

the Polish legacy
in Baku and beyond



azerbaijan

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Modern Baku was shaped by the famous Oil Boom of the late 19th–early 20th centuries, which turned it into a cosmopolitan hub mixing Western and Eastern influences. At the forefront of this remarkable transformation was a group of Polish architects who, together with a number of other Poles, left an incredible legacy.

stunning buildings *incredible stories*

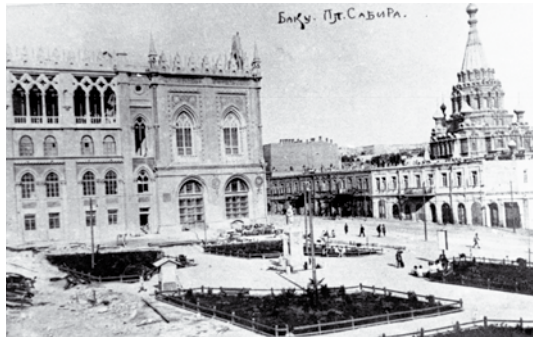


Baku at the end of the 19th century was a city in flux. A massive boom in the oil industry – by 1901 Baku was producing over half the world's oil – brought new wealth, triggering vast urban development and a population influx. In the space of just a few decades the city went from being a provincial outpost of the Russian Empire to the “Paris of the Caucasus”.

It was during this time that Baku witnessed a Polish architectural phenomenon, as the urban transformation was overseen by three consecutive chief city architects of Polish origin: Jozef Goslawski (1892-1904), Kazimierz Skorewicz (1904-1907) and Jozef Ploszko (1907-1910), as well as Eugeniusz Skibinski, who worked in the architectural department of the Baku City Council. These Polish architects also designed a host of fabulous fin-de-siècle buildings.



*The Western Caspian University building on Istiglaliyyat Street, built in 1893-1894 and designed by Jozef Goslawski.
On the map *



As part of Poland and Azerbaijan were both at the time within the Russian Empire, many Poles joined the masses of economic migrants (from Russia and beyond) to Baku attracted by the opportunities created by the Oil Boom. Besides architects, they included engineers, scientists, scholars, musicians, doctors and teachers. The city was already home to a number of Poles deported to the Caucasus for participation in national uprisings against Imperial Russian authority. The Polish community played a prominent role in the oil industry and other areas, however it was in architecture that they left their greatest mark.

The Polish architects featured in this brochure designed eye-catching mansions and palaces built for Baku's oil elite as well as sumptuous civic buildings and cathedrals. Their iconic designs blended the best of local and Western architectural traditions and remain, over a century later, among Baku's best landmarks.

However, the Oil Boom architecture was not a purely Polish phenomenon, as many other local and foreign architects were involved and the trend also reflects Azerbaijanis' growing interest in European culture at the time. That culminated in the creation of the first parliamentary republic in the Muslim world in Azerbaijan in 1918.

The Polish architectural contribution spread to other parts of Azerbaijan as well. For example, the architect Jozef Ploszko supervised the reconstruction of the Juma Mosque in Shamakhi following an earthquake, while Ignacy Krzyształowicz was the chief architect of Yelizavetpol (now Ganja), where he created a city master plan and designed several buildings. Catholic churches built by exiled Polish soldiers also still exist in Gusar and Zagatala.

The outbreak of World War I ended this remarkable period of Polish influence in Azerbaijan as most Poles fled the great changes brought about by the Bolshevik revolution in 1917. Nevertheless, there are still several hundred Poles living here today, who are mostly descendants of those who came in the 19th century.

Over the next pages, we present the architectural masterpieces of the four outstanding Polish architects and several more sites of Polish heritage.



Polish architects

Here we present the four prominent Polish architects who helped create the specific look and feel of Baku during the Oil Boom period. Each of them spent their most productive years in the city designing stunning buildings that continue to delight both locals and visitors.



Jozef Goslawski (in Polish: *Józef Goslawski*) (1865–1904) was nicknamed the "Caucasian Rastrelli" following his successful contribution to the construction of the Alexander Nevski Cathedral. This project brought Goslawski to Baku having graduated from the St Petersburg Institute of Civil Engineers. He spent the rest of his short life in the city, residing at 31 Mirza Ibrahimov Street, where a plaque commemorates the architect (on the map [1](#)). Goslawski became the favoured architect of the oil baron Zeynalabdin Taghiyev, for whom he designed the Taghiyev Palace and School for Muslim Girls. At the age of 27 in 1892, he was appointed Baku's chief city architect and remained so until his untimely death in 1904. He was notoriously hard-working, due to which his health suffered. His final project was the building of the Baku City Duma (the local government), during which he died of tuberculosis at the age of 38. After his death, Goslawski's sister Michalina and youngest daughter Lucja stayed in Baku and took care of his belongings. Lucja later took them to Leningrad, where she moved in the 1930s, however the entire collection was lost when she died during the Siege of Leningrad in World War II.



Jozef Ploszko (in Polish: *Józef Płoszko*) (1867–1931) came to Baku at the invitation of Jozef Goslawski having graduated from the St Petersburg Institute of Civil Engineers and began to work for the construction department of the Baku City Administration. Ploszko became the favoured architect of the oil barons Musa Naghiyev and Murtuza Mukhtarov, for whom he designed the Palace of Happiness and Ismailiyya Palace respectively. Other noteworthy structures designed by him include the State Puppet Theatre building, the former Virgin Mary Catholic Church and the Lukoil office building. Ploszko also participated in the reconstruction of the Juma Mosque in Shamakhi after it was destroyed by an earthquake. He designed buildings in a great many styles, though often in Gothic or modern. Ploszko worked in Baku for over 30 years, including as the chief architect of the city in 1907–1910. In 1925 he left for Warsaw.

Kazimierz Skorewicz (in Polish: *Kazimierz Skórewicz*) (1866–1950) was another graduate of the St Petersburg Institute of Civil Engineers who arrived in Baku at the invitation of Jozef Goslawski. Skorewicz's buildings typically blended Western and Eastern styles. He designed a number of residential buildings that harmoniously fit into the ensemble of the Old City, as well as landmarks like the current office of the State Prosecutor of Azerbaijan and the Taghiyev Mall (Passage). He worked in the city for 12 years (including as the chief city architect in 1904–1907) before leaving after the First Russian Revolution of 1905 and returning to his native Poland. There, he designed the building of the Polish Sejm (the first chamber of the Polish parliament) in Warsaw.



Eugeniusz Skibinski (in Polish: *Eugeniusz Skibiński*) (1858–1918) was the only one of the four Azerbaijani Polish architects who was born in Azerbaijan: in Shamakhi. A graduate of the St Petersburg Academy of Arts, he designed over 250 buildings in Baku, the most notable being the Union of Architects (formerly the Aghabala Guliyev House), whose elaborate decorative elements were inspired by the Shirvanshahs Palace. Skibinski also participated in the design of the Baku Railway Station. His style has a strikingly Oriental feel, which reflects Skibinski's admiration of the medieval architecture of the Absheron region. But what made his buildings really stand out was how they harmoniously adapted the traditions of the Old City to the new Baku that emerged during the Oil Boom.



Polish legacy *beyond Baku*

The Polish legacy in Azerbaijan at the turn of the 20th century stretches beyond Baku to these other cities:

Shamakhi – the architect Jozef Ploszko participated in the reconstruction of the Juma Mosque, the oldest mosque in Azerbaijan which dates back to 743, following earthquake damage in 1902. Due to financial issues, the reconstruction was only partially completed.

Ganja – in the late 19th century Ignacy Krzysztalowicz served as the chief city architect of Yelizavetpol (now Ganja), designing the first city master plan in 1873 and numerous houses for wealthy residents.

Gusar and Zagatala – Catholic churches were built in these cities hosting Russian military garrisons by serving Polish soldiers.



what to see

To keep things clear and simple, we have divided this brochure into four parts encompassing the best buildings designed by the Polish architects. There are more buildings and sites of Polish heritage, but these are the highlights.

There is also a special walking tour connecting all the main sites linked to prominent Poles in Baku, which is clearly marked with signposts and information boards. For more information, see Azerbaijan.travel.



Istiglaliyyat Street area

- 1 Baku City Hall
- 2 Institute of Manuscripts
- 3 Presidium of the Academy of Sciences (aka Ismailiyya Palace)
- 4 Western Caspian University building

Murtuza Mukhtarov Street area

- 1 Palace of Happiness
- 2 State Prosecutor's Office
- 3 Rostropovich House Museum
- 4 Union of Architects

Nizami Street & Fountains Square area

- 1 Former house of Jozef Goslawski
- 2 Union of Co-operatives
- 3 National Museum of History of Azerbaijan
- 4 The Lukoil office building
- 5 Street of Polish Architects
- 6 Baku Department Store
- 7 Residential building on Safarli Street

Other sights

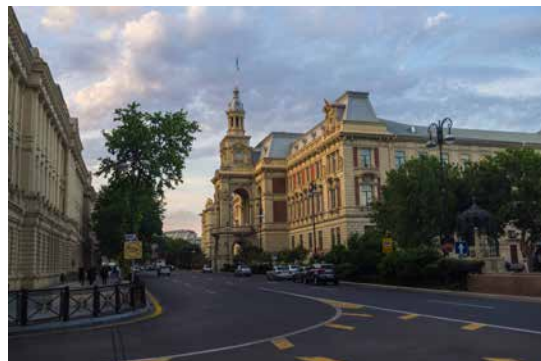
- 1 State Puppet Theatre
- 2 Grave of the engineer Pavel Potocki
- 3 Baku Railway Station building
- 4 Holy Virgin Mary Catholic Church

Istiglaliyyat Street area



Baku City Hall

1 The Baku City Hall building was constructed in 1900-1904 based on the design by the Polish architect Jozef Goslawski. This was Goslawski's last project, which he failed to finish as he died during the construction from tuberculosis. The building was therefore completed by fellow Polish architects Kazimierz Skowroncz and Jozef Ploszko, who stuck faithfully to Goslawski's original plans. The luxurious yet austere building, built in the baroque style, symbolises the work of the City Hall and its huge responsibility for improving the city, the lives of its residents and the wealth of Baku. Red bricks were imported from Italy especially for the exterior cladding. On the porticoes of the second floor you can see various coats of arms which symbolise the different areas of work of the Baku City Hall. The actual coat of arms of Baku itself – three tongues of flame – is there too, and a melody plays every hour from a clock on the tower above the pavement. There is a somewhat misleading "1870" inscription on the facade, which represents the date when new municipal regulations were adopted in the Russian Empire rather than the construction date of the building. Currently it houses the Baku Executive Power offices.



Institute of Manuscripts

2 This fabulous building in the national romantic style was designed by the Polish architect Jozef Goslawski and built in 1898-1901. Its owner was the extremely influential oil baron and philanthropist, Haji Zeynalabdin Taghiyev, who wanted to set up a secular boarding school for Muslim girls, the very first in the Muslim East. The project was a difficult one for Goslawski as the building had to combine an Oriental style with modesty and austerity to symbolise its purpose. Simplicity and harmony were key principles of the design, for in the late 19th-early 20th centuries, despite the influence of European culture through the Russian Empire, strict Islamic laws still reigned. Education was given mainly to young men and girls were thought to not need it.

In establishing the school Taghiyev faced a double challenge: the reluctance of the Tsar to grant him permission, and opposition from the local clergy. However, he managed to solve both these problems, the first by receiving the approval of Empress Alexandra Feodorovna, in whose honour the school was named, and the second by collecting notes of permission from respected religious leaders in the Islamic world. The school finally opened its doors in 1901 and accepted girls from both wealthy and poor families. Education included a mix of writing, reading and arithmetic, and housekeeping, handicrafts and etiquette.

In the interior design of the building Goslawski took into account all the school's needs, incorporating a prayer room, laundry room, medical room, library, and more. Later, in 1913, the building became a teachers' seminary for Muslim girls. From 7 December 1918 until the Soviet occupation of Azerbaijan in April 1920 it housed the parliament of the first Republic of Azerbaijan. Today it hosts the Azerbaijani Institute of Manuscripts as well as the House Museum of Huseyn Javid, an acclaimed poet who lived here from 1920 to 1937. The Institute of Manuscripts is open to visitors and has a small museum displaying historic manuscripts and miniatures in the room where the parliament of the first Azerbaijani republic once met.





Presidium of the Academy of Sciences (aka Ismailiyya Palace)

3 A piece of Italy in central Baku, this stunning building is said to have been inspired by Venice's Palazzo Ducale. It was built in 1908-1913, designed by the Polish architect Jozef Ploszko and financed by the fabulously wealthy oil baron Agha Musa Naghiyev. The story behind it is as follows: in 1905 a headquarters for the Muslim Charity Society needed to be built, and a vacant plot of land next to Taghiyev's Muslim School for Girls (now the Institute of Manuscripts) was chosen for it. However, it took a long time to realise the construction of the building, which was largely due to difficulties in finding someone to finance it. This was resolved when Baku's oil millionaires proposed the project to Naghiyev during a feast celebrating the Novruz holiday as a way of commemorating his son, Ismayil (after whom the building is named), who died young of tuberculosis. Naghiyev agreed and tasked Ploszko with designing it.

This was Ploszko's first independent project during the 30 years he lived in Baku and remains one of his most iconic. Legend has it that Naghiyev sent him on a long tour of Europe in search of inspiration, and the result was this Venetian Gothic masterpiece. During the March Days of 1918, a period of great civil unrest in which thousands of Baku's Muslims were killed by Bolshevik-Dashnak forces, the building was almost completely ruined. Later, it was saved from being completely demolished under the Soviet regime by the protests of the local people. Today it is considered one of the main architectural monuments of Baku and hosts the Presidium of the Azerbaijan Academy of Sciences.





Explore the area

For the best views of these buildings, walk by at night to admire them spectacularly lit up. Hidden behind these buildings is Baku's stunning **Old City**, a UNESCO World Heritage Site whose labyrinth of narrow streets is home to landmarks like the **Maiden Tower** and **Shirvanshahs Palace** as well as hidden gems like the **Museum of Miniature Books**. At the southern end of Istiglaliyyat Street, visit Baku's first park, **Philharmonic Garden**, whose exotic trees and outdoor restaurants make it a great place to relax in warmer months. At the northern end of Istiglaliyyat Street, meanwhile, is the peaceful **Sabir Park**, where you can admire the Old City walls and take a break before walking on down to the modern **city centre** based around **Fountains Square** and **Nizami Street**.



Murtuza Mukhtarov Street

area



Palace of Happiness

1 Considered one of the best Oil Boom buildings, the Palace of Happiness was designed by the Polish architect Jozef Ploszko and built in 1911-1912 in the French Gothic style. It was originally called the Mukhtarov Palace as the owner was the oil baron Murtuza Mukhtarov, who had it built as a gift for his beloved wife Liza Tuganova, the daughter of a Russian General of Ossetian origin. Legend has it that she had been enamoured of a building in the Gothic style seen while the couple were travelling in Europe and expressed envy of its owners. Having returned to Baku, Mukhtarov swiftly asked Ploszko to come up with something similar. The construction of the palace took nine months; upon its completion Mukhtarov surprised Liza by driving her there in a carriage and revealing it as her new residence. But the story has a tragic end: after the Bolsheviks came to power in Baku in April 1920, it is said that Mukhtarov shot some Red Army soldiers who entered and attempted to confiscate the property and then turned the gun on himself.

Originally the building stood opposite the Alexander Nevski Cathedral, which was demolished in the Soviet period. An intriguing detail is the statue above the entrance of the Polish knight Zawisza Czarny (Zawisza the Black) – a famous folk hero in Poland. Today the building hosts official wedding ceremonies.

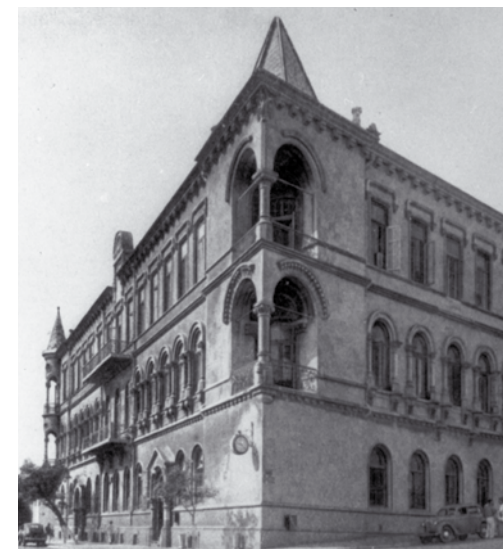


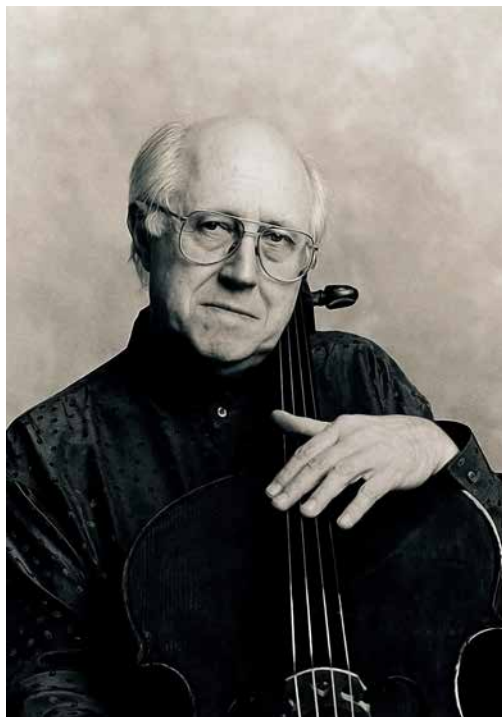
State Prosecutor's Office

2 This building was initially the Baku office of the Rothschilds and today serves as the State Prosecutor's Office. It was built in 1897-1899 in the neo-Gothic style and bears a characteristic feature for Baku architecture – white aglay stone, which the author of the building's design, the Polish architect Kazimierz Skorewicz, generally liked to work with.

The Rothschilds played a huge role in the development of the city as one of the most important foreign representatives in the oil industry, which their capital helped to develop at a fast pace. However, the Rothschilds were also known for their charitable projects: they acted as trustees of educational institutions and provided free education to oil workers' children.

Their office also housed the Caspian-Black Sea Oil Industry and Trade Company and its subsidiary, Mazut, which were engaged in oil production in the seashore area of Bibi-Heybat. Due to the building housing the Central House of Rural Workers in the 1930s, the architecture underwent some changes as elements deemed "pretentious" and "inappropriate" for the working class were removed.





Rostropovich House Museum

3 Another talented man of Polish origin who left his mark on the history and culture of Azerbaijan was Mstislav Rostropovich (*in Polish: Mściślaw Rostropowicz*), who is recognised as one of the greatest cellists of all time. He was born in 1927 in Baku, where his parents had arrived two years earlier at the invitation of the composer Uzeyir Hajibeyli, the founder of modern classical music in Azerbaijan, to teach at the Azerbaijan State Conservatoire. His father Leopold was a well-known cellist and conductor and his mother Sophia an expert pianist.

Strongly influenced by this musical environment, the young Mstislav went on to study at Gnessin State Musical College, then at the Orenburg School of Music, which later became the Orenburg State Institute of Arts L & M Rostropovich. During his great career, he performed almost the entire repertoire of existing cello music, and many works were written especially for him.

Nowadays, the Baku house the Rostropoviches lived in hosts a museum with over 5,000 items detailing their lives. They loved Baku very much but left in 1931. In 1974 Mstislav emigrated with his family (also musicians) to the United States due to pressure faced from the Soviet regime for his support of dissidents such as the writer Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn.

In Baku there is also a music school named after the Rostropoviches, and the Rostropovich International Music Festival, organised in March–April each year, attracts musicians from all over the world.

Monday – Friday, 10:00 – 17:00
2 AZN

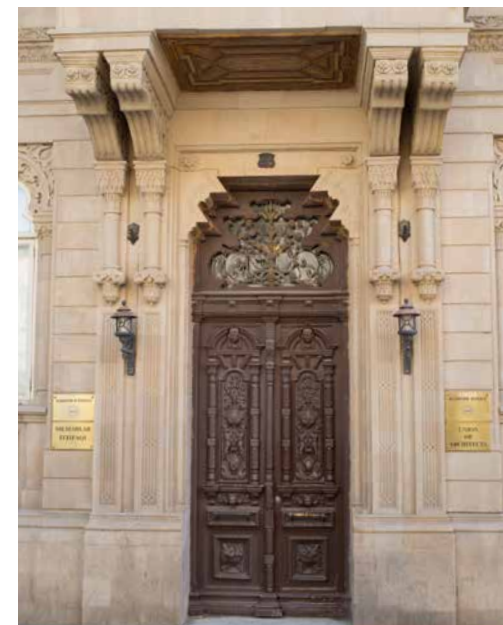
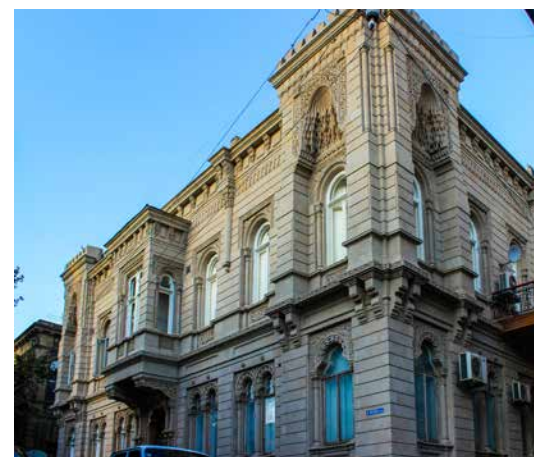


Union of Architects

4 This building, formerly known as the Aghabala Guliyev House, is the diamond in the Baku career of the Polish architect Eugeniusz Skibinski. Its majestic exterior design was inspired by the stunning Shirvanshahs Palace in the Old City. The owner of the mansion, Aghabala Guliyev, hailed from a poor family but clearly had exceptional entrepreneurial talent: already as a young child he was selling qutabs (stuffed pancakes) baked by his mother. Later, he made a fortune trading in flour – hence his nickname of Baku's Flour King – which allowed him to acquire a mill and a rice-cleaning plant as well as oil lands.

There is an interesting story about a scandal Guliyev was involved in aged 27, having fallen in love with a girl and proposed but been refused by her relatives. This led him to attempt to kidnap the girl (a fairly common practice then in the Caucasus) but he failed and instead of a wedding ceremony he received two months in prison.

The house of Aghabala Guliyev on the former Persian Street was built in 1899 and today houses the national Union of Architects. The building is romantic-orientalist in style and besides its eye-catching exterior features an exquisite interior lavishly decorated with Moorish mosaics and colourful wall paintings.



POLISH SIGHTS



Explore the area

If you keep going along Mukhtarov Street, turn right at the intersection with Alovset Guliyev Street and descend a block, you'll come to the gorgeous white with gold dome **Archangel Michael Russian Church** – Baku's oldest church, built in the 1840s. Alternatively, heading a few blocks west (uphill) will take you to **Teze Pir Mosque**, a large and impressive building that is one of the most important mosques in Azerbaijan. And if you simply carry straight on you'll arrive at **Central Park**, a glorious expanse of green space where you can stroll, have coffee, enjoy the views and take a break from all the hustle and bustle of the city centre.



MURTUZA MUKHTAROV STREET AREA



Nizami Street & Fountains Square area



Union of Co-operatives

2 This four-storey building on the former Staropolitseyskaya Street belonged to the Ryłski family, who were wealthy oil producers of Polish origin. It was built in 1912 and designed by the Polish architect Jozef Płoszko, whose mastery of local Azerbaijani architectural traditions are clearly reflected in this building's stunning Oriental facade. In 1919 the Ryłski's mansion became the residence of the Polish Consulate in Baku. Today it houses the Union of Co-operatives.



National Museum of History of Azerbaijan

3 The building of the National Museum of History of Azerbaijan on the former Gorchakovskaya Street was built for the legendary oil baron Zeynalabdin Taghiyev in 1893–1902 as his family residence. It was designed by the Polish architect Jozef Goslawski in the Italian Renaissance style and occupies a whole block in the most prestigious part of the city centre. The interior consists of two grandiose floors, each decorated in Eastern and European styles. Today it houses the National History Museum, which takes visitors on a journey through Azerbaijan's eventful history from ancient times to the modern era. However, a small section has been preserved as a house museum of Taghiyev, allowing you a glimpse of the private life of one of Baku's most influential pre-revolutionary public figures.

Monday – Friday, 10:30 – 17:00
5 AZN



The Lukoil office building

4 Originally home to the New Europe Hotel, this building was built for the oil magnate Agha Musa Naghiyev in 1910–1913 based on the design by Polish architect Jozef Płoszko. The six-storey building with pastel pink facades is a fine example of the early 20th-century modern style and housed the biggest hotel in pre-revolutionary Baku, which played a crucial role accommodating visiting businessmen during the Oil Boom. The building was known for its modern amenities; for example, it was one of Baku's first buildings with elevators.

An interesting fact is that in 1924–1925, during his frequent visits to Baku, the famous Russian poet Sergey Yesenin created his famous collection Persian Motifs while staying at the New Europe. Later, in the 1940s and 1950s it was one of only two hotels in Baku, mainly accommodating domestic travellers. Located on the former Gorchakovskaya Street, the building now houses the Baku office of the Russian oil company Lukoil.



Street of Polish Architects

5 Located in a historical neighbourhood is a street named in memory of the four outstanding Polish architects who left such an incredible architectural legacy in Baku. A memorial board honours the names of Jozef Goslawski, Kazimierz Skorewicz, Jozef Płoszko, and Eugeniusz Skibinski and features images of some of the masterpieces they created in the city: the Palace of Happiness, Presidium of the Academy of Sciences (former Ismailiyya Palace), Baku City Hall, and the Union of Architects (formerly the Aghabala Guliyev House). The board was created by the Azerbaijani sculptor Elbay Gasimov. This street, located near Sahil metro station, was officially opened on 31 May 2019 and intersects with Tarlan Aliyarbayov and Haji Zeynalabdin Taghiyev streets.





Baku Department Store

6 The Taghiyev Passage on the former Olginsky Street, which is currently known as Baku Department Store, was built in 1896 and designed by the Polish architect Kazimierz Skorewicz. Today this building, which occupies an entire block, hosts a row of cafes and restaurants, but it was once Baku's largest shopping centre. In 1903 it was bought by the famous oil baron Zeynalabdin Taghiyev and afterwards became known as the Taghiyev Passage. People came here to buy hats, shoes, shirts, fabrics, and more, as well as to visit one of Baku's first cinemas at which one of the first Azerbaijani movies, "In the Kingdom of Oil and Millions" (1915) by Boris Svetlov, was shown. Today, the interior of the Taghiyev Passage is a less bustling place, although a few jewellery and antiques shops continue to operate. But strolling through and admiring the classical architecture will still allow you to imagine pre-revolutionary Baku's special atmosphere.



Residential building on Safarli Street

7 This three-storey residential building on the former Vorontsov Street was the first Gothic-style building in Baku and belonged to the Malikov family. It was built in 1893-1897 based on the design by the Polish architect Jozef Goslawski, who reportedly modelled the facades on Florentine palaces. The house is also noteworthy for its many windows which let an abundance of natural light into the building.



Explore the area

Here in the heart of downtown Baku you can get a taste of Baku's emerging coffee culture at the many trendy new cafes, grab a bite to eat at restaurants to suit all tastes, or investigate the shops around **Fountains Square** and **Nizami Street**. At night, there's a really vibrant atmosphere with plenty of pubs and bars to pick from, many with DJs, karaoke or live music.

In this area, you're not far from Baku's beautiful **Seaside Boulevard**, which is a national park with a huge range of trees and kilometres of pathways offering ever-changing views of the city and the Caspian Sea. In summer it comes alive with outdoor restaurants and tea houses. You can rent a bike, take a ride on the **Baku Eye** and shop or relax at the architecturally astonishing **Deniz Mall**. Another attraction not to miss here is the equally eye-catching **Carpet Museum**, where you can get lost in the beauty and symbolism of rugs woven all around the country.



other sights



State Puppet Theatre

1 Currently housing the State Puppet Theatre of Azerbaijan, this small fin-de-siècle building was designed by the Polish architect Jozef Ploszko and built in 1908-1910 in the French Renaissance style. It began life as the Phenomenon Cinema, Baku's first cinema which showed silent movies and was renowned for its innovative air ventilation system that changed the air every 15 minutes. According to the architect Shamil Fatullayev, it also had a small casino, one of whose owners was the building's architect, Jozef Ploszko, who apparently spent rather a lot of time here. Ten years later it was reconstructed and converted into the Satiragit (Satire-Agitation) Workers Theatre. Later in the Soviet era, it housed the Agricultural Academy Museum and then the State Puppet Theatre.

The elegant building was one of the first architectural monuments on the newly constructed Baku Boulevard and helped to encourage the city administration to further beautify the promenade. Today, performances at the Puppet Theatre are mostly in Azerbaijani and Russian, but they are very easy to understand regardless of language and well worth experiencing.



Explore the area

Take the opportunity to stroll along the Baku Seaside Boulevard, where you can admire iconic examples of Baku's modern architecture, refuel at traditional tea-houses and restaurants, and take a ride on the Mirvari boat for superb views of the city's seafloor.



Grave of the engineer Pawel Potocki

2 Another Baku-based Pole with a remarkable story was the engineer Pawel Potocki. He graduated from the Technical Institute in 1901 and worked in many European countries, including the Netherlands and Russia, before coming to Baku at the invitation of the prominent Polish geologist, Witold Zglenicki, a pioneer of oil extraction at sea who was known as the "Polish Nobel" for his philanthropic activities. Zglenicki proposed an innovative project to reclaim land from the sea in the Bibi-Heybat bay in order to extract oil, but passed away before it could be realised.

The project was the first of its type in the world, and it was finally completed nearly 20 years later by Potocki, for whom it became the project of his life. In 1919, however, he started to lose his eyesight, which in time went completely. Nevertheless, Potocki continued to work on the project since he knew its specifications and the territory so well. In total, 79 hectares of land were reclaimed under his supervision. On 18 April 1923, an 82.5-metre-deep oil well was put into operation on the reclaimed land, generating great interest in the global oil industry.

The Bibi-Heybat project was so important for Potocki that, according to his will, he was buried on the reclaimed land. Today, his grave and memorial in Bibi-Heybat are a must-visit site for anyone interested in Polish heritage and Azerbaijan's oil history.

Explore the area

The best way to visit the burial place of Potocki is by car. On the way, you can stop at the world's first mechanically driven oil well located a few kilometres before. Not far away, visit the Surakhani Ship Museum (Wednesday – Sunday, 10:00 – 18:00, 5 AZN), housed aboard a 123.5m-long oil tanker on the Baku Boulevard, to discover the history of oil production and transportation on the Caspian Sea.





Baku Railway Station building

③ A delightful example of Oriental architecture with a strong Moorish influence, the historic building of the Baku Central Railway Station was built in 1883 as the railway line was being constructed between Baku and the Georgian capital of Tiflis (now Tbilisi). Among the various artists and architects involved in the project was the Polish architect Eugeniusz Skibinski.

Besides the striking exterior, in its time the station building was renowned for its lavish and spacious interior with wall paintings reminiscent of an Eastern carpet, mosaic tiled floor and numerous sculptural details. There were beautifully designed waiting rooms and a vast vestibule with a grand staircase. The station was created in a part of the city serving as a sort of crossroads between the city centre and the Absheron Peninsula, and its construction on the site of a private garden signalled the start of wide-scale urban development in the area. Today, the station combines old and new buildings equipped with escalators, WiFi, shops, cafes and restaurants.



Explore the area

A short walk from the Baku Railway Station building is the 28 Mall, one of the best malls in Baku where you can enjoy some shopping or visit restaurants and cafes.

Holy Virgin Mary Catholic Church

④ The Virgin Mary Catholic Church was an eye-catching neo-Gothic building that mostly served Baku's Polish community. It was designed by the Polish architect Jozef Ploszko and constructed in 1912, funded by the Baku oil magnates of Polish origin, the Rylski family. Sadly, it was later destroyed by the Soviet government in their anti-religion campaign to make way for a cultural centre used by the KGB. This grand Soviet structure is today the Shahriyar Cultural Centre.

However, after Azerbaijan regained its independence, freedom of worship was restored for all religious communities in the country, including the Catholic community, and land was allocated for the construction of a new Catholic church (albeit in a different part of the city). The territory for the new church was consecrated in accordance with the tradition of the Roman Catholic Church by the head of the Vatican delegation, Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran, who visited Azerbaijan in 2004. A year later, the Roman Catholic Church's official Cardinal Crescenio Sepe gave his blessing to the church's foundation stone, and construction was completed in 2007. It was co-designed by the professor of Naples University of Architecture, Paolo Ruggiero, and the chief architect of Baku, Akif Abdullayev, and has a capacity of 250–300 people. The official opening took place during the visit of Vatican Secretary of State Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone to Azerbaijan in March 2008. An interesting fact is that the church bells were a present from Lech Kaczynski, then the President of Poland.



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Country Size
86,600 km²
Population
10 million



COVID-19 measures

COVID-19 has affected us like the rest of the world, but we've taken various measures to protect people. The main one is the SAHMAN programme, aiming to raise health, safety and hygiene standards across the accommodation, hospitality and transportation sectors and supported by the UNWTO. Named after the Azerbaijani word for 'immaculateness', it urges businesses to take mandatory measures on social distancing, disinfection, quarantine areas, cleaning methodology, and more. Learn more at sahman.az.

Visa

Currently visas are only being issued through Azerbaijan embassies due to the COVID-19 pandemic. But normally, for some nationalities visas are available upon arrival. For others e-visas can be obtained within 3 days via evisa.gov.az. But please check requirements before booking your trip.

Money

Our currency is the manat (AZN). Card payments are accepted at most shops and restaurants in the country. Mastercard/ Visa ATMs are very widespread and available in main towns. Changing money back is no problem.

Accommodation

We have a complete range of options, from luxury and mid-range hotels to rural ensuite bungalows, provincial hotels and even private homestays. Many have joined the SAHMAN programme to raise health, safety and hygiene standards.

Language

Our state language is Azerbaijani, which is similar to Turkish. Many people speak fluent Russian. Basic English is understood by most of the population.

Religion

While we are a secular country, most of the population follow Islam. Muslim dress code is not enforced nor expected. Alcohol is very widely available. All religions have somewhere to worship in Azerbaijan.

Dining

Azerbaijan's cuisine is full of amazing flavours and aromas. Due to having nine different climate zones and an arable land mass of 38.9%, a huge variety of fruits and vegetables are cultivated here. The local cuisine, which varies from region to region, is therefore packed with organic and healthy produce. Besides the traditional dishes, local restaurants offer a variety of food options, such as vegetarian, vegan, halal, kosher, etc. Baku has an excellent selection of restaurants serving everything from Japanese fusion to Italian.



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