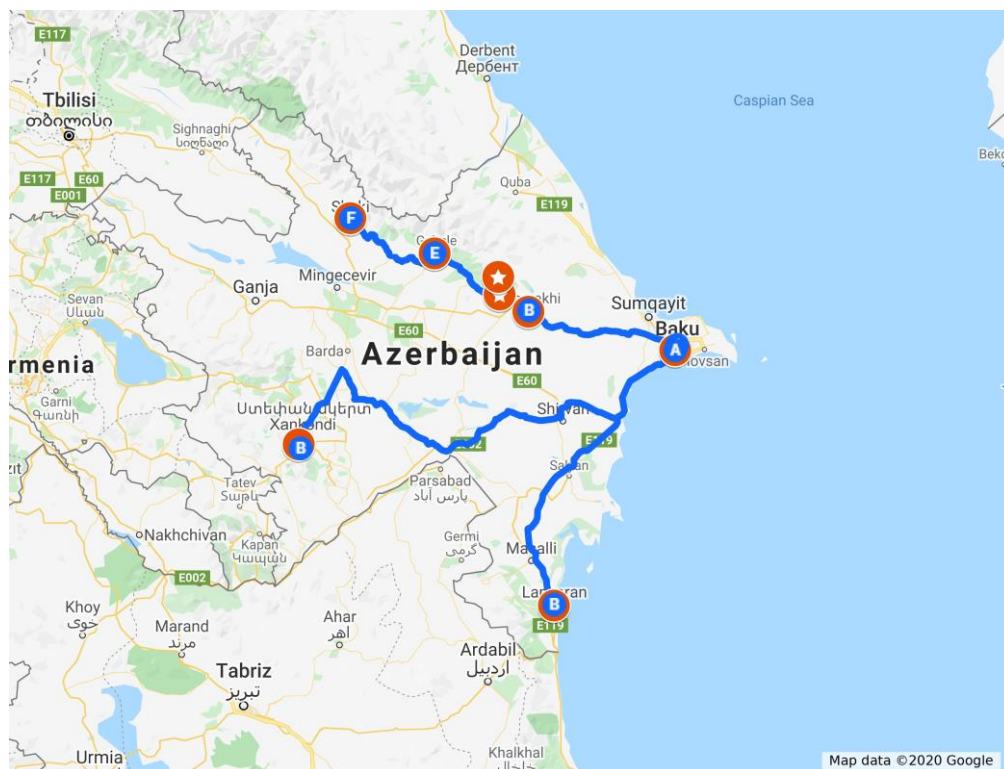
Azerbaijan, one of the countries along the Silk Roads, is said to be offering a blend of traditions and modern development. While more than half of the population lives in big cities, several of the rural regions kept their traditions and lifestyle even when they were influenced by modernization and industrialization. Apart from its beautiful terrain, Azerbaijan is also famous about its horses and caviar as distinctive exports of the country (Sunny, Howe, Allworth and Silaev, 2019).

The Azerbaijan Tourism Board (ATB) is Azerbaijan's national tourism organisation, a public legal entity within the State Travel Agency of the Republic of Azerbaijan. Among other tasks, it is responsible for the management of the 'Holidays in Azerbaijan' brand, marketing, and knowledge transfers. Their goal is to contribute to the competitiveness of Azerbaijan as a tourism destination (ATB, 2019). Their website shows information about upcoming Worldwide Exhibitions, workshops, the latest results of their international tourist perception survey and their brochures. Under the ATB operates the AzCB (Azerbaijan Convention Bureau), whose main goal is 'to put Azerbaijan on the global map as a premium business events destination' (AzCB, 2019).

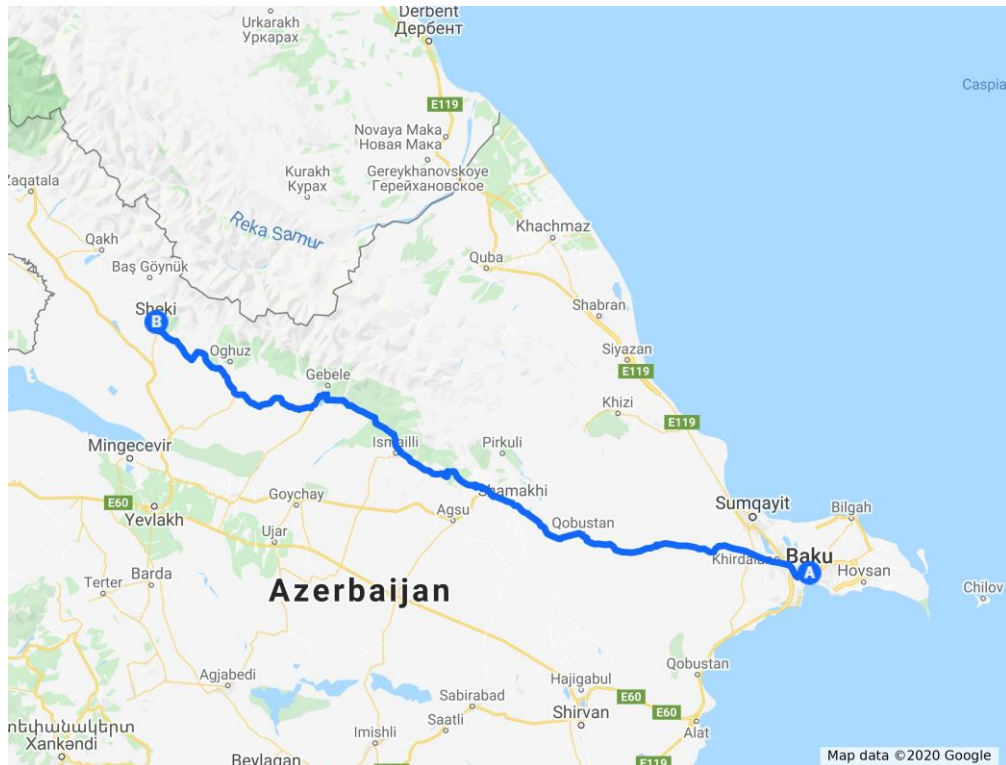
Just like other Silk Road countries, Azerbaijan often uses the historical routes as tourism resources. They are building the destination image around it and utilising it as a promotional material. Since

land and sea routes linked Azerbaijan with China, Syria, India, Asia Minor, Iran, Egypt, Russia, the Arabian Peninsula, North Africa, and Europe for centuries now, the importance of the cities along the roads is unquestionable (UNESCO b, n.d.). Several tourism companies in the world organise tours focusing on the countries along the Silk Road, and specific cities. In Azerbaijan, the most prominent Silk Road cities, when it comes to tangible and intangible cultural or natural tourism resources are: Sheki, Gabala, Shamakhi, Lahij, Baskal, Shusha, Lankaran and of course, Baku.

Shusha and Lankaran are a little bit different from the other places listed, based on their further locations. Shusha can be found in the problematic region of Nagorno-Karabakh, which was labelled as unsafe and unsteady because of the conflicts with Armenia. The Azerbaijan Embassy (2020) states that the tourism infrastructure of the region has been totally destroyed. Lankaran can be reached on the southern route, now called E19.



As it can be seen below, the other towns listed are located on the same road, M4. Leading towards North-West from Baku, these are Shamakhi, Baksal, Lahij, Gabala or Gebele, and Sheki. Their relative closeness makes them a popular package tour, with several tour operators combining and selling them in different themes (TripAdvisor, 2019; Azerbaijan Tourism, 2020; Silk Way Travel, 2020). However, each location has its own unique features and tourism resources, and these will be discussed in the destinations section of the report.



2.1.1 Projects and Organisations

While it was already mentioned before, Azerbaijan is a member of the UNESCO Silk Roads Online Platform International Network and the UNWTO's Silk Road Project. The country's leadership also took other steps to increase tourism and refurbish specific parts of the Roads in their territory:

PATA

As it was mentioned before, Azerbaijan is aiming to be a major tourism destination and is ready to take steps in order to reach their goal. In 2019, the State Tourism Agency of the Republic of Azerbaijan had been welcomed as the newest government member of The **Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA)**.

The Chairman of the **State Tourism Agency of the Republic of Azerbaijan** believes that as a member of PATA, Azerbaijan is a step closer to its goals and aims to 'create an environment fostering the development of tourism in Azerbaijan. They aim to do it through holistic institutional framework supported by research, bringing together all involved stakeholders (strategic partnerships), innovation and unique tourism experiences. The vast knowledge networks and market of PATA is undoubtedly valuable resources for the emerging tourism destination (Töre, 2019).

Refurbishment

A project in 2008 started the refurbishment of the Azerbaijan section of the original Silk Road. It does not take into consideration the criss-cross routes in the country though. It means that the EBRD (European Bank of Refurbishment and Development) founded project reconstructed most parts of the road connecting Baku to the border of Georgia, with the passing of Kyurdamir, but did not do work on the roads leading towards Lankaran or Sheki. Since the EBRD aimed to cut travel and transport time, the refurbishment of other Silk Roads was not a priority for them (Reiserer, 2008).

3.0 Tourism Destinations and Resources Along the Silk Road

Azerbaijan not only offers a variety of travel experiences and ever evolving service quality as an emerging tourism destination. It also possesses outstanding historical and cultural heritage with more than 7500 natural, archaeological, architectural, and historical monuments (Töre, 2019). Many of these are connected to the history of the Silk Roads and can be found in the destinations listed below.

3.1 Lankaran

Lankaran lays at the southernmost part of Azerbaijan. It is famous about its beautiful green tea gardens, citrus bushes and picturesque lighthouses. It takes approximately two hours to reach Lankaran from Baku on the recently built road and the journey is said to be spectacular in the rich greenery (Rzayeva, 2019).

Natural resources	• Tea Fields • Burning Water • Khanbulanchay Reservoir • Xanbulan Lake • Hirkan National Park • Gizil-Agach State Reserve
Primary tangible cultural tourism resources	• Xan Evi (Khan Palace) • Khazar Lankaran Central Stadium • Mayak (Lighthouse) and Tower of Zindan • House Museum of Hazi Aslanov • Tomb of Sheikh Zahid
Other important tangible and intangible resources	• Outstanding Hospitality • Grand Bazaar Mosque (Boyuk Bazar Mescidi) • Lankaran Village Life • Tea, Rice and Citrus Festival • Gastronomy

Lankaran possesses intangible cultural heritage too: for example, the tea culture of Azerbaijan, which said to be originated from here. The region is also well known about other subtropical crops, like citruses, which shows in their Tea, Rice and Citrus Festival (Ismayilova a, 2019). There are several tangible cultural heritage resources, like Lankaran's symbol, the Lankaran Lighthouse, and Zidan Tower. A small village in the area, Archivan provides an even more unique natural attraction, in the form of the Burning Spring (Rzayeva, 2019). Lankaran also famous about its lavangi chicken (special stuffed chicken), different kind of plovs, gutab and tendir bread.

3.1.1 Primary Resources:

Natural Resources

Tea Fields

The first tea plantation of Azerbaijan was established in the Lankaran region in 1937. The area is still famous about its tea culture and soil, perfect for growing citrus fruits, rice, tobacco, and grapes. To celebrate these natural resources, the city holds the Tea Rice and Citrus Festival every year (Ismayilova, 2016).

Burning Water

Yanar Bulag (Burning Spring) can be found next to the village entrance, in the form of a fountain. What makes this perfectly drinkable water from this spring so spectacular, is the fact that it is percolated with methane-gas and can be set alight with fire (Rzayeva, 2019; Guided Azerbaijan a, 2019).

Khanbulanchay Reservoir

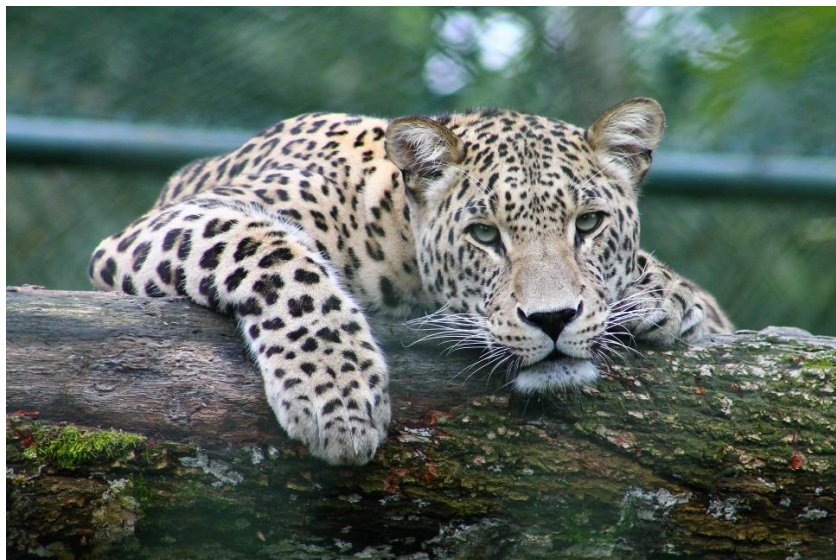
Also known as Khanbulaqchay reservoir. The name of the lake and its surrounding area means “the spring of the khan”. According to TripAdvisor comments, a beautiful and untouched piece of nature, worth a visit for those who go to the Lankaran Rayon region (TripAdvisor, 2019).

Xanbulan Lake

The lake is located southwest from Lankaran city. While it is listed on TripAdvisor under natural places worth visiting in Lankaran, information about the location is nearly impossible to find. The Aurora Tea Factory can be found not far from the lake. The factory provides tours, tasting and showcase the tea-making process (TripAdvisor, 2019).

Hirkan National Park

The most well-known national park in Lankaran. Visitors can meet animals like wild boars, spot antlers, jackals, lynx, brown bears, wolves, foxes, jungle cats, roe deer, badgers, Caspian tits, woodpeckers, and stone sparrows. There are other rare and amazing species on its 40.000 hectares area. However, the most unique animal which still inhabits the park now days is undoubtedly the Caucasian or Persian leopard. The other stunning animal who lived here was the Caspian tiger, which unfortunately went extinct in the early 20th century. The area is almost 99% covered with forests, and flora, and many plant species from before the last Ice Age can be found in it. While the park has a visitor centre, it is free from cafes, camping sites, shops and other facilities (Azerbaijan Travel, 2019; TripAdvisor, 2019; Maclachlan, 2009).



(Image Source: Mirpuri Foundation, n.d.)

Gizil-Agach State Reserve

Partly located in Lankaran and around twice the size of the Hirkan National Park. Famous about its huge bird population. It was originally established in order to protect the migrating birds' wintering and nesting habitat (Azerbaijan Travel, 2019; Trip Hobo, 2020).

Cultural Resources

Xan Evi (Khan Palace)

Also known as Murakhmad Khan's Palace, the first multi-story building in Lankaran. It was built of red bricks and local white stone by French architects in 1913. It is a combination of European and Azerbaijani architect. Today, it houses the Museum of History and Regional Studies named after M.A. Aliyev (Azerbaijan Travel, 2019).

According to visitors, the palace is beautiful, and the exhibitions are interesting. However, no information is displayed in English and while one comment mentioned that the museum staff is very knowledgeable, they could only enjoy the tour provided by them because they had an interpreter (TripAdvisor, 2019).

Khazar Lankaran Central Stadium

The football stadium can be found outside the city centre and provides the place for professional football. The owner of the 2007 national champion team is a wealthy Lankaran local (TripAdvisor, 2019).

Mayak (Lighthouse) and Tower of Zindan

It was built in the 18th century and the lighthouse is the symbol of Lankaran. It is said to be connected to the old prison, Zidan Tower by secret tunnels. Zindan Tower is rather famous about being the prison of Joseph Stalin and was a popular attraction. However, currently tourists cannot go inside (Guided Azerbaijan a, 2019; Rzayeva, 2019).

House Museum of Hazi Aslanov

The museum is dedicated to Hazi Aslanov, who was born in Lankaran and later became a military commander and skilful tanker. He was nominated as the Hero of the Soviet Union two times. The museum exhibits memorials from his life and military service (Azerbaijan Travel, 2019; TripAdvisor, 2019).

Tomb of Sheikh Zahid

The shrine in the local cemetery is known as the holy place of Sheikh Zahid. The great grandfather of Shah Ismail Khatai, Sheikh Zahid is buried here. Sheikh Zahid ibn Sheikh Rovshan Amir (1215-1300), was a famous Oriental scholar, philosopher and a sect leader in the 13th century. His shrine in the local cemetery is known as a holy place.

Social Resources

Outstanding hospitality – even invitation for weddings (Azeri Toys)

The Lankaran area is famous about the hospitable locals. Rumour has it, if you ask locals about any upcoming “toys” – Azeri weddings -, you will get an invitation and they will welcome you with open arms. However, the language barrier can present some difficulty for communication, since not many of the locals speak English. Tourist are advised to bring an Azeri tour book with them (Azerbaijan Travel, 2019; TripAdvisor, 2019).

Grand Bazaar Mosque (Boyuk Bazar Mescidi)

One of the two mosques in Lanakran. Near to the Grand Bazaar, which is visited by tourists for its wild selection of Azerbaijani and Turkish products, vibrant and authentic atmosphere (TripAdvisor, 2019). **Kichik Bazaar Mosque** is the other, smaller mosque, still working just like the other. Located close to the Kichik (small) Bazaar (TripAdvisor, 2019).

3.1.2 Secondary Resources:

Accommodation

Basharu Resort, Olimp Hotel, Luxe Lankaran Hotel, Deniz Hotel & Restaurant, Hirkan Park Hotel, Khan Lankaran Hotel, Lankaran Springs Wellness Hotel, Aerozone Hostel, Qafqaz Sahil Hotel, Palmalife Lankaran Resort, Vaenkomat Hostel, Forest Lankaran, Starway Hotel, Mandarin Hotel, Khazar Palace (Booking.com a, 2019; TripAdvisor, 2019, Agoda a, 2020)

For the majority of these hotels, finding their own website proved to be impossible. Guests can probably only book rooms through websites like booking.com or agoda.com.

Travel organisation and Information

The Lankaran Tourism Information Centre can be found on Facebook, and in the city. It does not seem to have its own website (Facebook a, 2019).

Transportation and Infrastructure

The airport is currently not operating in Lankaran. The city can be reached by bus, train, taxi, car and marshrutka. Buses and marshrutkas depart from Baku's 20th January terminal every other hour starting at 8. The fastest is by taxi and it takes approximately 3,5 hours. The electric train leaves at 8 am from Baku and returns there at 5 pm (Google Maps a, 2020). In the city, people can get around by taxi and buses.

Entertainment

Lankaran village life

A day tour focused on the village lifestyle in Lankaran and the gastronomy of the area. The signature cuisine includes lavangi, Lankaran kulcha, marji plov, white plov, pumpkin plov and turshu kebab (TripAdvisor, 2019).

3.2 Qabala/Gabala

At two thousand years old, Gabala or Qabala is said to be the most ancient city of Azerbaijan (Advantour a, 2020). Located about 225 km from Baku, famous about its historical monuments and its spectacular natural environment. For centuries, from the 4th century BC the city served as the capital city of Caucasian Albania. Ruins of the ancient city can be still found 15 km from Gabala. The city was always a desired location for rulers as it lays in the middle of the Silk Road. Evidence of its rich history can be seen today in the preserved landmarks: the old tower for defence purposes, the mosque from the 13th century and the thousands of artefacts discovered in the area, many of them exhibited in the Historical Ethnography Museum in Gabala (Shirinov, 2016).

Natural resources	• Nohur Göl Lake • Yeddi Gozel Waterfall • Forests with rich flora and fauna
Primary tangible cultural tourism resources	• Gabala City New Mosque • Quabala Archeological Centre • World War II Memorial Park • Museum of Wine and Savalan Aspi Winery • Heydar Aliyev Museum • Historical Ethnography Museum

Other important tangible and intangible resources	• Art Zone • Gabaland • Gabala Shooting Club • Tufandag Winter-Summer Tourism Holiday Complex • International Music Festival and International Jam Festival
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The intangible assets, like the wine tradition and festivals also give a unique resource for the Gabala region. However, what seems to be a development focus now for the Visit Gabala organisation, is the increasing wellness tourist numbers. Chenot Palace Gabala and Qafqaz Thermal Hotel not only operate as hotels, but also as sanatoriums and healthcare facilities, providing traditional treatments and highlight the healing abilities of the area's spring waters. Another unique feature is the Naftalan oil used in Gabala as a wellness and illness treatment (Visit Gabala, 2020).

3.2.1 Primary Resources:

Natural Resources

Nohur Göl Lake

One of the most beautiful places in Gabala, the picturesque lake with a view at the Caucasus. While swimming is prohibited it is said to be the perfect place for fishing and relaxing. Most of the hotels in Gabala provide cheap tours to the lake (Visit Gabala, 2020; TripAdvisor, 2019).

Yeddi Gozel (Seven Beauties) Waterfall

Named after the seven mountain roads the visitors have to pass to reach the waterfall, this place not only provides a beautiful view, but also has a tea house at the highest point. The place is only open during summer and spring and offers tea made with the water from the waterfall, giving it a special aroma (Visit Gabala, 2020; TripAdvisor, 2019; Lonely Planet, 2019).

The Gabala region also famous about its nuts and chestnuts trees, and its forests not only contain rich wildlife (bears, foxes, deer, boars, etc.), but some of the trees are around 500 years old. Some of these trees are on the list of the state protected natural elements. Several rivers, like the **Damiraparan River, Vandam River, Bum River, Thick River** and others run through the region (Azerbaijan Embassy, 2020). Weather is mild in spring and autumn, hot in summer and cold in winter (Visit Gabala, 2020).

Cultural Resources

Gabala City New Mosque

The Heydar Aliyev Foundation ordered the building of the newest mosque in Gabala. The construction started in 2010 and finished in 2013. The Mosque can accommodate 600 prayers at a time, 450 men and 150 women. Offers places for an Ahong, lesson rooms, library, rooms for ceremonies, ablution rooms for men and women, as well as ancillary buildings. It is surrounded by a decorative yard with trees, lightening system and fountains (Heydar Aliyev Foundation, 2020). The Mosque is operating every day, so tourist can only visit if they abide the rules (TripAdvisor, 2019).

Qabala Archaeological Center

The Archaeological center is located in the area called Chukhur by locals, where remains from even 4th century BC can be found. It is divided into three parts. The Chaggalli settlement with remains of city life from the 4th century BC. Salbir settlement with relics dating back to the 1st-10th century and the Gala settlement from the 1st – 7th century. Wine storehouses with large-scale pitchers, elliptic remains of constructions, old city defence walls, farmhouse remains, catacombs, water supply lines, clay water pitchers, household items and even Christian graves were discovered in the three areas. One of the most important monuments is the Ancient Fortress Walls, located in the Salbir area. It differs from other medieval fortress walls in Gabala by its structure and appearance (Visit Gabala, 2019; TripAdvisor, 2019; Azerbaijan Embassy, 2020).



(Image Source: Shirinov, 2016)

World War II Memorial Park

A basically one monument park, dedicated to those who died in the war. Does not seem to be a popular tourist destination and hardly any information available about it, apart from the location. The rating on Trip Advisor (2019) is 2,5 from 5 people.

Museum of Wine and Savalan Aspi Winery

The Museum of Wine is located in the Savalan area of the Gabala region, in the Aspi Winery. This area said to be served as the original, historical wine region of Azerbaijan, and the museum presents cubes and clay dishes that were discovered in the different excavations. It also exhibits historical facts about the vine-making traditions, developments, and origins from other regions of Azerbaijan and the history of the Aspi-Agro Company (Visit Gabala, 2019). The Aspi Winery also provides Wine tours in their factory and vineyards (Aspi Winery, 2020).

Heydar Aliyev Museum

The museum is dedicated to the life and activities of national leader of Azerbaijan, Heydar Aliyev. More than 200 pictures, archival materials and various books can be found in the museum, and it also operates as a Gabala branch of the Heydar Aliyev Foundation (Visit Gabala, 2019).

Gabala Historical Ethnography Museum

The 13 exhibition halls of the museum present 2500 year of Gabala's history. There are more than 12.000 artefacts of ancient, medieval and recent history, a rich scientific library, an art gallery and an open-air museum showcasing ancient stone chronicles. Visitors can examine household items, pottery and clay containers, ethnographic materials, ancient writings and other relics found in the Gabala region (Visit Gabala, 2019).

Social Resources

Art Zone

In 2019 the city hosted the first Art Zone painting symposium where several national artists appeared. The aim was to show the diversity and beauty of Gabala through the eyes of artists and arrange workshops to high school students. The paintings are exhibited at the traditional Art Zone exhibition (Ismayilova b, 2019).

3.2.2 Secondary Resources:

Accommodation

Qafqaz Riverside Hotel, Qafqaz Tufandag Mountain Resort Hotel, Qafqaz Gabala Sport Hotel, Qafqaz Resort Hotel Gabala, Qafqaz Thermal and Spa Hotel, Fortuna Resort Qebele, Qafqaz Karvansaray Hotel, Gabala Homes Musa, Gabala City Rooms, Emerald House Gabala, Ruma Zeytun Hotel, Kahran Hostel, Gabala Gilan Hotel, Firuze Apartments, Cavansir Hotel, Chenot Palace Health Wellness Hotel, Gabala Ventus Villas, Qafqaz Suites Riverside Villas, Villa Millennium 2, Savalan Villa, Super Villa Two, Gabala Center Villa, Flora Grand Gabala, Qabala Red Castle, Qabala White Castle, Qabala Old Villa, S-House, Gabala White Hotel (Tripadvisor, 2019; Agoda b, 2020; Booking.com b,2019)

Several of the above listed properties are villas, while the number of hotels were limited on all searched websites.

Travel organisation and Information

General information can be found on the Visit Gabala website, and there is also a Gabala Tourism Information Center in the city (Visit Gabala, 2019). Their biggest tour operator seems to be the Gabala Tour Agency (Gabala Tour, 2020).

Transportation and Infrastructure

225 km from Baku. 45 minutes by flight (Gabala has its own airport, Airport Gabala), 4 hours by bus from Baku Bus Terminal and 2,5-3 hours by taxi. The main transport means in the city are buses and cars (Visit Gabala, 2019). The airport is active 0-24 and operated by the government of Azerbaijan.

Entertainment

Gabaland

Largest open-air theme park in Azerbaijan. Offers over 50 attractions for both children and adults. Paintball, laser guns, go-cart, ice rink, four-wheel bumper cars, cable way for skydiving, safari bicycles, observation wheel, giant swings, jet plane, pneumatic rifle range, off-road cars and numerous other attractions are aimed for adults. For kids, indoor game zone, mini jet, kid's train, kid's motorbikes, turtle trains, twister, different Sega games, trampoline park, etc. (Visit Gabala, 2019; Azerbaijan Embassy, 2020).

Gabala Shooting Club

Part of the Gabala Sport Club. Not just entertainment and recreational centre, but a world class facility, a training place for the national shooting team and international professionals. Possibility for night shooting, paintball and strikeball. The club also houses a Georgian themed restaurant, offering traditional Georgian and Azerbaijan food, along with a café providing snacks, tea, and desserts (Visit Gabala, 2019).

Tufandag Winter-Summer Tourism Holiday Complex

4 km from Gabala city. Provides opportunity for visitors to enjoy different extreme sports. Ski season is from the 15th of December till the end of March. Skiing, hiking, snowmobiling, and snowboarding are available for visitors during the winter season. Tufandag complex offers 1000-meter vertical downhill, 15-kilometer ski slopes and 4 rope lines. Green and blue ski slopes for beginners, red and

black ski slopes for professional skiers. In summer, the area is perfect for hiking, quads, and the cable cabins also operate with 4 stations. The L2 Riverside station (height 956m-1660), the L4 Gabala cable car track (height 1251-1660m), the L5 Duruca cable car track (height 1251-1410m), and the L6 Sleeping Beauty cable car track (height 1410-1920m). The Qafqaz Tufandag Mountain Resort Hotel is located 20 kms from the Gabala Airport and lays at the foot of the Caucasus Mountain (Visit Gabala, 2019; TripAdvisor, 2019).



(Image Source: Booking.com b, 2019)

International Music Festival and International Jam Festival

The city gives place to two festivals already going on for years. The Gabala International Music Festival and the International Jam Festival, both receiving international guests and not just local participants (Shirinov, 2016; Ismayilova b, 2019).

3.3 Shamakhi

Titled as the historical region of Azerbaijan, the centre of the ancient Shirvan area. Rich cultural heritage, history and popular natural, recreational resources can be found in the area. Relatively close to Baku, the infrastructure is favourable. The climate, which is usually mild, with dry summers, moderate winters and cool autumns and springs, paired with the natural resources makes the area a perfect sport tourist destination too (Tek Tourism, 2019).

Natural resources	• Pirgulu Reserve
Primary tangible cultural tourism resources	• Gulustan Fortress • Yeddi Gumbaz Mausoleum • Juma Mosque • Shahandan Mausoleum • Nasimi Memorial Park • House-Museum of M. Sabir • Heydar Aliyev Park and Museum • Diri-Baba Mausoleum
Other important tangible and intangible resources	• Shamakhi Astrophysical Observatory

3.3.1 Primary Resources:

Natural Resources

Pirgulu Reserve

Established in 1968, lays on 3.662 hectares. Located 22 km from Shamakhi, the part of the Shahdag National Park since 2008. Nearly 90% of the area is covered with thick forest, with rich flora and fauna, perfect destination for hiking and walking (Azerbaijan Travel, 2019).

Cultural Resources

Gulustan Fortress

Named the most famous landmark of Shamakhi. It was built more than a thousand years ago and served as the last sanctuary for the Shirvanshahs during the Middle Ages. Once, the whole fortress was surrounded by high walls, with several quadrangle towers, and hid a secret passage leading to a nearby stream, providing a route for escape. Unfortunately, the fortress took heavy damage in the 16th century from constant battles and earthquakes and only remains can be visited today (Guided Azerbaijan b, 2019; Tek Tourism, 2019). The secret tunnel, which also provided water to the inhabitants of the fortress and the stone ponds remained intact (Azerbaijan Embassy, 2020).

Yeddi Gumbaz Mausoleum

Also called the “Seven Domes”, a cemetery and a group of mausoleums located at the foot of the Gulustan Fortress. The burial vaults style came from the 15th century and the Shirvan khans of the 18th and 19th centuries had been buried there. The mausoleums are in different level of decay, but visitors can go into three of them (Azerbaijan Embassy, 2020; Guided Azerbaijan b, 2019).



(Image Source: Guided Azerbaijan b, 2019)

Juma Mosque

The oldest and largest Mosque in the Caucasus was built in the 8th century. The exact date of the establishment is 744, determined with the help of the Arabic inscription on the façade of the Mosque. Has a unique architecture – the large prayer hall is divided into three independent sections and connected by wide open apertures. All three area has a separate mihrab and entrance. It gained its current, modern look after several deconstructions and rebuilding, following the damages made by wars and earthquakes. However, the foundation and the basic structure is still the original (Guided Azerbaijan b, 2019; Azerbaijan Embassy, 2020; TripAdvisor, 2019).

Shahandan Mausoleum

Can be found in the most ancient cemetery in the city. The Mausoleum was built on the grave of a 15th century poet, Shahandan, in the 17th century. The mausoleum survived centuries and can be visited by tourists. The grave of the famous Azerbaijani poet-satirist of the 19th century Seyid Azim Shirvani, also can be found in this cemetery (Tek Tourism, 2019).

Nasimi Memorial Park

Memorial park dedicated to the Azerbaijani poet, Imadaddin Nasimi from the 14th century. Not many information available (Tek Tourism, 2019; Azerbaijan Embassy, 2020).

House-Museum of M. Sabir

The Azerbaijani poet-satirist, Mirza Alakbar Sabir, was born in 1862 in Shamakhi. The museum dedicated for him is located on the side of the house he was born in and was established in 1998. 7 rooms with around 600 exhibits about his life, work, and the era he lived in (Azerbaijan Embassy, 2020; Tek Tourism, 2019).

Heydar Aliyev Park and Museum

Museum dedicated to Heydar Aliyev. Apart from the exhibits about his life and work, it also presents his monument and an amphitheatre (Tek Tourism, 2019).

Diri-Baba Mausoleum

A unique, two-story mausoleum from the 15th century, located near the road from Baku to Shamakhi, next to the Maraza village. The monument is built in the rock, with picturesque surroundings and currently protected by the government. Many legends and myths were born about the place, but the most common story is that a saint, named Diri-Baba was buried here and still lays in the mausoleum uncorrupted. From the 17th century, the place was a popular destination for pilgrims and travellers (Guided Azerbaijan b, 2019; Tek Tourism, 2019).



(Image Source: Guided Azerbaijan b, 2019)

3.3.2 Secondary Resources:

Accommodation

Shamakhi does not offer a wide range of accommodation selection, however there are still hotels and motels available for visitors in the city:

Shirvan Hotel & Spa, Sakit Gol – Silent Lake Hotel, Goyoursagi Samaxi, Shamakhy Sport Villas, Motel Sharadil, Shamakhi Palace Sharadil, Shavalan Motel (Booking.com c, 2019; TripAdvisor, 2019)

Travel organisation and Information

While several companies organise tours to Shamakhi, often combined with Gabala, Baku or Sheki tours (TripAdvisor, 2019; Firebird Tours, 2020; Guided Azerbaijan, 2019), it seems Shamakhi itself does not have a tourist centre in the city.

Transportation and Infrastructure

Located 122 km from Baku, the fastest way is by car, on the Baku-Tbilisi highway. Buses from Sheki

and Gabala also stop at the Shamakhi Bus Terminal on their way to Baku, and direct buses come from Baku to Shamakhi too (Google Maps b, 2020).

Entertainment

Shamakhi Astrophysical Observatory

Built 22 km from the city, the Observatory also known as Tusi, is named after Nasiraddin Tusi, a mathematician, physicist, and astronomer of medieval ages. It is located 1400 meters above sea level and houses one of the largest telescopes from the former USSR. The Observatory includes an exhibition hall, museum, conference, and lecture halls, six buildings for telescopes an administrative building, canteen, and cottages. The surrounding area is popular among the locals for snowball fights during the winter and horse-riding during the warmer seasons (Azerbaijan Embassy, 2020; Tek Tourism, 2019; Inspirock, n.d.) While the Observatory has its own website, it could not be opened even when tried at different times.

3.4 Sheki

One of Azerbaijan's most ancient city and said to be the country's architectural gem. In July 2019, the historic centre of the city and the Khan Palace were added to the UNESCO World Heritage list. Sheki is rich in tangible cultural tourism resources. The area also owns several intangible resources, like the art of Shebeke, its popular gastronomy and other craftsmanship (Mardsen, 2019; O'Hare, 2019).

Natural resources	• Picturesque environment
Primary tangible cultural tourism resources	• Sheki Khan's Summer Palace • Church of Kish • Sheki Khan's Winter Palace • Sheki Fortress • Museum of Folk and Applied Arts
Other important tangible and intangible resources	• Craftmanship • Gastronomy • Sheki Karvansaray • Silk Road International Music Festival

3.4.1 Primary Resources:

Natural Resources

The city is located at the foothills of the Greater Caucasus Mountains, surrounded by magnificent forest mountains. This environment creates a picturesque background; however, Sheki is not visited by tourist primarily for its natural resources (Azerbaijan Embassy, 2020).

Cultural Resources

Sheki Khan's Summer Palace

The palace was built in the 18th century and served as a summer residence for the Sheki Khans. A two-story building with heavy ornate decoration inside and outside. Furthermore, Russian wood, French strained glass, Ottoman ceramics and Iranian mirrorwork were all used during the construction. The facade is mostly covered in the multicoloured glass set in a wooden lattice, called a shebeke, crafted without nails or glue. The six room inside is fully decorated with the symbolic flora and fauna of the area. Not only a popular and worthy visit for tourists, but tours are also available in English (TripAdvisor, 2019; O'Hare, 2019; Azerbaijan Embassy, 2020).



(Image Source: Sinalcoadmin, 2017)

Church of Kish

Considered to be the oldest Christian building in the area. The foundation dates back to the 1st century. The rare and ancient Azerbaijani-Albanian architectural monument is located in the village of Kish. The study, restoration and conservation of the church was a joint project between Norway and Azerbaijan, started in 2000 and finished in 2003. The excavations and archaeological exploration of the building not only provided evidence for the date of the foundation, but also resulted in the discovery of several artefacts and the history of the region. It is currently restored and turned into the Caucasus-Albanian museum, presenting the history of Northern Azerbaijan (now the Republic of Azerbaijan) (Mammadova and Hacıyeva, 2008; Azerbaijan Travel, 2019).

Sheki Khan's Winter Palace

Lesser known as the Summer Palace, located outside the fortress walls. The unassuming exterior is painted white; however, the interior is originally just as decorated and colourful as the Summer Palace. Unfortunately, since the restoration works just started in 2010, only one room has been fully restored so far. Shebeke glass, painted doors, mirrored niches, and carved room dividers can already be seen. Unlike in the Summer Palace, visitors are allowed to wander around without time limit and even make photos (Wander-Lush, 2020).

Sheki Fortress

Located near the village of Nukha. The walls of the fortress are almost 1200 m long and 2 m thick, built in the 18th century. It was protected by several bastions and had two gates, one on the south and one on the north. It was mainly restored in 1958-63, and now houses several craft shops, Sheki Khan's palace, a tourist information center, etc. within its walls (TripAdvisor, 2019; Azerbaijan Embassy, 2020).

Museum of Folk and Applied Arts

A really small museum with a collection of textiles, carpets, costumes and embroidery from Sheki and surrounding villages (TripAdvisor, 2019; Wander-Lush, 2020).

Social Resources

Craftmanship is an essential part of the city's social life. Craft production today represents approximately 14.4% of its income, supported by 253 master-craftsmen specialised in 18 types of craft. Sheki is said to be the origin of several craftmanship in Azerbaijan, like blacksmithing, silk

weaving, chain stitching (telekduz), weapon manufacturing, decorative and artistic shabaka (shebeke), and the crafting of jewellery items (UNESCO d, n.d.)

3.4.2 Secondary Resources:

Accommodation

Sheki Olimpiya Hotel & Resort, Ruma Quala Hotel, Sheki Palace Hotel, MinAli Boutique Hotel, Sheki Saray Hotel, Issam Hotel & Spa, Sheki Park Hotel, Marxal Resort & Spa, Kungut Hotel and Resort, F-Garden Hotel, Yaffle Inn Boutique Hotel, Canal Hostel, H.I.I. Hotel, Seki Qonaq Evi, Inci Design Hotel & Hostel, Villa Boutique Inn Hotel, Macara Sheki City Hotel, etc. (Booking.com d, 2019; TripAdvisor, 2019)

Booking.com (d, 2019) actually lists 53 properties, while TripAdvisor (2019) has 68 on their list, be it guest houses, villas, hotels or hostels.

Sheki Karvansaray – Yukari Karavansarai Hotel

Undoubtedly the most memorable accommodation opportunity. The hotel is a converted Silk Road caravanserai. The rooms only provide the basics, can be cold during the nights and the bathrooms are outdated, but according to comments, the place is atmospheric and unique. However, the staff does not speak English and visitors must call them to make a reservation or hope to get a room when they arrive there (Wander-Lush, 2020; TripAdvisor, 2019; O’Hare, 2019).

Travel organisation and Information

Sheki has its own tourism centre, the Sheki Tourist Information Center with its website and Facebook page. While they provide information about attractions worth visiting in the area on their website, the English part of it is still under construction. The Facebook page is active, however rarely any information is posted in English and the browser only brings up the old version of the page, which has a link to the new one (Facebook b, 2020; Sheki Heritage, 2020).

Transportation and Infrastructure

Marshrutka vans and large coach buses go to Sheki from the International Bus Terminal in Baku. There are at least 6 buses per day. With the coach buses, the journey takes 6.5 hours, with the vans it is around 4.5 hours.

The overnight train departs from Baku’s 28 May Station at 11.30pm and arrives at Sheki Railway Station at 6.20am the next morning. The station is located 17km west of the centre of the town. The fastest way to reach Sheki from Baku is by taxi or shared taxi (Wander-Lush, 2020; ADY, 2020).

Entertainment

Silk Road International Music Festival

The festival was celebrated in Sheki for the 10th time in 2019. The event is co-organized by the Azerbaijan Union of Composers, the Ministry of Culture and Sheki Executive Power. It welcomes local participants and international performers every year. The city provides a unique background for the festivities and celebrates Sheki as an essential part of the historic Silk Roads (Ismayilova c, 2019).

3.5 Lahij

3.5.1 Primary Resources:

Lahij, (Lagich, Lahic, Lahich) is a small village, approximately 190 km from Baku, near Shamakhi with a population around 860 people. What makes this small village a tourist favourite is undoubtedly its status as the “**City of Masters**” or craft village (Lonely Planet a, 2020).

Natural resources	• Picturesque natural environment
Primary tangible cultural tourism resources	• The village itself
Other important tangible and intangible resources	• Craftmanship

The village itself is a tangible tourism resource, a historical and architectural monument, protected by the state and the look of it is preserved in its original form. There are five mosques, three baths, around 60 houses, one bridge, tombstones, one water mill and several craft workshops listed as protected monuments (Advantour b, 2020; Huseynli, 2018).

The **craftsmanship** of the village is its most important intangible cultural resource. The main material of the Lahij craftsmen is copper. Over the past centuries, the village was famous about its copper items. Traders and merchants visited from all over the neighbouring countries and took the products with them on their Silk Roads journeys. Unfortunately, with factories appearing in the 19th century, the village and its craftsmanship fall into decay. Craftsmen left for big cities and those who remained, made a living by farming (Advantour b, 2020; Huseynli, 2018).

During 1980, under the Soviet government, Lahij was labelled as a historical-cultural reserve of Azerbaijan. This put the village on the map again. People returned and craftsmen started to make copper, leather, and carpet products again. Instead of selling them to traders, they sell them to tourists now (Lonely Planet a, 2020; Advantour b, 2020).

The village is located in a picturesque environment, surrounded by the Caucasus, which makes the area a natural resource. However, people usually not visit the location for specific natural monuments. The atmosphere of the village is described as tranquil, calm and the locals said to be really friendly and welcoming (Huseynli, 2018).

3.5.2 Secondary Resources:

Accommodation

There seem to be only four guesthouses or hostel all in all, tourists mainly arriving for a couple of hours from nearby cities. Accommodations are available in Shamakhi, Sheki and Gabala, relatively near (Booking.com a/b/c, 2019).

Travel organisation and Information

There is an address and phone number for a Lahij Tourism Information Center, however no other information about it. No website or even Facebook page (GoMap, 2019).

Transportation and Infrastructure

190 km from Baku, can only be accessed from the road which connects Shamakhi to Ismaili. Visitors have to take a taxi from the main road or go by their own car. Tourists usually arrive with organised tours. During winter, snow and ice often cuts off the village from the roads. There is no public transport in Lahij, and not many cars either. Locals usually ride bicycles (Huseynli, 2018; Guided Azerbaijan c, 2019)



(Image Source: Travel in Baku a, n.d.)

3.6 Shusha

3.6.1 Primary Resources:

The historic city is located in the **Nagorno-Karabakh area**, and it is the cultural centre of Karabakh. The town got heavy hits during the Nagorno-Karabakh war, which took place in the area from the mid 1980's till May 1994 between the Armenians and Azerbaijanians living in the area. The British Government advice against visiting the area, and the Azerbaijan Embassy (2020) states '*It is worth noting that the natural landscape, historical and architectural monuments, transit and communication network of Nagorno-Karabakh and surrounding areas occupied by Armenia have been demolished by Armenians, and in short, the tourism infrastructure of the region has been completely destroyed.*'

Despite the sad events, travel companies are organising tours to the location and the town has both tangible and intangible cultural heritage resources remaining.

Natural resources	• Isa Bulaghi Spring • Hunot Canyon • Mossy Umbrella • Zontiki Waterfall • Cave of Commander Avan Yuzbashi
Primary tangible cultural tourism resources	• Ghazanchetsots Cathedral • Shusha Fortress • Kanach Zham Church • Mosques

The area is rich in natural resources, famous about its springs, like the **Isa Bulaghi**. The **Hunot Canyon**, not too far from the town is also a famous natural resource, hiding interesting attractions, like the **Mossy Umbrella or Zontiki Waterfall**, the **Cave of Commander Avan Yuzbashi** and the remains of **Hunot village** (Azerbaijan Embassy, 2020; Armenian Geographic, n.d.).

When it comes to tangible cultural heritage resources, one of the most popular attractions among tourists are the **Ghazanchetsots Cathedral**, also known as **Holy Savior Cathedral**, an Armenian Apostolic cathedral. Another is the Shusha or **Shoushi Fortress**, built in the 18th century and still standing. The **Kanach Zham or Saint John the Baptist Church**, is an Armenian Apostolic church built in the beginning of the 19th century. It is also often called the Green Church, because its domes were painted green in older times. Shusha also has several Mosques, like the **Yukhari Govhar Agha Mosque**, the **Ashaghi Govhar Agha Mosque**, and the **Agdam Mosque** (TripAdvisor, 2019; Azerbaijan Embassy, 2020; Alibeyli, 1998).



(Image source: TripAdvisor, 2019)

3.6.2 Secondary Resources:

Accommodation

The Avan Shushi Plaza Hotel, the Armen B&B and the Shushi Grand Hotel seem to be the only hotels in Shusha currently (Google Maps c, 2020).

Travel organisation and Information

According to Artsakh Travel (n.d.) there is a Shoushi Tourist Information Centre, and they have the address and phone number, but no other information.

Transportation and Infrastructure

There is not much information available about how tourists can reach Shusha alone from Baku. It seems, the most common way to get there is by bus or taxi from Stepanakert also known as Khankendi, the capital of the Nagorno-Karabakh area or from Armenia. In the city, it is advised to get around by walking, since there are no big distances between the attractions (Wikivoyage a, 2020).

3.7 Basqal

3.7.1 Primary Resources:

Basqal or Baskal, with a population of 1500 people, is located in the Ismayilli region and considered one of the oldest settlements along the Silk Roads. Surrounded by **picturesque environment**, this town was among the most important silk-weaving centres in the 16th -17th centuries and still famous about its silk crafts, especially the **Kelaghayis**, the traditional women shawls (UNESCO c, n.d.).

Natural resources	• Picturesque environment
Primary tangible cultural tourism resources	• Mosque • Bath House
Other important tangible and intangible resources	• Silk weaving - Kelaghayis

While the Kelaghayis and silk works as intangible cultural heritage resources are undoubtedly the most prominent features of Baskal, the town also possesses tangible resources, like a Mosque from the 17th century and a bath house. Even in Middle Ages, Baskal already had a sophisticated sewage system and every household had a bath (Ulduz Tourism, n.d.; UNESCO c, n.d.).



(Image Source: Sinalcoadmin, 2018)

3.7.2 Secondary Resources:

Accommodation

It seems that there are no hotels, hostels, or similar accommodations in Baskal, just in the nearby places like Shamakhi or Lahij (Google Maps d, 2020; TripAdvisor, 2019).

Travel organisation and Information

Information about a tourist information centre have not been found.

Transportation and Infrastructure

Baskal can be reached from the main road connecting Shamakhi and Gabala, however there is not information available for potential tourists about the public transport. It can be assumed that they can travel by taxi or car, just like to anywhere else, or join an organised tour. There are tours combining the visit to Baskal with destinations nearby (AzTerra, 2020).

3.8 Baku

Baku is not only the capital city of the Republic of Azerbaijan, but also the largest city in the Caucasus, rich in history, culture and seemingly a blend of modernisation and traditions. Located on the Absheron Peninsula and can be separated into three major divisions: İçəri Şəhər (Icherisheher - the Old Town), the Soviet-built city, and the modern part of the city (Lonely Planet b, 2020).

Baku and the surrounding areas are rich in tangible and intangible cultural heritages, offering visitors a wide variety of attractions and programs.

Natural resources	• Gobustan National Historical and Art Reserve • Yanardag
Primary tangible cultural tourism resources	• Museums: National Art Museum, the National Museum of History of Azerbaijan, the Heydar Aliyev Cultural Center, the Carpet Museum and the Stone Museum • Mosques and Churches: the Saray Mosque, the Muhammad Mosque, the Mosque of the Martyrs, the Church of Michael the Archangel, and the Former Church of the Saviour • Atashgah • Icherisheher • Shirvanshahs' Palace Complex • Maiden's Tower • Gulustan Palace • Palace of Happiness
Other important tangible and intangible resources	• The Boulevard • Nizami Torgovaya Street • Baku Funicular • Nagorny (Uphill) Park • Flame Towers • Baku Ferris Wheels • National Flag Square • The Little Venice

3.8.1 Primary Resources:

Natural Resources

The city is located on the western shore of the Caspian Sea, around the Bay of Baku. The area is protected from the violent northern winds by the islands of the Baku Archipelago, and the Absheron Peninsula (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2020). However, the most famous natural resources are not located in Baku, but around:

Gobustan National Historical and Art Reserve

The Gobustan National Park, located 70 km from Baku, is mostly known about the rock engravings from an ancient and primitive culture and the active mud volcanos. The reserve has around 6,000 engravings, dating back between 5,000-40,000 years and several remains of inhabited caves, settlements, and burials. The other special feature of the area is the collection of mud volcanos. There are around 850 known mud volcanos in the world, 300 of them located in Azerbaijan, and 100 of them in Gobustan. The state of them varies, some being dormant, some active and some buried or subsea. The Goturdag volcano, issuing mud for 100 years constantly, is the only one of its kind. In 2007, the reserve was included in the UNESCO World Heritage List (Lonely Planet b, 2020; SalamBaku, 2020; Azerbaijan Embassy, 2020).

Yanardag

Yanardag is one of the favourite destinations of tourist visiting Azerbaijan. Located 25 km from Baku, Yanardag perfectly symbolises why Azerbaijan is known as the Land of Fire. Natural fires are blazing in several parts of the country and have been for centuries, heavily influencing the beliefs, cultures, and traditions of locals. This natural phenomenon is a result of gas seeping onto the surface and catching fire. Yanardag, next to the village of Mahammadli is probably the most famous location presenting this and the area was declared a historical, cultural, and natural reserve in 2007 (SalamBaku, 2020; Azerbaijan Embassy, 2020).



(Image source: English Russia, 2019)

Cultural Resources

The richness of tangible and intangible cultural heritage resources of Baku is unquestionable. The city and the surrounding areas not only have several historical monuments, but also offer attractions for those who prefer more modern cultural attractions. **For museum lovers**, the city provides the **National Art Museum**, the **National Museum of History of Azerbaijan**, the **Heydar Aliyev Cultural Center**, the famous **Carpet Museum** and the **Stone Museum**.

Several caravanserais, churches and mosques can be seen: the **Saray Mosque**, the **Muhammad Mosque**, the **Mosque of the Martyrs**, the **Church of Michael the Archangel**, and the **Former Church of the Saviour**, just to name a few (SalamBaku, 2020; TripAdvisor, 2019; Azerbaijan Embassy, 2020).

The following attractions and monuments are probably the most well-known and popular ones in Baku and around the surrounding area:

Atashgah

Located 30 km from the centre of Baku, next to the village of Surakhani. The temple of fire worshippers has been revered by Zoroastrians, Hindus and Sikhs in different times and excavations show the remains of ancient constructions, but the current building dates back to the 18th century. The fire altar sits in the middle of a triangular courtyard and its dome has side flues above, spitting flames during special occasions. The President of Azerbaijan declared Atashgah a State historical-architectural reserve. Currently it also functions as an open-air museum and visitors can find different workshops and souvenir galleries there (SalamBaku, 2020; Lonely Planet b, 2020).

Heydar Aliyev Cultural Center

The cultural center dedicated to national leader Heydar Aliyev includes an auditorium, a museum, exhibition halls and administrative offices. It was designed by the famous architect Zaha Hadid and the construction of the building is labelled as one of the most courageous engineering projects of

modernity by the channels of Discovery and Science Channel. It is one of the symbols of modern Baku and was named the Design of the Year, in 2014 (SalamBaku, 2020; TripAdvisor, 2019).

Icherisheher

The old city of Baku, a World Heritage Site, can be found within the walled fortress of Baku and provides several interesting and famous sites:

The **Shirvanshahs' Palace Complex** is the highlight of the old city. The medieval palace was constructed in the 15th century and visitors can see the main building, the burial-vaults, the Saray mosque with a minaret, Seyid Yahya Bakuvi's mausoleum, a portal in the east called Sulatan Murad's gate, a reservoir, and the remnants of the Palace bathhouse.

The mysterious **Maiden's Tower** is also located in the old city. This tower was built somewhere between the 7th and 12th century and served as a temple, a defensive tower, a fire beacon, and astronomical observatory over the years.

The tower is a symbolic and distinctive landmark of Baku, with the height of 29,5 m and built alongside a natural oil well. It also houses a recently discovered, unique water well, with the original plumbing system. Visitors can also see several caravanserais, mosques, traditional residential buildings, and bathhouses in the old city (SalamBaku, 2020; Wikivoyage b, 2020; Lonely Planet b, 2020; TripAdvisor, 2019).



(Image Source: TripAdvisor, 2019)

Gulustan Palace

Not exactly a usual tourist destination, the Gulustan Palace serves as the executive office of the president of Azerbaijan and as a place to host concerts, public receptions, conferences, exhibitions, and other kinds of popular celebrations. It was constructed in the end of the 20th century, during the Soviet era, and the design includes traditional Azerbaijan elements, with some classical Soviet characteristics (Gulustan Palace, 2020).

Palace of Happiness

A Neo-Gothic style palace, built by millionaire Oil Baron, Murtuza Mukhtarov in 1912 for his wife, Lisa. It was inspired by the Venetian Palazzo de Loggia and designed by the Polish architect Józef Plosko. When the government's messenger arrived with the order of eviction during the Bolshevik repression, Mukhtarov refused to give up the building, shot the messenger and then committed suicide. Today, the Palace of Happiness is listed as real estate of historic and state importance and protected as a monument of Azerbaijani culture by the government (SalamBaku, 2020; Wikivoyage b, 2020).

Social Resources

Baku is the largest city in Azerbaijan with the population of 2,15 million people and the city receives around 2,5 million tourists in a year (World Population, 2020). Visitors describe the city as a very diverse one, where tourists can probably get around comfortably with English, and locals are mostly friendly and helpful, however scams happen rather often, so visitors must be careful (TripAdvisor, 2019; Starr, 2019).

3.8.2 Secondary Resources:

Accommodation

While Baku has more hotels, hostels, and other type of accommodations than any other city in Azerbaijan, this paper only lists the bests ones, based on the ranking of the Azerbaijan Embassy (2020):

Sheraton Baku Hotel, Ramada Baku Hotel, Resort Airberg Resort, Golden Coast Resort Hotel, Hotel Intourist, Hotel Holiday Inn Baku, Hotel Boulevard Baku Autograph Collection, Hotel Landmark Baku, Park Inn by Radisson Azerbaijan Hotel, Hotel Hyatt Regency, Hotel Diplomat Baku, Spa-h Hotel Excelsior Hotel & Spa Baku, Grand Hotel Europe, Hotel Shah Palace, Hotel JW Marriott Absheron Baku, Hotel Lake Palace Baku, Hotel Badamdar, Hilton Baku, Premier Expo Hotel, Hotel 4 Seasons, Hotel Fairmont Baku, Hotel Caucasus Baku City and Residences, Sapphire Inn, Hotel Divan Express Baku

Travel organisation and Information

The website of Azerbaijan Travel, operating under the Tourism Board of Azerbaijan offers useful information about traveling to and getting around Baku. Similarly, the Salam Baku website, also belonging to the Tourism Board, focuses especially on the tourist attractions and information in Baku. The city also has a Tourist Information Center office and its Facebook page, both belonging to Salam Baku, however, the comments about it show that people are not so satisfied with the services. They say, the tangible information, brochures and guides are okay, however, it is hard to communicate with the employees and when they go on tours with them, there is often miscommunication happening and meeting locations or practical information is not given correctly (TripAdvisor, 2019; SalamBaku, 2020; Azerbaijan Travel, 2019).

Transportation and Infrastructure

Baku is easily accessible by several way of transportation. Airlines, for example Aeroflot, Turkish Airlines, Lufthansa, and Qatar Airways offer flights to Baku's Heydar Aliyev International Airport from all over the world, but tourists can also use trains, buses, boats and cars to access it (SalamBaku, 2020; Wikivoyage b, 2020).

When it comes to getting around in the city, Baku provides several options. Tourists can walk around, enjoying the many pedestrian streets, or rent a bike, for example from the MyBike company, who also offers a bike map. Buses and minibuses also operate, along with metro lines and trains, and of course visitors can always choose taxis or car rentals too (Wikivoyage b, 2020; Wander-Lush, 2020; SalamBaku, 2020).

Entertainment

Apart from the cultural and historical heritage sites, monuments and museums, visitors can find several other activities to enjoy Baku. Shopping streets, like **The Boulevard** and the **Nizami Torgovaya Street** offer both traditional products and the newest fashion shops. The **Baku Funicular** is the perfect and most comfortable option to travel up to the highest point of the city, the **Nagorny (Uphill) Park**, which provides the most beautiful view over the city and the bay. Tourists can also see the famous **Flame Towers**, a trio of skyscrapers and the tallest buildings in Baku from here.

Another location providing breath-taking view is the **Baku Ferris Wheel**, located near the **National Flag Square**, whose flagpole was registered in the “Guinness book of records” as the tallest in the world in 2010. And last but not least, **The Little Venice**, located at the seaside boulevard, designed after the real Venice in Italy. With several channels, it provides the opportunity for romantic gondola journeys, and the restaurants on the shore invite guests for gastro experiences (SalamBaku, 2020; Azerbaijan Embassy, 2020).



(Image Source: Travel in Baku b, n.d.)

Conclusion

It can be concluded that with the refurbishment of Silk Roads and the initiatives and projects governments and world organisations are working on, the Silk Roads tourism can be a successful focus point to countries along the routes. While Azerbaijan currently focuses more on cultural events, sport events and conference tourism (Popova, 2019), many of the cities along the Silk Roads are developing their tourism resources and try to attract more visitors. While all of these cities have several unique tangible and intangible primary resources, some of them, like Basqal or Lahij lacks secondary resources. However, it may not be a bad thing, since developing a tourism infrastructure can destroy a destination's authenticity if it is overdone (Petroman et al., 2013).

The most popular and attractive city for tourists seem to be Baku at the moment. However, apart from the capital city, Sheki, Gabala and Shamakhi also aims to offer everything a tourist can wish for and they all located along the same route, just like Lahij and Basqal. Lankaran also has many unique cultural heritage sites and products, however the city is located far from the others. Shusha, while once considered one of the most beautiful places in Azerbaijan, currently faces uncertainty because of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflicts and the Azerbaijan Embassy stated that tourism infrastructure is mainly gone in that area.

All in all, it can be said that Azerbaijan possesses several attractive destinations and tourism products along the Silk Roads. Their Azerbaijan Travel website also works well, however, could use more information on specific locations, just like the world wide web in English, since it is proved to be hard to gather data about some places.

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