

AZERBAIJAN

Azerbaijan is bounded by the Caspian Sea and Caucasus Mountains, and shares borders with Russia, Georgia, Armenia, and Iran. Its capital, Baku, is famed for its medieval walled Inner City. Within the Inner City lies a royal retreat dating to the 15th century and the centuries-old stone Maiden Tower, which dominates the city skyline. This oil-rich country has redefined itself over the past two decades from a struggling, newly independent former Soviet state to a major regional energy player. Deals with international energy producers have allowed the country to use its energy revenues to create a government-run fund involved in international projects, and it is also using its resources to rebuild its army, which is seen as a government priority. Azerbaijani (Azeri) is the state official language and is spoken by more than 90% of the population. The currency is the manat and the main exports are oil and oil products.



Population

10,046,516



33,436 MI²

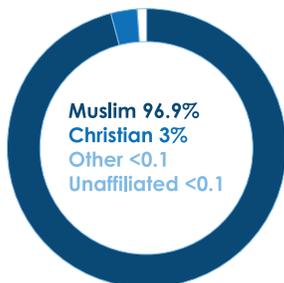
Slightly smaller than Maine



Ethnicities

- Azerbaijani 91.6%
- Lezghin 2%
- Russian 1.3%
- Armenian 1.3%
- Talysh 1.3%
- Other 2.4%

Religions



FAMILY LIFE

A typical family consists of two parents and two children. It is common for grandparents to live in the same household and, in some regions, uncles, aunts and their families share the same yard or home. Often, both parents work and are financially responsible for the family. It is also common for the mother to stay at home and take care of household chores. Meals are mostly eaten together as a family.

Most teenagers share a bedroom, but if they do have their own room, it is considered unacceptable to isolate themselves and not socialize with their families for extended periods of time.

Children are often asked to help their parents around the house, but specific chores are not assigned to them in most families. It is not common for boys to wash dishes or do laundry because these tasks are typically done by women. In an effort to teach life skills, many teenagers are responsible for managing their time between school, extracurricular activities, jobs, and social events and are expected to figure out transportation to and from these activities by themselves.

Because parents worry about their children being taken advantage of, they strongly discourage them from sharing personal information with strangers online, and monitor which sites they access and the time spent on the computer. Most parents tend to be involved in all aspects of their children's lives. Parents usually make the final decision about which clubs and courses their children will join. Many teenagers go to music and art schools, join sports clubs and take language courses.

Some families have cats or dogs which are kept inside or outside the house depending on the family. They are not usually considered members of the family.

FRIENDSHIP

Teenagers make friends through school, extracurricular activities, or family and neighborhood connections. The term "friend" is reserved for very close relationships; peers are considered "classmates" or "acquaintances." Classmates are often very close to each other since they are with the same group throughout all grades.

Teenagers socialize in groups and one-on-one since both are considered appropriate behavior. It is uncommon for boys and girls to socialize together in some regions of Azerbaijan.

SCHOOL LIFE

Students are required to take 15-17 subjects a semester and attend school 5-6 days a week, depending on the school. Students are evaluated daily on tasks including homework, class participation, written tests, and oral reports. If the school is well-equipped, students move between different rooms for classes such as chemistry, physics or biology. In most regional schools, students simply stay in one classroom and the teachers move. Students do not have an opportunity to study subjects at varying levels of difficulty and they must study subjects according to their grade. Students are not allowed to choose any of their courses. Schools do not tolerate fighting, bullying, or sexual harassment, and these are forbidden on school property. If they occur, the police will likely be involved and charges against the student will be filed. The penalties for engaging in these activities are generally not as severe as in the U.S., but can include being expelled or arrested. Cheating is not allowed or tolerated. Students caught cheating will be reprimanded and their parents will be called.

Students are expected to show respect to their teachers by listening and being engaged in class. Students will sometimes have a friendly, informal relationship with their teachers and the teacher may prefer students to call them by a nickname or first name. However, in most cases, students have a more formal relationship with their teachers. Boys and girls study in the same classes and are not seated apart, and all subjects are open to both genders.

While some schools provide an opportunity for students to be involved in extracurricular activities such as sports or art, most do not. It is common for students to participate in different (usually fee-based) activities outside of school which include music, art, dance, and sports.

FOOD

Vegetarianism and vegan diets are not common, but some do observe special diets due to food allergies or other medical conditions. Most people do not eat pork due to religious beliefs.

RELIGION

Most families do not practice any religion, although most people consider themselves Muslim. When a family does practice Islam, they tend to worship together five times a day and fathers sometimes take their families to mosques for Friday prayers. Mosques only serve as places of worship and are not considered as a community center.

PERSONAL CARE

Teenagers normally shower three times a week, or more often if they are involved in physical activities. It is considered normal for teens to wear the same clothes multiple times in a row and wash them if they look untidy or are unclean. Mothers or daughters typically do the laundry, and boys are not expected to help.



The Future Leaders Exchange (FLEX) program is sponsored by the U.S. Department of State. FLEX provides competitively selected secondary school students from 21 countries in Europe and Eurasia with the opportunity to spend the academic year in the U.S. living with a volunteer host family and attending a host high school. Begun in 1993, FLEX now has over 27,000 alumni.