Journey from the Caspian

MEDIA GUIDE

BAKU 2017
4th Islamic Solidarity Games
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Mehriban Aliyeva

First Vice President of the Republic of Azerbaijan
Chair, Baku 2017 Islamic Solidarity Games Organising Committee

A series of Water Ceremonies and Festivals bringing together thousands of people at 15 locations across the country will showcase the diverse beauty of our great nation.

Water, that most vital of elements so central to Islamic culture, has left an indelible mark on the glorious landscapes of Azerbaijan – from the Caucasus Mountains to the Caspian Sea.

In the coming weeks, the Journey from the Caspian events programme will see the essence of the Baku 2017 Islamic Solidarity Games flow out from the capital city to every corner of our country.

The Journey begins in Baku on 5 April, when the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev, will officially launch the Baku 2017 Islamic Solidarity Games at the Stone Chronicle Museum.

In the 37 days that follow, a series of Water Ceremonies and Festivals, bringing together thousands of people at 15 locations across the country, will showcase the diverse beauty of our great nation.

The Journey ends with the Opening Ceremony at the Baku Olympic Stadium on 12 May, when the crystal waters of Azerbaijan will welcome more than 50 nations of the Islamic world to the Games.

As representatives of the media, you will make an invaluable contribution to the success of Baku 2017, helping to share the fourth Islamic Solidarity Games’ messages of peace and unity with the world.

I am delighted to invite you on this journey throughout Azerbaijan, to experience for yourselves our nation’s great natural treasures and the inspiration the Games will bring to everyone.
The essence of the sublime values of Islam will flow and their message of peace, amity and tolerance.

The Baku 2017 Islamic Solidarity Games will gather the athletes of the Islamic Ummah for fair play competition and the promotion of fraternity, solidarity and friendship.

The high-quality preparations and great attention being given by AISGOC to the Games reflect the paramount importance of this major sporting event. I would like to thank the Republic of Azerbaijan for such very fine preparations and efforts.

On this blessed occasion, I would like to thank the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev for his unwavering support and commitment to render the Games a great success.

My special thanks are due to First Vice President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Mehriban Aliyeva for her inspiring leadership as Chair of the Baku 2017 Organising Committee, and to the people of Azerbaijan, whose warmth and hospitality will define these Games.

The Journey from the Caspian is the final straight before the fourth edition of the Islamic Solidarity Games, and the coming weeks will see a series of captivating events across Azerbaijan. With them the essence of the sublime values of Islam will flow and their message of peace, amity and tolerance.
Our investment in skills, infrastructure and sporting facilities continues to deliver important economic and social benefits.

For the second time in the space of just two years, Azerbaijan will welcome athletes to a major international celebration of sport and friendship, this time from more than 50 nations of the Islamic world.

Hosting the Baku 2017 Islamic Solidarity Games builds on the legacy of Baku 2015, the inaugural edition of the European Games. This groundbreaking event inspired a new generation of Azerbaijani athletes, and our investment in skills, infrastructure and sporting facilities continues to deliver important economic and social benefits.

Since 2015, Baku has hosted the 2016 Formula 1 European Grand Prix and the World Chess Olympiad, and we look forward to welcoming the Azerbaijan Grand Prix this summer and UEFA Euro Championship matches in 2020.

Our country’s emergence as a leading centre for international sport and cultural exchange is a source of immense pride to our people.

It is with great pleasure that I invite you to join us on the Baku 2017 Journey from the Caspian. It will lead us to the Opening Ceremony on 12 May at the state-of-the-art Olympic Stadium, and 10 days of world-class sporting action.
Azerbaijan, the largest country in the Caucasus region, is located at the crossroads of Western Asia and Eastern Europe. Its eastern coastline is bounded by the Caspian Sea – the world’s largest enclosed inland body of water.

A land of plentiful natural resources, age-old culture and deeply engrained hospitality, Azerbaijan has always played a vital role in the region. It’s a nexus of ancient historical empires. But also a new nation – independent since 1991 – and a youthful country, with 40% of the population aged under 25.

Azerbaijan enjoys a booming economy that achieved the second highest GDP growth in the world between 2000 and 2010. The boom is largely driven by natural resources, but there are also growing agriculture, tourism and events industries.

Nine out of 11 climate types are present in Azerbaijan – from semi-deserts to mountain tundras. At the extremes, temperatures can reach 46°C and drop as low as -33°C.

Food is deeply rooted in the history, traditions and values of the nation. Aside from wonderful soups and kebabs, one of the most widespread dishes is the rice-based plov. Pomegranates – a symbol of unity – are also a feature of the cuisine.

The cosmopolitan capital, Baku, sits on the shores of the Caspian Sea surrounded by semi-desert. Its Walled City, on UNESCO’s World Heritage List, is ringed by burgeoning new skyscrapers yet, barely a few hours’ drive away, timeless rural villages are backed by the soaring Caucasus mountains.

**RECENT AND FORTHCOMING MAJOR EVENTS IN AZERBAIJAN**

In 2015, the inaugural European Games and the Chess World Cup were held in Baku.

The following year, Azerbaijan hosted the World Chess Olympiad, Arena Polo World Cup, UEFA European Under-17 Championship and AGF Trophy World Cup 2016 Rhythmic Gymnastics Finals.

Looking ahead, in the summer of 2017 the Azerbaijan Grand Prix will see Formula 1 cars racing through the streets of Baku for the second year running; and later in the year, the Women’s European Volleyball Championship will be held in the city. In 2020, Azerbaijan will host the European Karate Championship, plus three group stage football matches and a quarter-final of the UEFA Euro Championship at the Baku Olympic Stadium,
Baku 2017 Islamic Solidarity Games

In July 2013, Baku was announced as the host city for the fourth Islamic Solidarity Games – an exciting multi-sport event uniting the Islamic world.

Athletes from more than 50 Islamic countries will come together from 12 to 22 May 2017 to represent their nations over 10 days of competition across 20 different sports. They include 24 disciplines (Athletics and Para Athletics, Aquatics: Diving, Aquatics: Swimming, Aquatics: Water Polo, Basketball 3x3, Boxing, Football, Gymnastics: Artistic, Gymnastics: Rhythmic, Handball, Judo and Blind Judo, Karate, Shooting, Table Tennis, Taekwondo, Tennis, Volleyball, Weightlifting, Wrestling: Greco-Roman, Wrestling: Freestyle, Wushu and Zurkhaneh) in 16 state-of-the-art competition venues across Baku.

The Organising Committee was set up by decree of İlham Aliyev, President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, under the leadership of Mehriban Aliyeva, First Vice President of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

The Azerbaijan Islamic Solidarity Games Operations Committee (AISGOC) will organise and run the Games in cooperation with the Islamic Solidarity Sports Federation (ISSF).

Azerbaijan has always had a passion for sport – recently hosting the Baku 2015 European Games – and its investment in Baku 2017 will pay dividends in the future as the country hosts further events, such as the 2017 Formula 1 Azerbaijan Grand Prix and UEFA Euro 2020 football matches.

Opening Ceremony: Knowledge
Friday 12 May
Baku will welcome the world with a spectacular Opening Ceremony that tells a universal story of peace and hope, and celebrates the enormous contribution Islamic civilisation has made to everything around us. Springing from the age-old culture of Azerbaijan, it follows a little girl and her kite on an inspirational journey of knowledge and discovery.

Closing Ceremony: Gilavar
Monday 22 May
Rooted in the country’s elemental landscapes, the Closing Ceremony explores Azerbaijan’s beautiful heritage and takes a joyous look at the city of winds, Baku, where the gentle breeze of the Gilavar warms our hearts with positive change. Together we will celebrate the great achievements of our athletes and share the spirit of the Games – unity and solidarity – with the world.
Journey from the Caspian
Key points

*Water gives life to every living thing. A symbol of purity and unity, it forms an essential part of Islam and has a special relevance for Baku, which sits on the shores of the Caspian Sea.*

**Journey from the Caspian**
The 2017 Islamic Solidarity Games will be held in Baku but they are a sporting celebration for the whole country, not just the capital city. The Journey from the Caspian events programme will launch from the Caspian Sea and visit 15 more water locations across Azerbaijan to share the spirit of the Games with everyone, building excitement in the lead up to our Opening Ceremony on 12 May.

Our great journey around Azerbaijan will visit...

- 5 lakes
- 1 reservoir
- 3 rivers
- 1 spring
- 3 waterfalls
- and the Caspian Sea.

**Launch Ceremony**
On 5 April, a child from Baku accompanied by two athletes will collect waters from the shores of the Caspian – a symbol of unity to be shared across the land. At the evening Launch Ceremony, the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev, will present copper vessels filled with this water to 16 children who will return to their home towns and cities to bring the spirit of the Baku 2017 Islamic Solidarity Games to the people of Azerbaijan.

**Water Ceremonies & Festivals**
At 15 water locations of great natural beauty across Azerbaijan, one local child accompanied by two athletes will fill a copper vessel at a special Ceremony. These waters, along with the waters of the Caspian Sea sent by the President, will then be presented at an evening Festival – a free celebration open to everyone, with performances by Azerbaijani music and dance acts, spectacular water effects and brilliant fireworks.

**Opening Ceremony**
The Journey from the Caspian will end 37 days after it began, at the Opening Ceremony on 12 May. There, the crystal waters of Azerbaijan – collected by our children from lakes and rivers, waterfalls and springs across the land – will welcome over 50 nations of the Islamic world to the Games.

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16 locations
37 days
3,000+ kilometres

There will be photo and filming opportunities at Water Ceremonies & Festivals.
At the Launch Ceremony the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev, will present the waters of the Caspian Sea to the children of the country in **small Water Vessels** (40cm high). The children will carry them to their home towns and cities to bring the spirit of the Baku 2017 Islamic Solidarity Games to the people of Azerbaijan.

The crystal waters of Azerbaijan, collected in **medium Water Vessels** (50cm high) by children across the land, will be displayed at the regional Water Festivals before journeying to Baku to welcome more than 50 nations of the Islamic world to the Games.

The **large Water Vessels** (60cm high) will be used to symbolically unite the Islamic world in Baku – join us at the Opening Ceremony on 12 May to see how.
# Schedule

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Day by day
During the day, a child from Baku accompanied by two athletes will collect waters from the shores of the **Caspian Sea** – a symbol of unity to be shared across the land.

At the evening Launch Ceremony, the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev, will present copper vessels filled with this water to 16 children who will return to their home towns and cities to bring the spirit of the Baku 2017 Islamic Solidarity Games to the people of Azerbaijan.

The President will be joined by First Vice President of the Republic of Azerbaijan and Chair of the Baku 2017 Organising Committee, Mehriban Aliyeva, and the President of the Islamic Solidarity Sports Federation, HRH Prince Abdullah Bin Mosaad Bin Abdulaziz.

The Launch Ceremony will be held at the Stone Chronicle Museum. Opened in 2015 by the Heydar Aliyev Foundation, this former power station beside the State Flag Square in Baku houses an impressive collection of stone artefacts, inscriptions and sculptures, both ancient and modern, from all over Azerbaijan.
Nakhchivan

11:00 Water Ceremony
20:00 Water Festival

This cradle of Azerbaijani culture and history is now a disconnected lozenge of Azerbaijan. Historical monuments and villages are dotted around a landscape of deserts and melon fields rimmed by craggy mountains. Heydar Aliyev (1923-2003), national leader of Azerbaijan, was born in Nakhchivan; as were Huseyn Javid (poet and playwright) and Jalil Mammadguluzadeh (satirist and writer).

Batabat Lake lies about an hour’s drive north of Nakhchivan city. The picturesque mountain lake, surrounded by alpine meadows, is notable for its crystal clear fresh water and flat turf islands that ‘float’ – a few metres over the course of a few days.
Astara

11:00 Water Ceremony
20:00 Water Festival

Astara is on the southern tip of Azerbaijan on the Lankaran Lowland. The region’s black sand beaches on the Caspian to the east, forests and springs to the west, and subtropical climate make it an attractive year-round resort.

Yanar Bulag (burning spring) fascinatingly combines two elements: fire and water. The water that gurgles from the spring has an unusually high methane content. So when a flame is put to it, the liquid itself appears to be on fire. Locals believe the water has remedial properties and people come from far and wide to drink it.
Shirvan

11:00 Water Ceremony
20:00 Water Festival

Situated on the left bank of the Kura River, Shirvan is in an area of semi-desert with a dry subtropical climate. It’s known for its manufacturing and energy industries.

The Kura is Azerbaijan’s longest river, 906km of which run through the country. The first wooden bridge across it was built in 1917 at Shirvan.
Sabirabad takes its name from Mirza Alakbar Sabir (1862–1911), a renowned philosopher, teacher and poet. The region is renowned for its agricultural industries.

The Kura-Araz Lowland is the meeting point of the country’s two largest rivers – the Kura and Araz. The area is bordered by the Greater Caucasus to the north, Lesser Caucasus to the west, and the Talysh Mountains to the south.
Agjabedi

11:00 Water Ceremony
20:00 Water Festival

Uzeyir Hajibayli (1885–1948), recognised as the father of Azerbaijani classical music and opera, was born here. The warm pastures of Agjabedi are ideal for cattle, goat and sheep farming.

Aggol (white lake), the second largest lake in Azerbaijan, is an oasis for thousands of birds, including many endangered species. Recognised as an area of global importance, it’s protected as a Ramsar Wetland of International Importance, under the auspices of UNESCO.
Horadiz city, Fizuli

11:00 Water Ceremony closed to external media
20:00 Water Festival

This agricultural region stretches between the south-eastern foothills of the Garabakh mountain range and the Araz River plains. Wheat farming, livestock breeding and vegetable cultivation play a leading role in the region.

The Araz River rises in Turkey and flows for more than 1,000km before joining the Caspian Sea.
Ganja

11:00 Water Ceremony
20:00 Water Festival

Azerbaijan’s second largest city is also one of the oldest in the Caucasus. Having been subjected to a seemingly endless stream of invading armies, its name has changed repeatedly over the years – the historical name, Ganja, was restored in 1991 with Azerbaijan’s independence. Ganja is the birthplace and resting place of the great romantic poet, Nizami (1141–1209). Ganja was European Youth Capital 2016.

Goygol (blue lake) is one of the most beautiful lakes in Azerbaijan. Nestled in the foothills of Murovdag, it sits within the Goygol National Park where the sub-alpine ecosystem of the region is protected. The lake was formed in 1139 when an earthquake caused part of the Kapaz Mountain to fall into the Agsu River.
Shamkir

11:00 Water Ceremony
20:00 Water Festival

Located in the foothills of the Lesser Caucasus, the city dates back to the 5th century. For many years Shamkir prospered as a centre of international trade, but by 1235 it had been occupied and destroyed by Mongols. Today Shamkir is a flourishing modern city, famous for its Sharg Ulduzu wines. Poet, Ahmad Javad, who wrote the lyrics for Azerbaijan’s national anthem, was born in the Shamkir district.

The Shamkirchay River is a tributary of the Kura. A new reservoir on the river was completed in 2014 to provide drinking water and irrigation to the region.
Mingachevir

11:00 Water Ceremony
20:00 Water Festival

The fourth-largest city in Azerbaijan is known as ‘the city of lights’ because of its hydroelectric power station on the Kura River, which splits the city in half. The area has been settled for thousands of years, but the current city was founded in 1948. Mingachevir was the venue for the Canoe Sprint at the Baku 2015 European Games.

The Kura is the largest river in the Caucasus. It rises on the slopes of Mount Kisirindagi in north-east Turkey, crosses Georgia and meanders through Azerbaijan, finally entering the Caspian Sea 1,515km later. In 1953, a new dam created a picturesque lake – the largest reservoir in Azerbaijan – to help irrigate the surrounding land.
Gakh

11:00 Water Ceremony
20:00 Water Festival

The region, bordered by Georgia and Russia, is best-known for producing nuts (hazelnuts, chestnuts, walnuts). It’s also a rich source of materials used in the construction industry. Tourist attractions in the area include the Ilisu hot springs and waterfalls.

Waterfalls can be seen in mountainous areas across Azerbaijan. They were formed when rivers pushed through eroded hillsides. At around 70m, Ramrama Waterfall is one of the highest in the country.
Gabala

11:00 Water Ceremony
20:00 Water Festival

Archaeological evidence indicates that Gabala was the capital of Caucasian Albania as early as the 4th century BC. It’s located on the centuries-old Silk Road, a series of trade and cultural routes connecting the East and West. Today, local industries range from soft drink and confectionery factories to livestock and dairy farms.

With the Greater Caucasus Mountains and mist-shrouded forests reflecting in its green-blue waters, Nohur Lake is beautiful year-round. Created in 1949 to supply water to the surrounding villages, today it’s a popular recreation spot.
Gusar

11:00 Water Ceremony
20:00 Water Festival

In the foothills of the Greater Caucasus, Gusar is 180km north of Baku near the border with Russia. It’s the nearest city to Shahdag, Azerbaijan’s leading ski resort.

On the road from Gusar to the small, attractive mountain village of Laza, several high waterfalls tumble down into the green, boulder-strewn pastures of the valley.
Guba is known for fine carpets. While the fertile surrounding region is known as Azerbaijan’s ‘apple country’. Fifty kilometres out of the city, Khinalig village is one of the highest residential settlements in Europe (2,350m above sea level).

There are numerous waterfalls in Azerbaijan – each one unique in height, flow and surrounding landscape. South of Guba lies the Afurja Waterfall, one of the best-known in the country and considered a natural monument.
Garadagh

11:00 Water Ceremony (Absheron)
20:00 Water Festival (Garadagh)

Garadagh sits on the Caspian coast, approximately 21km south-west of Baku on the Absheron (place of salty water) Peninsula.

Masazir Lake, in Absheron, is thought to be one of only eight ‘pink lakes’ in the world. The unusual colour is created by microscopic organisms living in the water and salt crust.
Sumgayit

11:00 Water Ceremony
20:00 Water Festival

Azerbaijan’s third largest city lies about 34km north of Baku. In 1978, a statue of the city symbol – a dove of peace – was unveiled in Nasimi Park. Covering 80 hectares, the park is named after the great 14th-century Azerbaijani poet, Imadaddin Nasimi. Last year, the area was further enriched with the opening of the Sumgayit Seaside Boulevard which stretches 4km along the Caspian coast.

The President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev, launched the Journey from the Caspian in Baku on 5 April. Now, for the final location on the route, we’re back on the shores of the Caspian Sea, the largest inland body of water in the world.
Opening Ceremony
Baku Olympic Stadium

The Journey from the Caspian will end 37 days after it began, at the Opening Ceremony on 12 May at the Baku Olympic Stadium.

The crystal waters of Azerbaijan – collected by our children from lakes and rivers, waterfalls and springs across the land – will welcome more than 50 nations of the Islamic world to the Games.

The magnificent stadium, built on the shores of Lake Boyukshor, was completed in 2015. It can seat 68,700 spectators and is the perfect setting for major football and athletics championships, as well as large-scale concerts and events. It was the setting for Ceremonies and Athletics events at the Baku 2015 European Games, and will host three qualifying matches and a quarter-final at the UEFA Euro 2020 Championship.
PRODUCERS
Baku 2017 Opening and Closing Ceremonies, and Journey from the Caspian events created and produced by Betty Productions Ltd.
betty-productions.com

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
Heydar Aliyev Foundation
Ministry of Culture & Tourism
Ministry of Emergency Situations
Ministry of Internal Affairs
Ministry of Youth & Sport
Seaside Boulevard Office
Special State Protection Service
Stone Chronicle Museum