

Condé Nast Traveller



THE WORLD MADE LOCAL
JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2024

MIDDLE EAST EDITION

Tropical hideouts

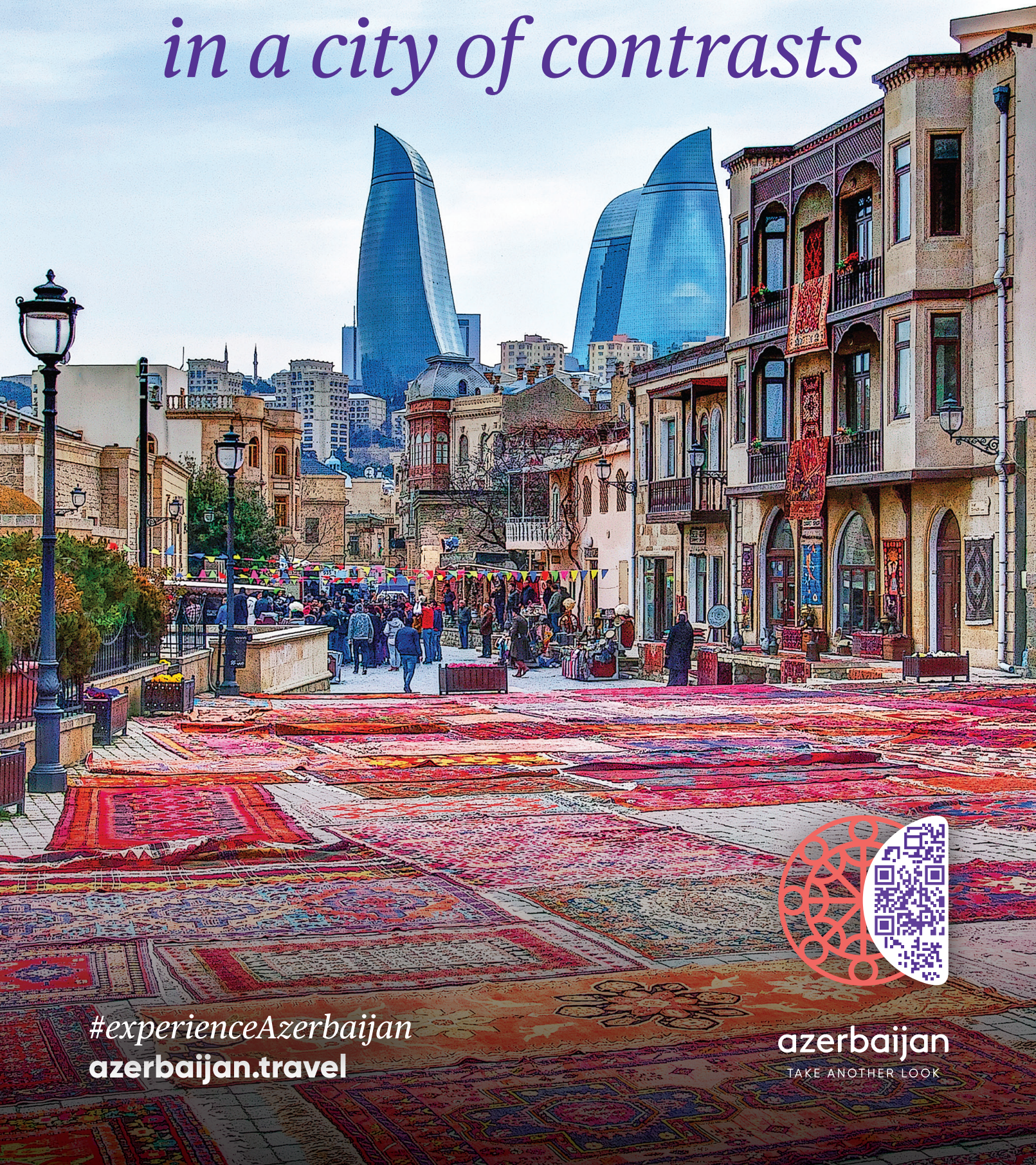
OTHERWORLDLY ESCAPES, FROM THE COAST
OF KENYA TO THE HILLS OF SRI LANKA

The Gold List

OUR EDITORS' ALL-TIME FAVOURITE HOTELS

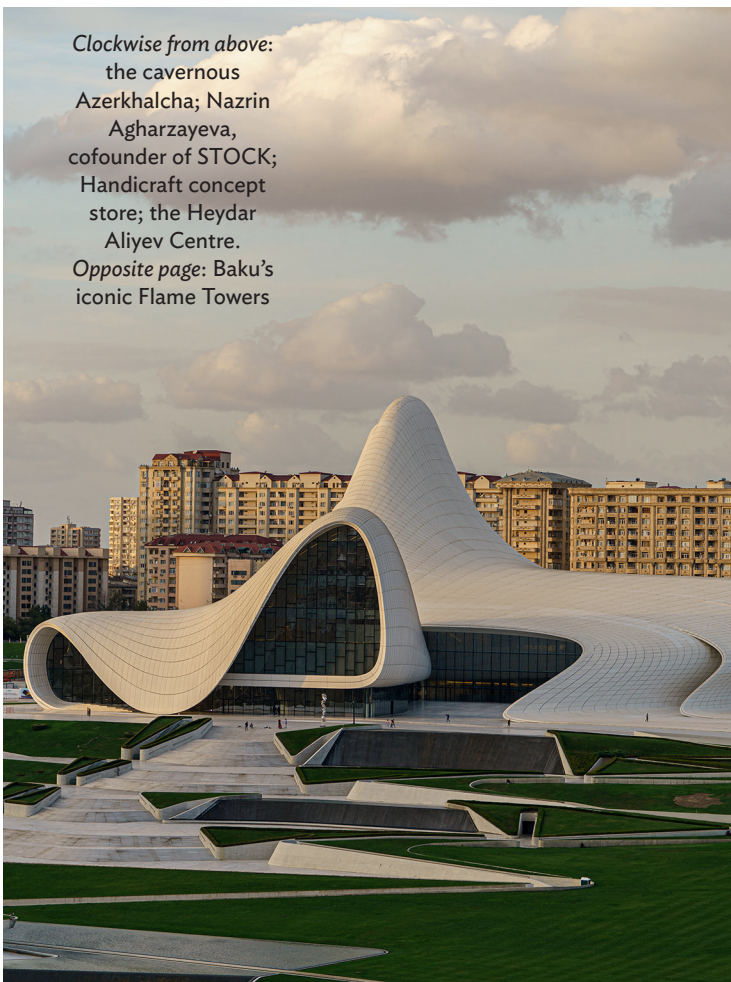
PLUS FIRST-RATE FASHION ★ SKIING IN ALASKA ★ A TASTE OF BANGKOK ★ THE HONEYMOON GUIDE

find your inspiration *in a city of contrasts*



#experienceAzerbaijan
azerbaijan.travel

azerbaijan
TAKE ANOTHER LOOK



Clockwise from above:
the cavernous
Azerkhalcha; Nazrin
Agharzayeva,
cofounder of STOCK;
Handicraft concept
store; the Heydar
Aliyev Centre.
Opposite page: Baku's
iconic Flame Towers

A photograph of the Flame Towers in Baku, Azerbaijan, with a traditional building in the foreground. The towers are tall, curved, and covered in blue-tinted glass, reflecting the sky. The foreground shows a traditional building with a domed roof and arched windows. The sky is blue with scattered white clouds.

Shopping in BAKU

HOMEGROWN ARTISANS AND DESIGNERS ARE
PUTTING AZERBAIJAN'S CREATIVE SIDE IN THE SPOTLIGHT

WORDS AND PHOTOGRAPHS BY CHRIS SCHALKX



Top row, from left: Chelebi; The Anjir; Azerkhalcha. Middle row, from left: Soreka; the café at Gazelli House; cushions at Chelebi. Bottom row, from left: Abad; Resm; Gazelli House's library lounge

TAKING STOCK

Before designer Nazrin Agharzayeva cofounded Azerbaijan's first local fashion platform **STOCK** with business partners Anar Iskandarli and Saida Nazirova in 2019, Baku's fashion crowd only had eyes for foreign brands. "The attitude towards local designers wasn't great," Agharzayeva says. "Everyone thought clothes imported from abroad were better." With **STOCK**, the trio aim to shift that mindset by bringing together more than 75 labels from Baku-based and Azerbaijani diaspora designers in its industrial-chic showroom along the city's boulevard. Highlights from the ever-changing collection include sharp-cut blazers lined with reclaimed silk kimonos by Isabeyli, boldly silhouetted tops and dresses by MMDM, and tees with tongue-in-cheek slogans by Off White-esque streetwear label Estudio Barcode. Hit up nearby **Concept Store 27** for silk shawls by textile designer Menzer Hajiyeva, who puts a new spin on the traditional block-printed kelagayi head scarves worn by Azerbaijani women. @stockinstockout; menzerhajiyeva.com

HERITAGE HOMEWARE

Founded in 2013 by Azerbaijani artist and curator Aida Mahmudova, **Chelebi** recasts the country's traditional arts and crafts as contemporary home decor. As part of a redesign, its showroom on the perimeter of Port Baku Mall reopened last September as a shoppable gallery for furniture, ceramics and home fragrances. In collaboration with the Azerbaijan National Museum of Art, Chelebi reinterprets heritage materials and techniques into high-design homeware: ceramic plates and cups take inspiration from the frescoes in the 18th-century summer residence of the Shaki Khans, while the whimsical works of the late Azerbaijani painter Rasim Babayev live on as woven throw blankets. The brand also worked with Moscow- and Grasse-based perfumery Aadre on a collection of diffusers, hand soaps and scented candles with notes of juniper, oud and other ingredients inspired by folkloric legends. chelebi.az

COOL CARPETS

Like many countries along the former Silk Route, Azerbaijan's carpet-weaving prowess can be traced back thousands of years. Weaving communities from Shirvan to Tabriz developed their own signature colours, patterns and techniques, which Unesco deemed worthy of a

Masterpiece of Intangible Heritage recognition in 2010. On a mission to keep this ancient craft alive, state-run **Azerkhalcha** works with women from around the country to produce fresh iterations of classic designs. At its flagship shop in the Old City, it hosts loom-weaving demonstrations and works with artists such as Baku-born designer Faig Ahmed on limited-edition pieces. The brand can arrange the certificates needed to take authentic rugs out of the country, and can compress silk carpets into suitcase-friendly packages. azerxalca.az

PRECIOUS PIECES

Azerbaijan's paisley-like buta, a Zoroastrian symbol for fire, is a recurring motif in the collection of rings, bracelets and necklaces made in the atelier of Baku-based brand **Resm**. At its store and showroom in the Nasimi district, each piece is displayed with a note on the historical or cultural significance of its design, which can range from the country's kaleidoscopic carpets (translated into earrings studded with amethyst) to cufflinks inspired by the ancient rock carvings found in the nearby Gobustan region. At jeweller **The Anjir**, handmade pieces adopt a more modern aesthetic – bubble-like rings in gold, pearl chokers, bracelets with hamsa pendants. They're sold at the brand's store on Razul Rza street alongside feather-fringed dresses, boxy suits and breezy tops by local designers such as Anara Zakirli and The Noisé. resm.com; @theanjir21

BAZAAR BUYS

Locals flock to the Yasil Bazar (Green Bazaar), northeast of the Old City, for groceries, but you'll discover plenty of suitcase-friendly souvenirs between the pomegranate-pyramids and heaps of parsley. Pick up jars of preserved grape leaves to make dolmas at home, or scoop up a pick-and-mix bag of gem-hued dried fruits in the main hall. Boutiques on the perimeter specialise in local saffron, honey and tinned caviar from Azerbaijan sturgeon. Come hungry: many of the vendors proffer samples of nuts and salty regional cheeses ripened in sacks of inside-out sheepskin.

WHOLESOME HANDICRAFTS

As a community-oriented offshoot of Azerbaijan's Social Innovations state agency, **Abad**'s countrywide chain of "ethno-boutiques" helps small-scale farmers and folk artists with financial planning and marketing. The group's Baku outpost is housed in a

centuries-old caravanserai in the Old City – look beyond the typical tourist tat (and national leader portraits in Swarovski) and you'll find colourful wooden cheese boards and coasters painted with patterns derived from the country's flat-woven zilli carpets alongside quirky socks printed with motifs of baklava and shekerbura pastries. The **Handicraft** concept store on Neftchilar Avenue stocks ceramics, leather goods and photo prints by local artists. Keep an eye out for its collection of felt slippers and embroidered vests crafted from natural-dyed wool by Pirsah, a charitable women's collective from nearby Pirsagi village.

THE HIPSTER HUB

Think of **Gazelli House**, a cluster of boutiques, cafés and a subterranean wellness centre set in an unassuming residential building (with a second outpost in London's South Kensington), as the Azerbaijani answer to Soho House. Membership isn't required, but it has become a hush-hush hangout for Baku's in-crowd, who you'll find sipping post-yoga oat milk lattes in the courtyard or brunching on Mediterranean-tinged salads at the glasshouse-like restaurant. Founded in 1999 by Baku-born genetic scientist Zarifa Hamzayeva, the Gazelli Group started as a cosmetics producer, and you'll find a wide range of pomegranate-scented hand creams, face masks and serums with the brand's patented white oil on the shelves of the skin-care boutique out front. The same shop also stocks healing crystals and bespoke tea blends with black tea from plantations around southern Azerbaijan's Lankaran region. The adjoining **Soroka** specialises in homeware and accessories from around the world – including cutesy ceramic cups sourced in Morocco and Jonathan Adler vases. gazellihouse.az

WHERE TO STAY

In a turreted neoclassical building between the boulevard and the higgledy-piggledy streets of the Old City, the **Four Seasons Hotel Baku** delivers old-world glam without a hint of stuffiness. Its marble-floored lobby fades into a gold-trimmed bar, tea room and Italian diner. The cream-coloured rooms are spacious and timelessly elegant – those on the south or western side come with views of the iconic Flame Towers. For those short on time, the concierge can arrange chauffeur-driven shopping tours with insider access to the ateliers of some of Baku's most envelope-pushing fashion designers. fourseasons.com/baku 📍