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Section I: Introduction

Congratulations on your acceptance to the Turkish Overseas Flagship Program! As a participant on the Turkish Overseas Flagship (TOF) Program, you will live and study this summer or during the academic year in Baku, Azerbaijan. You will have the opportunity to improve your language skills, learn about local culture, make new friends, and become a more independent person with a broader perspective on the world.

American Councils TOF program staff members and have compiled this handbook to provide you with information that will make your study-abroad experience a success. We look forward to seeing you soon!

As you prepare for the academic year program, if you have a question that is not covered in the handbook, is of a personal nature, requires immediate attention, or cannot be resolved through online discussion, please contact your TOF program administrator:

Gennady Babankov
Assistant Program Manager
Phone: 202-833-7522
Email: gbabankov@americancouncils.org
Fast Facts – TOF Program
The TOF program in Azerbaijan is administered by American Councils for International Education and hosted by Azerbaijan University of Languages (AUL).

American Councils for International Education
Since its founding in 1974, American Councils has developed into one of the premier American education and international training organizations, offering intensive overseas language study and research programs for U.S. undergraduates, graduate students, teachers, and scholars. American Councils today has representation in more than 30 countries across the former Soviet Union, Asia, the Middle East, and Southeastern Europe. American Councils operates an office in Baku, Azerbaijan, which will coordinate logistics of your stay in the country.

Azerbaijan University of Languages
Azerbaijan University of Languages (AUL) provides instruction and program organization for the TOF Program in Baku. AUL is the premier pedagogical university in Azerbaijan and prepares its students for continued study at the graduate level and professional teaching careers. The university has three campuses, eight schools of study, and more than 5,000 undergraduate students, as well as over 300 graduate students. AUL is also home to the U.S. Embassy’s American Center, which is an Internet center and library that offers access to reference tools and research services.

Program Staff
Many people at various levels and in various organizations are working together to ensure that you have a positive experience in the TOF Program. These include:

TOF Staff at American Councils in Washington, DC
American Councils’ staff members in Washington, DC are your primary contact for questions before and after the TOF Program. During the program, American Councils will work closely with local staff and in cases of emergencies. If you have questions about policies or program-wide concerns, you can contact program staff in Washington. Your primary contacts are Gennady Babankov, gbabankov@americancouncils.org and Derek Groom, dgroom@americancouncils.org

Resident Director (RD)
Your Resident Director, Aidin Debaleh, is the American Councils representative at your host institution. He will be your primary contact during the TOF Program. If you have any problems related to health, housing, legal issues, or safety, you should talk with him. The RD will have a cell phone at all times so that he can be contacted in case of emergency and will coordinate with AUL staff and American Councils staff in Washington to resolve any issues.

AUL Staff
Your principal AUL representative is Dr. Jala Garibova, Vice Rector for International Relations. She and other staff members at Azerbaijan University of Languages are responsible for planning and overseeing the TOF academic program, cultural excursions and activities, peer tutors, and other academic aspects of your stay in Baku. They are also excellent resources regarding local culture, places of interest, and safety.

For reference, addresses and key phone numbers are included in the appendices of this book. You will also be given a full list of contact information when you begin the program.
Fast Facts: Azerbaijan

Azerbaijan / Azərbaycan Respublikası

- Size: Slightly smaller than Maine
- Population: 9,590,159 (July 2013 est.)
- Ethnic groups: Azeri 90.6%, Dagestani 2.2%, Russian 1.8%, Armenian 1.5%, other 3.9% (1999 census)
  - The people of Azerbaijan are called Azerbaijanis (referring to the entire country) or Azeris (generally used to refer to the entire country, but can be used to distinguish between Azeris, Turks, and other ethnic or linguistic groups)
- Languages: Azerbaijani 90.3%, Lezgi 2.2%, Russian 1.8%, Armenian 1.5%, other 3.3%, unspecified 1% (1999 census)
- Regions: 59 rayons, 11 cities, 1 autonomous republic
- President: Ilham Aliyev (since 31 October 2003)
- Prime Minister: Artur Rasizade (since 4 November 2003)

Fast Facts: Baku

Baku

- Capital and largest city
- Population: 4 million (2013 est.)
- Economic, scientific, and cultural center of Azerbaijan
- Located on the southern shore of the Absheron Peninsula, which juts into the Caspian Sea
- Locally known as the “city of wind” for the strong winds that come off the Caspian several times a month
- Some popular sites in Baku:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Maiden’s Tower, Qız Qalası</th>
<th>Nizami Museum of Literature, Nizami Gəncavi adına Azərbaycan adəbiyyatı muzeyi</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This tower was built in the 12th century as part of the walled city of Baku. It is one of the most notable landmarks and emblems in Baku and today houses a museum on the historic evolution of the city.</td>
<td>Originally constructed in 1850 as a caravanserai, this building was renovated and established as a museum in 1939. The museum features exhibits on Azerbaijani literature and culture.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
For information on a walking tour of the Old Inner City of Baku, see:  

**Fast Facts: Azerbaijani History & Resources**

- Azerbaijan was first conquered by the Achaemenids around 550 B.C.E. and later became part of Alexander the Great's Empire.
- Turkic Oghuz tribes and Seljuq Turks took control later and strongly influenced Azerbaijan’s language and culture.
- A period of Timur rule ensued, followed by rule by various Azerbaijani states, which were consolidated in 1501 into the State of Safavids.
- After the Russo-Persian Wars in the 1800s, Azerbaijan was divided between the Russian and Iranian Empires.
- When the Russian Empire collapsed, Azerbaijan joined Georgia and Armenia in forming the short-lived Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic.
- Azerbaijan had a brief period of independence as the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic before becoming part of the Soviet Union in 1920.
- With the collapse of the Soviet Union, Azerbaijan declared independence in 1991.
- In 2012, Azerbaijan hosted the widely popular singing competition, Eurovision, in the capital city, Baku.

Find out more

Below are resources for additional information. These are not reviewed or endorsed by the TOF Program or American Councils. This list has come from former participants and Resident Directors.

**Books**

- **Azerbaijan Diary: A Rogue Reporter’s Adventures in an Oil-Rich, War-Torn, Post-Soviet Republic** by Thomas Goltz
- **Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan through Peace and War** by Thomas de Waal
- **Ali & Nino** by Kurban Said
- **The Oil and the Glory** by Steve LeVine
- For more books, consult [http://www.preslib.az/](http://www.preslib.az/)
General Information

- CIA World Factbook
- Azerbaijan.az
- Azerbaijani President’s website
- Azerbaijan Embassy in USA
- Lonely Planet Travel Guide
- Flying Carpets and Broken Pipelines – blog by a young Azerbaijani woman
- Hajibeyov: Celebrating the Legacy of Azerbaijan’s Greatest Composer

News & Magazines

- Eurasia.net
- Azerbaijan International
- Today.az
- RFE/RL – in Azerbaijani
- Anspress.com – in Azerbaijani

Language Resources

- J. Qəribova, S.Əliyeva - Azərbaycan dili ( J. Garibova, S. Aliyeva - The Azerbaijani Language ( For foreigners – elementary level ) Baku, 2012
- S.Əliyeva, K.Hacıyeva, İ. Vahabova - Azərbaycan dili ( Əcnəbilər üçün- yükşək səviyyə) S. Aliyeva, K. Hajiyeva, İ. Vahabova - The Azerbaijani Language ( For foreigners – advanced level ) Baku, 2013
- Azeri Language and Literature
- Learn Azeri
- Deep Approach to Turkish Teaching and Learning (Azerbaijani module)

Section II: Pre-Departure Information

Packing

Please pack light. One comment we have heard over and over from past participants is that they wish they had packed lighter. Keep in mind:

- American Councils does not cover the cost for a second bag or overweight bag fees on the flights to and from the country.
- Azerbaijan offers wonderful souvenirs and gifts, from rugs and pottery to scarves and artwork. If you plan to purchase souvenirs, you will need room for them as well.

Women’s Clothing

Many participants ask what type of clothing Azerbaijani women typically wear. In general, dress is similar to the U.S. but somewhat more conservative. Short skirts, dresses, and shorts (above the knee), tank tops, and low-cut tops may attract unwanted attention or make your friends or host family uncomfortable. Pack modest items, and use scarves or light cardigans to cover up when appropriate.
Medical and Personal Hygiene
Most Western products are available in Baku. Since certain name-brand products cost more or may not be widely available, you may wish to bring a full supply of any products you have a strong brand preference for. Otherwise, you will likely be able to purchase what you need in Baku.

Clothing guidelines:
- Baku has a semi-arid climate with hot and dry summers and cool and wet winters. You should expect strong winds year round. You should have a business casual outfit for dressier occasions.
- Azerbaijanis generally own less clothing than Americans – no need to pack your whole closet.
- Shorts are not as common in Azerbaijan as in the U.S. They are not inappropriate for men (for women, see text to the right), but they are unusual. Consider packing casual pants as well as shorts.
- You may be walking more than you usually do and the streets can be rough due to construction. Bring comfortable shoes!
- You will likely visit at least one mosque. Both men and women should cover their shoulders – no sleeveless tops! Wear long pants, and women should carry a scarf to cover their hair. The strictness of the rules varies depending on how “touristy” the mosque is, but no matter where you are, don’t forget to take off your shoes before you enter!
- Don’t bring clothes that are hard to care for. Your host family will have a washing machine, but dryers and dry cleaners are uncommon. Clothes are often line dried. Also, your host may want to do your laundry for you - including ironing everything, unless you specify that a specific item shouldn’t be ironed.
- Some Azerbaijani families wear comfortable clothes, such as sweatpants, loose t-shirts, and slippers, while at home, and families may not understand why one would continue to wear jeans or school clothes while in the home. Many households will have extra slippers for your use, and some may provide you with sweatpants and comfy shirts.
- Most clothing you wish to purchase will be available in Baku, although you may not be able to find your favorite brands.
- It may be difficult to find quality shoes for a reasonable price. If you have large feet, you may also have trouble finding your size.

Money
The cost of products and meals in Baku can be close to that of Western countries, but you can also find very inexpensive meal options around town. Your current lifestyle should be a good indication of how much money you will spend while abroad.

Tips on bringing money:
- Bring the majority of your money in cash or cash-accessible form (i.e. ATM card).
- Bring clean, un-torn bills with no writing on them, as some exchange services will not exchange old, weathered bills.
- It is strongly recommended to bring a credit card if you have one (VISA and MasterCard are best) for emergency purposes.
- Do not bring travelers’ checks.
Electrical Appliances

Electrical appliances must be able to operate on 220-volt current. To use American items, you will need an adapter or converter. If your item can operate on 220-volt current (most new computers and cameras can), you will only need an adapter, which changes the type of prongs used from your American-style two-prong to the Azerbaijani version. If your item only uses 110-volt current (some hairdryers, electric shavers, etc.), you will need an adapter and an electrical converter.

Adapters can be purchased very cheaply (about 50 cents) in Azerbaijan or for several dollars in the U.S. A converter is more expensive — usually $25-50 — and may be hard to find in Azerbaijan.

If you bring your laptop, keep the following in mind:

- Insure your computer under your homeowner’s insurance policy (if applicable)
- Consider using a surge protector
- Illegally copied software is widely available in Azerbaijan but should be avoided. It can contain viruses and may be confiscated upon return to the U.S.

To Do Before Leaving the U.S.

- Call your credit card company and bank.
  - Find out about fees for overseas purchases, cash advances, ATM withdrawals.
  - Inform your bank of the dates of your trip so your cards are not frozen due to theft prevention measures.
  - Remember to bring the telephone number of your home bank and credit card company with you to Azerbaijan. Even with notice, some banks and credit card companies may still freeze your account or turn off your credit card after use in a foreign country. In this case, you’ll need to call the bank or company from Azerbaijan to get the card reactivated.

- Visit your dentist. The TOF Program does not provide dental coverage.

- Visit your doctor. Make sure you have a sufficient supply of your prescription medications and discuss any chronic physical, mental or emotional issues that may need special attention while traveling. Make sure your immunizations are up to date. Talk with your doctor about recommended vaccinations and preventative antibiotics (e.g. if you are prone to urinary tract infections). Please be sure to visit Center for Disease Control Azerbaijan page at http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/traveler/none/Azerbaijan for suggestions on vaccines and other necessary preparations.

- Ask your health insurance provider if your policy covers international travel. You will receive accident and sickness insurance from the TOF Program, but your own insurance can be a good supplement.
Arrange for someone in the U.S. to have power of attorney if you have outstanding financial matters (i.e. endorsing student loan checks while you are abroad).

Research Skype, long-distance phone plans, or phone cards that would allow your friends and family to call you abroad.

Research your host country and city online and in history books and guidebooks.

Ask friends or professors if they have acquaintances you could meet in Azerbaijan.

Call your airline to arrange a special meal if you are vegetarian or have special dietary needs.

**Suggested Packing List**

Everyone’s packing needs will vary – this list is a guideline only.

**Clothing**

- 1 business casual outfit
- Nice everyday clothing. Azerbaijani dress more formally than Americans (light-weight trousers/pants, skirts (knee-length or longer), long-sleeved and short-sleeved shirts or good-quality tees). We recommend 3-5 outfit combinations and durable, quality clothing that does not wrinkle easily
- Casual clothes for at home or working out (women: capri-length or longer pants are best)
- Warm winter coat
- Lighter coat
- Long Underwear/thermal silks
- Hat
- Gloves
- Scarf
- Thick Sweater
- 1 pair of pajamas
- **Miscellaneous**
  - Socks and underwear
  - A rain jacket
  - Bathing suit
  - A sturdy shoulder bag, purse, or small duffle bag
  - Women: light-weight scarf that can be used to cover the shoulders or head
- Shoes – at least one dressy pair, one pair that is comfortable for long walks, snow boots/waterproof hiking shoes

**Medical**

- A complete supply of all necessary prescription medications (labeled with the name of the medicine, your name, and your doctor’s name)
- Any medications recommended by your physician (e.g. Aspirin, Tylenol, Claritin, etc.)
- Contraceptives (including condoms, as these may not be reliable in Azerbaijan)
- Digestive aids or antacids such as Pepto-Bismol or Imodium
- Multivitamins and calcium tablets if you usually take them or anticipate difficulties adjusting to a Azerbaijani diet
- Laxatives
- NOTE: Many over-the-counter medications are available in Azerbaijan, but they may not be familiar brands or may differ slightly from what you are familiar with. These include pain relievers, cold and allergy relief medication, throat lozenges, topic hydrocortisone, liquid antibacterial hand sanitizer, and eye and nose drops.
Personal
- Prescription eyeglasses or contact lenses (including extra in case they are lost or broken)
- Contact lens solution
- Deodorant/antiperspirant
- Sunscreen
- Insect repellent
- Tampons, sanitary pads (may be difficult to find or expensive)
- Lip balm
- Shaving supplies
- Soap, shampoo, conditioner
- Skin lotion
- Toothbrushes, toothpaste, dental floss, mouthwash
- Band-Aids

Appliances
- Camera, battery, cables, memory cards, charger
- Laptop, cords, USB flash drive
- Hair appliances, electric shavers
- Electrical converter/transformer for your appliances
- Water filter if desired (instead, you can boil water or purchase boiled water)

School Supplies
- Small Turkish-English and Azerbaijani-English dictionaries if you have one already
- Turkish and/or Azerbaijani textbook you are familiar with (if you wish to use it as a grammar reference)
- Notebooks, pens, pencils

Miscellaneous
- Small flashlight (perhaps on a keychain), as many streets and entryways are dark
- Up-to-date guidebook
- Whistle (to use as an alarm) (will be provided by TOF staff at orientation)
- Small gifts for your host family/language partner/teachers

Identification & Banking
- Driver’s license or other official state identification card (since you will not have your passport until you reach Washington, DC – if you do not have alternate government ID, contact us)
- Photocopy of your passport and credit cards
- ATM card and credit card (VISA and MasterCard work best)
- Cash
- Money belt or pouch, if desired

Do Not Bring
- Expensive or irreplaceable jewelry or other items
- Household linens or towels (these are supplied by your host family)
Section III: Orientation and First Days

Pre-Departure Orientation
You will attend a one-day, mandatory Pre-Departure Orientation (PDO) in Washington, DC.

PDO day – The PDO program covers a wide range of information, including a discussion of TOF program rules and regulations, site-specific presentations, presentations from the FBI regarding security and safety, and a presentation on language acquisition abroad by key administrators of American Councils.

Departure evening – departure for Baku. You will be required to be ready at the hotel with your bags at an assigned time, and the group will travel to Dulles together by bus. Do not arrange alternate transportation.

In-Country Orientation
When you arrive in Baku, you will meet the on-site program staff and learn more about life in Azerbaijan. Your in-country orientation will be conducted by AUL and the American Councils office in Baku.

In-country orientation will cover subjects such as:

- Rules and policies
- Timeline of the program with detailed explanation of the schedule
- Cultural norms and expectations
- Overview of the academic curriculum
- Language-learning goals
- Safety and security (a separate security briefing will be conducted by the U.S. Embassy representative)
- What to do in case of emergency or if you get sick
- Opportunities to explore and get to know the city.

Will I have free time?
We realize that many participants have friends in the DC area, places they want to see, or last-minute preparations to take care of. We recommend that you not count on having any free time to run errands or wrap up loose ends during 9-5 business hours, as this may not be possible on departure day, and absence from any part of PDO activities is unacceptable and is grounds for disciplinary action. Plan on running any last minutes activities prior to the welcome dinner.

Section IV: Program Logistics

Language Instruction
During fall semester, your weekly academic schedule will include 12 hours of Turkish instruction, 5 hours of Azeri instruction, 3 hours of content courses taught in Turkish, and 5 hours with an AUL language partner. During spring semester, you will also participate in an internship with a local organization in Baku. Your classes in Baku will be small providing direct interaction with your instructors, who have experience teaching foreign students.

Homework & Projects
You will be expected to study outside of class and complete class assignments, which may include several hours of homework each day. You will be asked to write reports, give presentations, and/or do out-of-class research.
Grading
You will be given grades by your instructors. Your grades will be assigned based on a variety of factors that will be determined by individual instructors. Primary forms of evaluating your progress will include homework assignments, in-class exercises, exams, and projects. You will take regular quizzes and be assigned performance tasks. At the end of the course, you will take a final exam, which will evaluate your language skills in spoken interaction, spoken production, reading, listening, and writing.

Academic Expectations
American Councils and AUL invest substantial resources in developing strong academic programs in Baku. Although TOF staff work to make your transition into Azerbaijani life as smooth as possible, you should expect some differences in academic culture between Azerbaijan and the U.S. Part of the language-learning experience is growing to understand how a different culture views the academic process. Your Turkish language instructors will be trained and experienced teachers who are familiar with using AUL materials and curriculum and interacting with foreigners, but they may not use the same systems or methods you are familiar with in the U.S., and they may not have the same expectations for the classroom as your American teachers do.

The following are academic expectations that may differ from American ones:

- More formal classroom settings
  - Ask the instructor if food or drink is permitted in the classroom.
  - Wear clean, neat clothing and avoid baseball caps.
  - Students rarely interrupt instructors and may not ask questions as often as American students. If you have questions related to the material, you should feel comfortable to ask, but it may not be appropriate to ask questions unrelated to the topic or grammar point being presented. Save these questions for meetings with the teacher outside of class.
  - Students refer to instructors in formal language siz, while using their name followed by Bey (Mr.) or Hanım (Ms.). In some classes, students refer to their instructors as Hocam, also used as (e.g. Ahmet Hocam). It literally means “my teacher” and is more familiar than Bey or Hanım.
  - Be prepared to participate in classroom discussions. Turkish instructors will appreciate your contributions to the topic at hand.

- Teacher-student relationships
  - Instruction in Azerbaijan is usually teacher-centered (i.e., lecture format), rather than student-centered.
  - Language instructors often use many repeated oral drills and may demand that students thoroughly understand and be able to use a certain type of grammar before they teach new concepts.
  - Students’ success is often seen as the instructor’s responsibility. Thus, instructors take an active role in students’ intellectual growth, and poor student performance reflects negatively on the instructor.
  - It is not uncommon for teachers to correct students’ manners or solicit opinions about non-course-related subjects. Instructors may take a great interest in students’ health (i.e. food and clothing needs).
**Study Tips**
These tips will help you maximize your language gain during the TOF Program:

- Recognize that learning happens inside and outside of the classroom. Take the initiative to plot your own language learning.
- Establish a study routine and stick to it.
- Set periodic, short-term goals that are concrete, easily definable, and feasible.
- Keep a record of your language-learning accomplishments to help yourself sustain enthusiasm and motivation.
- Ask other language-learners what they do and consider adopting some of their habits.
- Maintain an open mind about different ways of teaching and learning.
- Take part in Turkish-language activities that you enjoy such as watching a favorite TV show, reading a magazine, spending time with friends, or engaging in sports.
- Find ways to make learning fun. Play games, learn jokes, and look up the lyrics for your favorite songs.
- Don’t get discouraged if you feel you aren’t making progress. This is a normal and necessary part of the learning process.
- Be willing to make mistakes, and encourage others to correct you.
- Listen to the way native speakers talk and try to imitate them. If you don’t understand something, make a note and ask your peer tutor, host family, or teacher.

**Language Partners**
You will be assigned a language partner to work one-on-one with you during the TOF Program. Your language partner will be a college student who will meet with you 5 hours each week to help you practice Turkish in an informal setting.

You and your language partner will decide what activities you want to do. Suggestions include:

- Ask your language partner for help with new phrases or concepts
- Visit a museum or other historic place
- Sip coffee or tea in a café
- Go to a concert or sporting match
- Ask your language partner for help with everyday errands: going to the post office, buying tissue at a pharmacy, adding minutes to your cell phone
- Ask your language partner to introduce you to his/her friends.

**Excursions**
You will have bi-weekly trips and excursions. Language partners may come along for some excursions. You will receive more information about excursions later.

**Language Pledge**
Improving his/her Turkish-language proficiency should be one of the participant's main goals while abroad, and the program staff expects the participants to use Turkish as much as possible. In addition, it is the policy of the American Councils Turkish language programs that Turkish should be used at all times, unless the participant is experiencing an emergency and needs to use English:

- In classes at AUL;
- When speaking with instructors and administrators of the Turkish Overseas Flagship program;
- While on group excursions and trips; and
- Anytime and anywhere while speaking with fellow participants.
Using English in any of these situations and/or places is discourteous to those around as well as contrary to the objectives of the whole academic program.

If program staff hears the participant speaking English in one of the above situations, the participant will receive a first warning. If there are further offenses the participant will be issued a second warning. If the participant continues to violate the language pledge after the receipt of a second warning, he/she may be dismissed from the Turkish Overseas Flagship Program.

Other Program Policies
You have already signed and submitted documents agreeing to the TOF Program rules, regulations, terms, and policies. Please refer back to your online terms and conditions for further reference.

Student’s Participation in the Program
You are responsible for observing satisfactory academic and professional standards and maintaining a standard of conduct and integrity that is in keeping with the spirit and intent of the TOF Program.

Local Laws
You are required to abide by all U.S. and Azerbaijani laws during the program. Regarding legal status, it is important to know that:

- Foreigners in Azerbaijan enjoy all of the rights of a citizen of Azerbaijan, but are also subject to Azerbaijani law
- American citizenship provides no special legal privileges or exemptions
- Neither the U.S. government nor American Councils can provide you any immunity to Azerbaijani law.

Any violation of local laws will result in your immediate termination from the Flagship Program, and any resulting legal fees will be your responsibility. Scholarship benefits will cease from the day of the violation and you may be responsible for repayment of all travel and scholarship costs.

Academic Credit
AUL will submit the TOF participants’ academic grades to American Councils and Indiana University. Participants who are students of Indiana University will receive their academic credit from Indiana University directly. For other participants, American Councils will make arrangements with their academic institution/s for proper credit transfer.

Section V: Living in Azerbaijan

Communication

Mail
If you wish to send postcards or letters from Baku, expect the service to be slow but relatively reliable. It usually takes 2-3 weeks for letters to arrive, while packages can take much longer and sometimes do not arrive at all. Services such as Federal Express and DHL are faster and more reliable but can be very costly.

Cell Phone
Each TOF participant is required to have a cell phone while on the program. The purpose of this requirement is so that TOF staff can contact you in case of an emergency and you can obtain help in case of an emergency.
It is common to pre-pay by the minute and put more money on your phone when you need it, rather than purchase a monthly plan. Text messaging is usually cheaper than calling. The main mobile providers in Azerbaijan and their calling prefixes are Azercell (0 50/51), Bakcell (0-55), and Narmobile (0-70). When calling from abroad, 994 (the country code) should be used instead of 0. If you plan to bring a telephone with you from the U.S., it must be Triband (GSM 900/1800/1900) and unlocked in order to work. Ask your provider for unlock codes.

Tips and rules regarding cell phone use:

- You should keep your phone charged and on at all times so that you can receive emergency calls. If anything happens to your phone, notify your resident director immediately.
- You should always keep money on your phone in case you need to use it in an emergency.
- Calling the U.S. on your cell phone is extremely expensive. It may be better to ask friends and family to call you or use Skype. Keep your emergency contact card with you, and memorize at least one phone number in case you lose your cell phone and need to make an emergency call.

Telephone
Your host family may have a landline telephone that you can use to make local calls and/or receive international calls. Check with your host family for permission to use their phone, and do not use it to call long-distance or internationally unless you have made an explicit agreement ahead of time to pay for it.

You cannot call a U.S. 1-800 number from Azerbaijan without paying international phone fees or using Skype or another VoIP program. You should ask your Resident Director for advice on places where you can make international calls.

In case of emergency, relatives and close friends should contact American Councils in Washington, DC at: (202) 833-7522 or (800) 621-9559.

Internet
You should not expect that your host family will have Internet at home, although some families do. There are Internet cafes in Baku where you can pay to use the Internet, and some cafes and restaurants have free Wi-Fi. You can also purchase a USB Wi-Fi Internet service or a dial-up Internet card for use with your personal laptop. In addition, you may use the Internet at AUL during university hours.

Life in your host family
Host family arrangements
Your Turkish-speaking host family may either be Turkish or Azerbaijani. You are required to speak Turkish with them at all times. This program component is specially designed as an opportunity to learn about Turkish culture and gain speaking and listening experience.

Your host family will live in Baku. Although American Councils tries to find host families who live close to the university, you may have a 45-50 minute commute on public transportation. This is an average commute in Baku, and many people travel even farther.

Your host family will provide you with:
- An individual, private room
- Clean bedding
- Clean towels
- Breakfast and dinner on weekdays
- Breakfast, lunch, and dinner on weekends

Living arrangements are subject to change if circumstances require. TOF chooses host families through a careful selection process and attempts to match students with families who can accommodate any special student needs and, when possible, share common interests with the student. However, it is not always possible to match all of the student’s preferences.

**Host Family Expectations & Realities**

The goal of the home stay aspect of the TOF Program is to provide you with a better understanding of Turkish and Azerbaijani culture and language, not to provide a surrogate family abroad or to place you in luxury accommodations. A primary criterion in host family selection is a genuine interest in cultural exchange.

You may develop a very close relationship with your host family, or you may find that you respect each other but do not feel very close. Just like living with any family, living with a host family in Azerbaijan will have its ups and downs. It is best to expect that you will find support and encouragement from your host family, but not a family tailor-made for you and your specific needs and interests.

As a participant living with a host family, you sign a contract agreeing to abide by certain rules of courtesy with your host family. You should:

- respect your host family members and follow their household rules;
- be flexible and understanding of the family and their customs, diets, and schedules;
- have realistic expectations about what the family can do for you;
- recognize the effort that your host family puts forth in hosting you;
- keep your room and area neat and help with family chores;
- be prepared to do your own laundry; if your host family insists on doing it, recognize that they are doing so out of kindness, not obligation;
- inform your host family when you will not be coming home for a meal, coming home late, or spending the night elsewhere;
- understand that your family has agreed to provide two weekday meals and three weekend meals for you and that other expenses are your responsibility. If they serve you an additional meal, consider contributing by bringing home fruit or another food item for the family;
- ask permission before inviting friends home;
- guests are not allowed to stay overnight with you at your host family's home. You should make hotel reservations for any guests; and
- as you would with any new person you meet, try to avoid sensitive political issues, particularly at the beginning of the program before you have gotten to know your host family well.
You can expect your host family to try to cater to your needs, but if you have unusual dietary needs or food preferences, you should purchase these items yourself, particularly if they are expensive.

Eating with Your Host Family

The typical Azerbaijani diet is based on meat (mostly lamb, beef, and chicken), bread, butter, fresh or pickled tomatoes and cucumbers, assorted greens, legumes, dairy products (cheese, yogurt, and sour cream), and seasonal fruits.

Here are tips that may help you better adapt to eating with your host family:

- Eating is a communal activity in Azerbaijan, and you will usually be expected to eat when your host family eats. If you are snacking at home, it is impolite not to share what you have.
- Azerbaijanis pride themselves on hospitality and cookery. It is polite to serve guests a lot of food and encourage them to eat seconds and thirds. If you cannot eat this much, be straightforward about it. Past participants recommend eating light at the beginning so that you do not establish a pattern of eating a lot and have to continue to do so.
- Try to appreciate the food your host family makes and be sensitive to their feelings, but don’t hesitate to communicate your needs and desires. Tell your host family which dishes you particularly enjoy and do not pretend to love something you cannot stand.
- Azerbaijanis drink a lot of tea for pleasure but also consider it a good cure for things from stomachaches to hangovers.
- Azerbaijanis are very careful not to waste or discard food. This is particularly true regarding bread.
- There is less health concern about fat and cholesterol than in the U.S.
- Some Azerbaijanis, especially men, drink a lot of alcohol. You may be encouraged to drink along. Do not attempt to keep pace with them. See the section on Safety & Security for more details about alcohol and drinking in Azerbaijan.

Vegetarianism & Other Special Diets

If you have food allergies or special dietary needs, let TOF staff know right away so that a host family can be selected with this in mind. American Councils places participants in host families that are willing to work with participants’ dietary needs, but you should recognize that this does not mean they will fully understand your needs and desires. When you arrive, explain to your family what you can and cannot eat, even if TOF staff has already talked with your family about this.

It is possible to be vegetarian in Azerbaijan, but it may be challenging at times. Being vegan will be more difficult. Vegetarianism is uncommon in Azerbaijan, and many people do not understand what vegetarians do and do not eat (i.e. some think that vegetarians eat chicken and fish). Others do not realize that soups made with chicken or beef broth may not be acceptable.

If you feel that your diet is somewhat lacking because your host family is not used to preparing balanced vegetarian meals, you might want to supplement your diet by purchasing fresh vegetables and produce from street vendors, small shops, or bazaars. Dairy products are common and easy to find. Soy-based products are not common but may be found in Western supermarkets.
Most restaurants will be able to prepare something vegetarian (often consisting of greens, bread, and/or cheese), but you may wish to bring snacks on excursions, since restaurants in smaller towns may have fewer vegetarian offerings or may not be able to provide a well-rounded diet for a vegetarian. Dried fruits and nuts are a good snack and widely available.

**Gift-Giving**

Gift giving is important in Azerbaijan. Modest and thoughtful gifts are a gracious way to acknowledge someone. If you are invited to someone’s home, it is appropriate to bring candy, cake, or flowers (an odd number for good events; an even number signifies death). Elaborate or expensive gifts are not advised. Generally, it is best to not give a gift that would be far beyond the means of the recipient.

You may also wish to bring small gifts for your host family, peer tutor, teachers, or friends. It is common to give a small thank-you gift to your teachers and peer tutor at the end of the program. Suggestions from previous participants include:

- Postcards or calendars with photos of your home town, stateside campus, popular cities, or art postcards;
- Picture books, art books, cookbooks;
- Gifts for children such as books, crayons, Legos, matchbox cars, action figures, Frisbees, soccer balls (inflate after you arrive);
- Quality coffee, chocolate, or other sweets;
- T-shirts, caps, or sweatshirts, especially those with pictures or insignia;
- Pens, key-chains;
- Food from your home region: Vermont maple syrup, Louisiana Cajun seasoning, Kentucky bourbon, Maryland Old Bay seasoning, ingredients for a key lime pie or chocolate chip cookies etc.
- Don’t offer gifts of alcohol before getting to know your host family first. Muslim families may or may not consume alcohol.
- Don’t bring foods with pork in them, as most Muslims do not consume pork products.
- Postcards or trinkets featuring DC monuments are a good last-minute gift idea.

**Cultural Differences**

You will encounter many cultural differences in Azerbaijan. Some will confuse or upset you, while others may excite and intrigue you. It’s best to approach unfamiliar or confusing situations with patience, communication, and a sense of humor. Below is a list of some of the key cultural differences you may encounter.

**Privacy vs. Togetherness at Home**

City-dwelling Azerbaijanis usually live in multi-storied apartment buildings in close quarters with neighbors and loved ones. Americans often notice that:

- Apartments are small, and the apartment’s largest room may have multiple functions: dining room and living room, perhaps even bedroom.
- The grounds around apartment complexes and stairwells are often untidy, but Azerbaijanis keep the inside of their apartments spotless. It is common to take off your shoes when entering an apartment. You may be offered slippers to wear indoors.
- Families are close, and parents are very protective of their children. Host families may extend this protective concern to you while you are living with them. Young women in particular may find that their host families are not comfortable with them staying out late or traveling alone.
• Families and friends spend a lot of time in close contact. Most people do not consider it normal to want alone time or to claim certain spaces as “private.” Although you will have your own room, your host family may not consider this to be your own private space in the same way that many Americans do.

“Polite” Topics of Conversation
The following are common in Azerbaijan:

• Strangers and friends may offer unsolicited advice about health. This is normal and not considered rude or invasive. Common examples include:
  o Don’t sit or stand in a draft (cold breeze)
  o Don’t sit on a cold surface
  o Don’t drink cold water
  o Don’t put ice in your drink

• Discussing the body, bodily functions, and sex are taboo and may be embarrassing, especially between the sexes. In mixed company, women usually do not state that they need to go to the bathroom, instead making references to “stepping outside” or other excuses.

• It is usual to ask direct questions about money: how much you earn, how much rent you pay, what an article of clothing costs. These questions are becoming more taboo for some Azerbaijanis, but many people are still comfortable with them and do not consider these issues private. Most people who ask are not trying to determine your net wealth but are simply curious about what life is like in the U.S.

• Most people will avoid discussing politics, particularly with someone they do not know well. Some Azerbaijanis will want to discuss politics or even criticize the government, but others are very devoted to former President Heydar Aliyev and his son, current President Ilham Aliyev. For the older generation, a certain amount of Soviet-style fear and reluctance to speak about those in power remains. It is best to let someone else bring up the topic of politics first and only to discuss these issues with people who you know well.

• Many of our alums have been surprised by how many local Azerbaijanis wanted to talk about Nagorno-Karabakh. They have also noted anti-Armenian sentiments when this topic is mentioned. It is best to not comment on sensitive issues such as this, instead, do your best to change the topic to something you are more comfortable with.

Closeness
Azerbaijanis tend to touch each other more than Americans. Family members and friends of the same gender touch frequently and may sit closer to each other than Americans usually do. Friends (male and female) can be seen holding hands with people of the same sex when walking down the street. In addition to shaking hands, men will very often kiss each other on the cheek as a greeting.

In the public sphere – such as on public transportation and in shops and lines – strangers also stand closer than Americans do, making some Americans feel their “personal space” is being invaded.

“Women’s Work”
Some Americans get the impression that Azerbaijani men are demeaning and treat female family members in unacceptable ways, but it is important to recognize that there is a different set of expectations in Azerbaijan than in the U.S. In Azerbaijan, women are responsible for the daily management of the home, including food preparation, laundry, cleaning, and childcare, even if they have an outside job. Men are responsible for earning a good living and taking care of mechanical and other maintenance items around the house. There are exceptions, but these roles are common and accepted by most people in Azerbaijan.
Stereotyping

Some Azerbaijanis stereotype more than is acceptable in American society. Stereotypes and glib comments are often directed at racial minorities and may not be meant in as prejudicial a way as they sound. See the information below for suggestions on how to deal with Azerbaijani perceptions of racial minorities and homosexuality. Keep in mind that not all Azerbaijanis have these negative attitudes, and some people who appear to be prejudiced simply have no experience with people different from themselves and repeat what they hear or see from others.

Other Cultural Behaviors

- Shaking hands is common when saying hello, even when not in a business setting. Even if you are only acquainted with one member of a group, it is polite to shake everyone’s hand on greeting and when saying goodbye.
- It is considered bad luck to shake hands across the threshold of a door.
- Some men will decline to shake a woman’s hand in accordance with Islamic practice. They will instead nod while placing their right hand over their heart.
- Foreign men should not shake hands with women unless the woman initiates; instead smile, nod, and place the hand over the heart.
- When meeting older Azerbaijanis, people in more traditional dress, and anyone in an official setting, always use the formal “you,” speaking slowly and seriously. It is better to have someone say that you can use the informal “you” with them than it is to offend them by assuming that it is okay.
- Many shop owners or others you meet in public will address you in the informal “you,” sen. It is up to you whether appropriate to respond in kind or use the formal variant, siz.
- The younger person should always initiate a greeting with an older person.
- Remove your shoes when you enter a home. For your comfort as well as to maintain the cleanliness of their home, your hosts will often offer you slippers, called bashmaq or tapochki.
- For informal dinners in people’s homes, casual dress is recommended, but this does not mean sweatshirts and torn jeans. Most Azerbaijanis dress more formally than Americans, so keep this in mind. Be ready to give toasts, since guests are typically asked to do so. Ask your Resident Director, teachers, or peer tutor for help writing a good toast.
- Cooking is largely the woman’s responsibility, and the time invested in it is considered an expression of love and caring for the family. Be aware that if you refuse food and drink, your hosts may construe it as disrespect or ingratitude. Talk with your hosts at the beginning of your stay about your dietary needs or preferences.

Culture Shock

When you travel to a new place, you bring with you a set of values, patterns of behavior, and understandings about what is good and bad, normal and abnormal. These values, patterns of behavior, and understandings are not universal, but culturally based.

In Azerbaijan, you will find that some things are different from what you are used to. Some differences are easy to observe, while others are harder to see and may pop up at unexpected times. The discomfort people feel as they
adjust to life in a setting with different values, behaviors, and expectations is called “culture shock.” Culture shock is a normal part of learning a new culture, and nearly everyone experiences it.

You should talk with your Resident Director, teachers, local staff, host family, and peer tutor about things you do not understand or find frustrating. People who have experience in both the U.S. and Azerbaijan (such as your Resident Director and Institute Director) are excellent resources because they know what may surprise you and can help guide you through these situations.

There are typically stages of cultural adjustment:

Stage 1: Initial Euphoria and Excitement. You have arrived in a new country and have great expectations and a positive mindset. Everything seems new and exciting, and you find many similarities between the local culture and your own.

Stage 2: Irritation and Hostility. You start to experience frustration and annoyance with cultural differences. You may or may not recognize these things as cultural differences, and may just think that people are being difficult or acting strangely. Small difficulties seem like major catastrophes, and you may be more emotional than normal.

Stage 3: Gradual Adjustment. In this stage, you are becoming familiar with the host culture. You begin to understand its logic and values. Cultural cues become easier to read. You feel more comfortable and less isolated. Your sense of humor returns.

Stage 4: Adaptation and Biculturalism. Finally, you are able to fully enjoy the customs, attitudes, and ways of saying and doing things in the host country. You find aspects of the local culture that you like and aspects that you do not like, but you can cope with these differences. You are able to live and work to your full potential.

You should not expect that you will experience every stage of adjustment during the TOF Program. For some people, the process of reaching stage 4 is rather short, while for others it can take years.

Coping with Culture Shock

Culture shock often expresses itself in physical symptoms, which you may not realize are related to your emotional experiences. Symptoms may include:

- Extreme homesickness
- Physical complaints and sleep disturbances
- Exhaustion
- Depression or anxiety
- Withdrawal from others, wanting to be alone
- Loss of your sense of humor
- Boredom or fatigue
- Difficulty with course work and concentration
- The feeling that your Turkish skills have grown worse
- Hostility toward the host culture
The most effective way to combat culture shock is to step back from an event that has bothered you, assess it, and search for an appropriate explanation and response. Here are some useful coping strategies when you feel overwhelmed:

- Set reasonable goals and expectations. Establish priorities and do the most important things first.
- Plan small tasks that will help you meet people and feel good about your abilities – like preparing a new food, talking to someone new, or accepting an invitation to go somewhere.
- Don’t isolate yourself. Seek out others to spend time with and invite others to partake in activities you enjoy.
- Find a mentor who can help “translate” the culture for you. Your Resident Director, Institute Director, and other program staff are there to help.
- Try to become comfortable with the language. Remind yourself that it’s okay to make mistakes.
- Take care of yourself: eat properly, exercise, and get plenty of rest.
- Write or call friends and family back home, but don’t spend all of your time on the Internet or phone. It’s important to interact with your fellow students, peer tutor, host family, and others in Baku.
- Remember that it is normal to feel overwhelmed and that the feeling of being overwhelmed will go away with time.

If you are feeling depressed or the feelings of homesickness do not go away no matter how much you try to do other things, talk with your Resident Director.

**Discrimination & Stereotyping**
Stereotyping and discrimination is relatively prevalent in Azerbaijan. This section is meant to provide a very brief overview about what to expect so that you can start to prepare before you arrive in Azerbaijan. It also provides some recommendations for exercising caution, particularly in new environments and late at night.

All program participants should:

- Be aware of your surroundings.
- Immediately remove yourself from a situation if it feels uncomfortable or something seems strange.
- Refrain from drinking alcohol excessively in public places.
- Avoid going out alone. Go out with other people – especially Azerbaijanis – whom you know and trust.
- Avoid any characters that seem suspicious, aggressive, or loud.
- If you encounter someone who is being aggressive and offensive, the best course of action is to ignore them and move on quickly.

**Racial Attitudes**
You may hear negative comments about Azerbaijanis with darker skin color or other groups outside Azerbaijan. Students of color have reported attitudes and behaviors that at times made them feel uncomfortable, embarrassed, and sometimes even unsafe. Students report that most incidences tend to be fleeting.
and innocuous enough that they can dismiss them and carry on, but these situations are naturally frustrating and upsetting.

Students have found that some people’s negative attitudes toward people of color are the result of lack of information and experience and that some people change their opinions as they learn more. Many students of color report that they enjoy not only improving their language skills and learning about Azerbaijani culture, but also helping Azerbaijanis break their stereotypes and learn about the diversity of the U.S. However, if you ever feel unsafe, it is best to remove yourself from a situation as quickly as possible.

**Attitudes toward Armenian Ancestry**

Students of Armenian ancestry should remain vigilant in Azerbaijan, as the Azerbaijani government has claimed it is unable to guarantee Armenians’ safety. Students who have an Armenian-sounding last name or have visas from Armenia in their passport may encounter intense questioning from customs and border officials. If you have concerns about this issue, please contact American Councils right away.

**Attitudes Regarding Sexual Orientation**

Azerbaijani attitudes toward lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans-identified individuals generally differ from those in the U.S., and you may hear Azerbaijanis make negative comments about LGBT individuals.

American Councils does not advise lying about or hiding your sexual orientation, but we do encourage LGBT students to be guarded, even with your host family or peer tutor. This is particularly important at the beginning of the program, before you have gotten to know your new family and friends and how they may respond.

Generally, Azerbaijani LGBT individuals do not show affection in public and are not open about their sexual orientation with strangers. Thus, you should be extremely confidential about the identity of any Azerbaijani LGBT friends you may make. It is also advisable to be discreet about your own sexual orientation in public, as it is difficult to judge how strangers may react. In some cases, it may be dangerous to openly express your sexual orientation. The police cannot be trusted to ensure justice when it comes to racist or homophobic attacks.

If you have concerns or questions, talk with your Resident Director. Your Resident Director is there to support you and will keep your sexual orientation confidential if you wish.

**Attitudes about Other Religions**

Most Azerbaijanis are Muslim, but the society is quite secular. Very few Azerbaijanis are fundamentalists, in fact, most are generally tolerant of other faiths. Although you may encounter some people who have strong beliefs about different religions, many times they simply have no experience with people from other faiths. The followers of all religions are generally accommodated, and practice is possible at various religious centers. Talk with your Resident Director about any concerns you have.
Section VI: Travel

Independent Travel During the Program
In addition to participating in organized TOF activities, you may wish to travel individually during free time. As a TOF participant, you may travel independently outside your host city if:

- You have submitted a travel request form to your resident director and it has been approved by him/her. You must do this several days prior to travel. Do not book/buy any flights or reserve/buy bus tickets before your travel request is approved. You will not be reimbursed if your travel request is not approved.
- You cannot miss class or required activities for independent travel.

Independent international travel is only allowed during official program breaks, i.e. winter and spring breaks. When traveling within Azerbaijan or outside of the country during breaks, you must be aware of and adhere to all Azerbaijani visa regulations. Check with your Resident Director for specifics when you are planning your travel.

You may not travel to any area deemed unsafe or off-limits by the U.S. or Azerbaijani government. The American Embassy can provide current information about areas where travel advisories have been issued. This includes Nagorno-Karabakh and the surrounding areas, as well as regions along the line of contact between Azerbaijani and Armenian positions. NOTE: Travel to Iran, Russia (including Crimea), Armenia, and Turkey (including Northern Cyprus), as well as to Nagorno-Karabakh and Nakhchivan, is forbidden. American Councils reserves the right to prohibit participants from travelling to any other destinations deemed unsafe by the U.S. or host country government and/or by the program funders. In addition to seeking approval for independent travel from American Councils, participants who are also Boren recipients must contact IIE, and seek Boren's approval for travel outside the host country.

Visitors
No dependents or companions may accompany you during the program, participate in TOF Program activities, or sleep in program-arranged housing. If you wish to have friends or family members visit during the program, they must stay in separate housing (such as a hotel), cannot stay for an extended period, and cannot interfere with your participation in TOF classes or planned activities. Visitors from home will demand a great deal of your already limited time and distract you from your studies.

All visa related issues for visitors, including letters of invitation and registration with the local police, are the responsibility of the visiting party. American Councils is unable to provide visa support in any fashion.

Tips for Traveling in Azerbaijan
As discussed previously, TOF participants may wish to travel in Azerbaijan independently during their free time. Traveling can be exciting and rewarding, as well as open your eyes to different ways of living in different parts of the country. Tips to make your travel successful include:

- Carry a photocopy of your passport, visa, Azerbaijan identity card (Şəxssiyyat Vasiqası), and police registration card at all times. You will receive the Azerbaijan identity card and police registration card during the first week in the country. If you are stopped and asked for identification, present these documents. During in-country orientation, your Resident Director will further explain how to deal with document checks.
• Travel with people you trust, whether they are other TOF participants, host family members, your peer tutor, or well-known Azerbaijani friends.
• Avoid traveling alone to unfamiliar places or late at night.

Getting Around Baku
Walking is often one of the best ways to get around central Baku, but there are several options for getting to more distant points. Based on where you are going, the time, and your budget, you will want to consider the following modes of transportation:

Buses
The easiest way to travel in Baku is by bus, which go everywhere and are inexpensive. Although there are no bus maps easily available, buses always serve the same routes, are marked by numbers, and have key stops printed on a sign in the window. Keep in mind that public transportation in Azerbaijan holds the same dangers it does in the U.S. It is best to travel with at least one other person and be particularly careful about traveling at night.

In more distant regions of Baku, marshrutkas operate alongside buses. These are large vans that travel along a dedicated route. The destination of the van is printed on a 1’ x 2’ poster attached to the passenger side window. In both buses and marshrutkas, you pay the driver when you get off. If you are traveling with a group, tell the driver how many tickets you bought. If you do not know your stop by sight, inform the driver when you wish to get out. Your driver will usually let you know when your stop comes up.

Metro
Baku's Metro (subway) can be a convenient way of covering long distances throughout the city. The system is fairly simple to use, and the cost is inexpensive. Again, this form of public transportation has some of the same dangers it does in the U.S. It is important to remember to be aware of your surroundings and to try to travel with at least one other person and be particularly careful about traveling at night.
Taxis

Taxis can be useful, particularly if you are traveling to an unknown destination or at night. However, use caution when selecting a taxi, and do not accept rides from unofficial taxis. For more information, see the Safety & Security section.

Section VII: Health

Physical & Mental Health

It is important to maintain your physical and mental health while abroad. Living in a foreign country and participating in an intensive language program can be exhausting, so it is particularly important to take care of yourself. Be sure to:

- Keep a balanced diet and avoid large amounts of sugar or alcohol
- Maintain regular sleep habits
- Listen to your body and take good care of yourself
- Bring a full supply of prescription medicine and remember to take your prescription on a regular schedule.

It is common to get sick while abroad because your body is adjusting to a new environment. Usually, these illnesses are minor and short-lived. Stomach ailments and the flu are the most common, so it is wise to have cold medicine, pain medication, antacids, and antidiarrheal and a laxative with you.

Water, Air, & Food Quality

It is recommended that you only drink boiled or bottled water. Even if Azerbaijanis drink the tap water, it may make you sick because your system is not accustomed to it. You should:

- Boil tap water for at least 3 minutes (start timing after the water is at a rolling boil) before drinking.
- If you prefer bottled water, buy brand-name bottled water (e.g., Aqua Vita and Bonaqua), rather than generic labels because some of these are of poor quality. Bottled water is widely available in Baku.
- Avoid swallowing water when showering and brushing your teeth. If you are concerned, use bottled or boiled water to brush your teeth.
- You may wish to purchase a water filter before the program and use it to remove microbiological cysts, cryptosporidium (99.9%) and giardia (99.99%). These are available at many camping stores in the U.S. but may not be available in Azerbaijan.

Air quality is notoriously poor in Baku due to car exhaust and other pollutants. In 2008, Forbes ranked Baku as the dirtiest city in the world. If you have respiratory problems, bring necessary supplies and minimize your time outside on the most polluted days.

Food is generally safe in Azerbaijan, but some precautions can help you avoid stomach ailments:

- Avoid eating food that has not been refrigerated, especially if purchasing foods from outdoor markets or street-side vendors.
- Cooked fruits and vegetables are less likely to make you sick than raw ones. If you eat raw fruits or vegetables, always peel and wash them first. Try to avoid fruit without peels.
• Only eat well cooked meat, poultry, and fish. *Pollution in Azerbaijan’s waterways – including the Caspian Sea – is an ongoing issue, so fish should be eaten infrequently and in limited quantities. Check with program staff for recommendations about fish that is safe to eat.*
• Avoid raw or undercooked eggs and uncured cheeses.
• Do not eat meat purchased from street vendors that has been sitting in the sun on a spit for hours.
• Ask for advice from your host family and local friends about where to purchase fresh meat and cheese and which restaurants are the safest.
• Choose cafes and fast food restaurants that look clean and busy. Local people usually eat at restaurants with the best and safest food.
• In Azerbaijani homes, it is common to leave meat-based dishes on the stove or counter all day and night. Use caution and good judgment to avoid ingesting bacteria.

Despite every precaution, most newcomers to Azerbaijan suffer from at least a short bout of diarrhea. The best treatment is to rehydrate yourself with boiled or purified water and soups. Try to avoid oily foods during this time and eat bland food until you feel better.

**Sanitary Standards**

**Bathrooms**

The sanitary standards in Azerbaijan can be different than what you are used to in the U.S., particularly when it comes to public restrooms, which are often rather dirty. In general, you should expect a “Turkish” or “squat” toilet unless you are in a new restaurant, home, or business. Very often there will be soap and water to wash your hands, but there may not be toilet paper. It is a good idea to carry a small amount of toilet paper and hand sanitizer with you at all times.

**Municipal Waste & Litter**

It is not unusual for people to drop trash on the ground in Baku, perhaps due to the lack of public trash cans and regular trash pick-up. Be particularly careful when walking in sandals to avoid cutting your feet on garbage that may be on the ground.

Irregular trash pick-up can also cause refuse to build up on the streets. This attracts stray animals that may be unpredictable and possibly rabid. It is best to give trash piles and stray animals a wide berth.

**Caspian Sea**

Over the years, the Caspian Sea has been polluted by artificial fertilizers and pesticides, industrial waste, off-shore oil exploitation, and untreated sewage. Although the worst industrial offenders have been closed and the government is working to improve the situation, the sea remains polluted. Avoid drinking any sea water and pay attention to signs of pollution. If you want to go to the beach, it is best to go with your host family or others who are knowledgeable about the safest places to swim.
Illness & Disease

**Vaccinations**

Consult with your physician about vaccinations before the program. It is important that your immunizations are up to date. Some physicians may recommend additional vaccinations for the trip. Visit the [travel website](https://www.cdc.gov) of the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) at for more information.

**Tuberculosis**

Tuberculosis (TB) is an infectious disease that usually attacks the lungs. TB is spread from person to person through the air, but it is not as infectious as many people believe: usually, a person must be in close contact with someone who is infected for a prolonged period before contracting the disease.

Incidents of tuberculosis are high in some countries in this region, including Azerbaijan. Students should consider getting a skin test for TB after returning to the U.S. Under normal conditions, TB is treatable and easily addressed with the proper regimen of medication.

**HIV & Sexually Transmitted Diseases**

Sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) are prevalent across the former Soviet Union. New night clubs have made casual sex more available, and prostitution is a growing issue. Meanwhile, sex education and awareness about STDs and AIDS are extremely low.

As always, the decision to engage in sexual activity entails certain risks. If you choose to engage in sexual activity abroad, you should use Western condoms. Even though it is possible to find contraceptives in Azerbaijan, it is recommended that all students – regardless of whether they plan to engage in sexual activity – bring a supply of condoms from the U.S. Students should exercise caution about who they engage with at night clubs and be wary if approached by a stranger who shows a particularly strong romantic interest. More information about safety related to sexual activity can be found in the Safety & Security section.

**Accident and Sickness Coverage**

Health and accident insurance (including coverage for medical and security evacuation) is provided for all participants. Participants are enrolled through Cultural Insurance Services International (CISI) under a plan that covers the period of the program and 30 days after the program for illnesses diagnosed by a physician while on the program.

**Dental**

Your health coverage during the TOF Program does not include dental coverage. We recommend that you visit your dentist before leaving for the TOF Program. Plan your visit approximately one month before leaving so that you have time to take care of any problems your dentist might find. If the need arises to see a dentist while in Baku, it is good to seek advice from TOF administration, or American Councils representatives in Baku before visiting any dental facility.
Emergency Procedures
TOF staff will help you if you need to visit a doctor during the program. You should not visit a hospital or clinic without talking with your resident director, who will accompany you to a clinic in order to facilitate your admission and care.

In case of emergency or severe illness, contact your resident director immediately. If you cannot reach your resident director, call other local TOF staff. If there is an emergency, your resident director and local staff director will work with American Councils staff in Washington, DC, to find the best possible resolution to the situation.

Medical Facilities
Medical care in Azerbaijan was once very limited and underdeveloped but has been developing and modernizing over the past 10 years. Nonetheless, most hospitals and other health care facilities do not meet Western standards.

If you need to visit a medical facility during the TOF Program, talk with your Resident Director to find an appropriate local facility. You should never visit a hospital or clinic without talking with your Resident Director, who will accompany you in order to facilitate your admission and care.

Hospitals and clinics in Baku include:

- MediClub
  Uzeir Hajibayov str. 45
  Tel: 497-09-11, 497-09-12

- Turk-American Medical Center
  Mardanov Gardashlari str. 41/47
  Tel: 494-18-23, 497-37-84
  [www.tamc.az](http://www.tamc.az)

- Leyla Shikhinskaya Clinic
  Yusif Safarov str. 19
  Tel: 490-21-31
  [www.lsh-clinic.com](http://www.lsh-clinic.com)

- International SOS Clinic* (membership fee may be required)
  Rashid Behbudov str. 30
  Tel: 493-7 3-54
  [www.internationalsos.com](http://www.internationalsos.com)

Section VIII: Safety & Security

General Safety Precautions
Most past American Councils program participants report feeling safe in Baku, but it is important to take precautions. Foreigners are noticeable outsiders. This, combined with your lack of full understanding of the language and customs, could have consequences for your safety.
Our intention is not to frighten you but to make sure you have information about crime prevention. More information about safety and security will be discussed during pre-departure and in-country orientation.

These tips can help keep you safe:

- Avoid mannerisms that draw attention to you: smiling as you walk down the street, speaking loudly in public, or swinging your arms while walking.
- Women should be aware that there is a strong undercurrent of tradition about how a respectable young lady should dress and act in Azerbaijan. Even if many Azerbaijani girls wear Western attire, it is important to understand the connotations associated with doing so. Consider the signal your clothing sends, and err on the side of modesty. Women should also avoid smoking on the street.
- Travel with a friend or in a small group, rather than alone or with a large group. Walking with someone else deflects people who might bother you, but walking in a large group may call more attention to you.
- If you are out at night or drinking, always walk with someone. If you visit friends in the evening, ask them to escort you home. Men may be expected to walk women home, especially local women.
- Do not stay out late in the evenings, especially if you are alone. People who are out very late at night arouse suspicion and are more prone to be harassed, sometimes by police officers. It can also be difficult to find a bus or taxi at night.
- Avoid walking alone (especially women) very early in the morning (i.e. before people would typically begin going to work or school). If you need to go out, it is better if you are accompanied by a member of your host family. Instances of harassment can occur, particularly towards women, if they are seen alone very early in the morning.
- Use caution walking in the dark to avoid open manholes and abrupt drops in the street or sidewalk.
- Always tell someone where you are going and when you expect to return.
- When asking directions, try to approach older women. Likewise, if travelling alone, try to befriend older women, as they will often “adopt” you and look out for you.
- Be aware of your surroundings, and do not wear earphones in public. This increases the chances of being mugged for your music player, and you cannot hear warnings or danger signs around you.
- Observe traffic lights and be wary of cars. Drivers in Azerbaijan are often aggressive and erratic. Pedestrians never have the right-of-way, even if indicated by traffic signs. Never assume a car will stop or steer out of the way. Watch for cars reversing down one-way streets, ignoring traffic lights, and parking on the sidewalk. Observe traffic lights and regulations, but don’t assume crossing lights function properly or are observed by drivers. Stay on sidewalks away from the curb, and walk facing on-coming traffic whenever possible. If you do not see a crosswalk at an intersection, look for an underground passage.
- Keep money and valuables hidden from sight in public and in a safe location in your host family’s home.
- Never leave your bag in the classroom during breaks unless the instructor locks the door. Other students and strangers move freely throughout the building and may steal items left unattended.

Alcohol
Azerbaijan has a culture of drinking that is in some ways similar to Russian drinking culture. Peer pressure can be extremely high to drink in excess, especially for men. You should:
- Avoid situations where large groups or unfamiliar Azerbaijani men are drinking. The risk of harassment or fights increases in these situations.
- If you are in a place where there is drinking, stay alert. Be aware of who pours your drinks, do not go home with anyone you don’t know, and stay with your group.
- Do not accept a drink unless you are willing to continue drinking with the group until the bottle of alcohol (i.e. vodka, wine, etc.) is empty. This is a cultural expectation, particularly for men.
- Male students should exercise caution drinking with the Azerbaijani women in bars. In one case, a student was drugged, robbed of his money and documents, and left in an empty apartment when he accepted an attractive young woman’s invitation to “go home” with her.

Some host families or others may abstain from alcohol for religious reasons, and many local women will not accept a drink or will only take sips during a toast at a special occasion. It is much easier for women to refuse a drink than men, although sometimes foreign women are expected to drink more. In some cases, women who are drinking may be seen as having loose morals, so it is good to be cautious drinking around new people. Although some young women in Baku visit bars and drink alcohol, this is not common across all segments of society.

Strategies to avoid drinking:

- Do not start: once you take the first “shot” of vodka, it is nearly impossible to deflect pressure to drink more. It is considered bad luck by some to take an odd number of shots.
- Claim health concerns or religious restrictions that force you to abstain.
- “Selective abstinence” is rarely effective. If you refuse to drink with your host family or local friends but are seen drinking with Americans, your credibility will suffer a serious blow.
- Being culturally sensitive does not include endangering your health or safety, no matter how “insulted” locals may be at your refusal to drink with them. It’s okay to say “no.”

Excessive abuse of alcohol that endangers the participant or others or interferes with their ability to participate in the program will result in dismissal from the TOF Program.

Drugs
Do not use illegal drugs during the TOF Program. TOF employs a zero tolerance policy concerning illegal drug use, and using drugs will result in immediate dismissal. Using illegal drugs is not only a health risk but puts you at risk for arrest.

- The legal ramifications of using illegal drugs abroad can be very serious, and the U.S. government cannot get a U.S. citizen out of jail overseas if he or she has been convicted of a drug offense.
- Illegal drugs can be tainted or contain substances other than those advertised, and taking them can lead to an overdose or worse.
- Misuse or abuse of prescription drugs can also be dangerous. Don’t respond to the stresses of adjusting to a new culture by taking more than the prescribed dosage of your medication or drugs prescribed to another student.
- The social and cultural consequences of using illegal drugs can be different in a foreign country. This behavior likely will be viewed very negatively by your new acquaintances.
Crowds & Political Demonstrations

- Keep an eye on your purse, bag, or wallet in crowded public areas.
- Keep your bags close to you, either under your arm or by your chest.
- Do not wear large backpacks on crowded public transportation. If you must wear a backpack, keep your valuables in a separate location and/or use a small combination lock on your zipper.
- A concealed money belt can be a safe way to carry cash and credit cards in crowded situations or when carrying a large amount of money.
- Avoid groups of street children who surround pedestrians to swindle money. Go into a store or cross the street to deflect them. If you cannot avoid them and are surrounded, aggressively defend your belongings by shouting and swinging your bag or umbrella to keep them away.
- Be wary of con artists and use good judgment when approached by new people who want to make your acquaintance. In many cases, the best strategy is to walk away or change the subject.

Political Demonstrations

Stay away from political demonstrations. The political climate in Azerbaijan can be volatile. Small and large demonstrations for and against the government, large political organizations, and small radical fringe groups are common. Tempers have been known to flare suddenly at these demonstrations, resulting in violence and police intervention.

Police have dispersed demonstrations with tear gas, water cannons, and clubs. Observers expose themselves to indiscriminate beatings and the risk of being trampled by retreating crowds. Your medical coverage does not cover injuries that result from demonstrations, riots, or civil unrest.

TOF Program staff will try to notify you of any planned protests so that you can avoid those areas, but you should also be aware of situations that arise unexpectedly. If you notice a large group gathering, it is best to avoid the situation and go a different way.

Sexual Harassment & Assault

The comments below are aimed primarily at female participants, but male participants should also be aware of these concerns, as American men have been victims of sexual assaults in the past.

It is important to understand that Azerbaijan has a male-dominated culture. Although women are unlikely to be harassed in the streets during daytime hours in most cases, the gender roles and expectations in Azerbaijan are very different than they are in the U.S., and sexual stereotyping remains strong.

To prevent unwanted attention, women are advised to dress and behave conservatively and avoid situations involving drunken men.

What is Sexual Harassment?

The State Department reports that sexual harassment is prevalent in both urban and rural areas of Azerbaijan. Additionally, American Councils participants reported experiencing sexual harassment in Baku and elsewhere in Azerbaijan. Though American Councils takes the threat of sexual harassment and assault very seriously, participants should understand that responses and reactions to sexual harassment will differ from those in the US. Police procedures for responding to sexual harassment and assault are often less sympathetic to victims than in the US, and that there are fewer organizational resources for victims of sexual violence available in Azerbaijan. See the section
Even though you may not experience sexual harassment during your program, it is important that you be made aware of the potential occurrences, and understand strategies for avoiding and dealing with sexual harassment in Azerbaijan. Understanding that sexual harassment is not just a problem that women have to face or deal with alone is key. Men can also be the victims of sexual harassment, and also have roles to play in helping their peers avoid harassment. Sexual harassment refers to an unwelcome sexual advance or behavior and can include any of the following:

- Sexual advances or requests for sexual favors
- Unwanted sexual contact
- Physical, verbal, or nonverbal behavior that is sexual in nature or is hostile, demeaning, or intimidating
- Terms of endearment
- Sabotaging a person’s work or academic standing
- Withholding information. Exclusion from informal meetings/social events
- Sexual jokes, comments, or innuendoes
- Cartoons or visuals that ridicule or denigrate a person’s gender
- Employment or academic decisions that are based solely or partially on a person’s sex.

What is Sexual Assault?

Sexual assault refers to a range of unwanted behaviors ranging from forced kissing/touching to completed penetration (rape.) Most often, sexual assault involves psychological coercion and/or taking advantage of an individual who is under duress or incapacitated and incapable of making a decision on his/her own (including under the influence of alcohol, drugs and/or prescription medications).

Cultural Differences

Students should understand that cultural norms and expectations are different in Azerbaijan. What may be seen as normal in the U.S. could be perceived differently in Azerbaijan. A very good example is eye contact. Women should not make eye contact with or smile at men on the street in Azerbaijan. Doing so could be seen as an invitation. Students will also find that Azerbaijani women may react differently to harassment than women in the U.S. It is important and useful to have discussions with your teachers and language partners about how they understand and respond to harassment on the streets. Remember that as an American, you also have your own perspective and perception that may differ from the perspective of Azerbaijanis. It is therefore critically important to keep an open mind, and look upon differing opinions as more cultural knowledge. You should not approach these differences by demanding that the host country culture change. This is contradictory to the program’s goals of better cultural understanding, and may even be dangerous. Nevertheless, navigating such cultural differences can feel unfair, and be emotionally taxing. It is therefore important for you to communicate frequently with the RD or D.C. staff if you encounter this frustration, or feel frustrated that your classmates are going through this. Such reflection can help you better identify and cope with cultural differences. Keeping these frustrated feelings bottled up could lead to anger or further stress. An outlet in which you vent and voice your concerns can be extremely useful in dealing with these frustrations.
Avoiding Sexual Harassment and Assault in Azerbaijan

Experiences of sexual harassment and assault are never the victim’s fault! There are steps you can take to help mitigate risk of sexual harassment, assault, and other crimes.

Participants Should:

1. **Blend in with local society, both in dress and behavior.** It is always best for participants, especially women, to dress conservatively. As an American, you will automatically attract more attention. While you may occasionally see local women in Baku wearing more revealing attire, it is for your own safety to blend in as best you can. Women should avoid shorts or skirts above the knee and sleeveless shirts or tank tops. As a rule, the more skin you expose, the more attention you will receive. If traveling outside of Baku, you should dress more conservatively than in the city. Azerbaijani women may have pre-conceived stereotypes regarding American women’s dress and behavior from the media. Modeling, and learning from an Azerbaijani’s example is a key tool for language acquisition and staying safe. If you don’t see Azerbaijani women doing something, do not do it yourself.

2. **Never travel alone, especially at night.** Make it a point to travel with peers or friends. You are much less likely to be harassed if you travel in groups.

3. **Not smile or make eye contact with people on the street.** While smiling and making eye contact is a common custom in the U.S., women should avoid eye contact with men on the street as they may perceive it as an invitation. Sunglasses are very useful for avoiding eye contact.

4. **Avoid areas that are deserted.** You should always avoid shortcuts in favor of streets where you see lots of people walking.

5. **Trust their instincts.** If something seems off, it most likely is. For example, if a new acquaintance is overly aggressive, don’t worry about being rude. Just remove yourself from the situation. It is often common for a potential harasser to try and get you alone. Resist any efforts to be alone with someone you do not trust.

6. **Always be aware of your surroundings.** Do not walk with earphones. Always pay attention to your surroundings.

7. **Take the initiative to help your classmates.** Males on the program should take the initiative by offering to walk with female students even if they don’t ask, and simply serve as a supportive presence for the group.

What to do if you become a victim

1. **Do not respond to harassment on the street.** Ignoring a harasser is most often the best policy. Any response, even a negative one can be seen as encouragement. It is usually best to completely ignore catcalls, or other forms of street harassment.

2. **If you need to say something be stern, and keep it simple.** Repeat the same phrase loudly and clearly for example, “shame” or “no,” without changing it. Make your body language and tone of voice match your words. The object here is public humiliation of your harasser.

3. **Find a safe place.** If you are being followed on the street, it is a good idea to get yourself out of the situation and find somewhere or someone you trust. Your RD can provide more suggestions.

4. **Don’t keep it to yourself! If you are harassed or assaulted, it is very important to bring it to the attention of American Councils staff.** Frequent harassment on top of a rigorous academic program and unfamiliar atmosphere can cause you to feel stressed. American Councils and your RD care about your health and well-
being. If you are experiencing harassment, we encourage you to let us know so that we can connect you with trained advocates and more suggestions. It is critical not to let your stress build.

Resources for Survivors of Sexual Harassment and Assault

While not as comprehensive as in the U.S., there are resources available to survivors of sexual assault or harassment including the participant’s RD, as well as online or phone resources where students can speak to a trained advocate at all hours.

Resources on the Ground

Participants are encouraged to reach out to their RD or D.C. staff if they experience harassment or assault. Not only is it important that American Councils be made aware of these incidents so that we can respond, it is also critical that the participant receive adequate support, and not allow stress or anxiety to consume them.

If a student reports to American Councils staff that he/she has suffered sexual assault or harassment on an American Councils program, American Councils staff will, within 24 hours, report the incident to the study abroad office of the student’s home institution in order to ensure he/she receives full access to support services provided by his/her home institution as stipulated by Title IX. Participants who wish to access confidential resource personnel should contact the Rape and Incest National Network (RAINN) or the Americans Overseas Domestic Violence Crisis Center. Contact information for these organizations is provided to all participants in American Councils program materials and during pre-departure orientations.

Resources through your Home Institution/Insurance Policy

Some schools offer confidential counseling resources for students overseas. If this is not available at your home institution, talk to your study abroad office and review your insurance policy to see what it covers. If you are also insured through your parents or school in the U.S., find out if it will cover counseling sessions with an American psychiatrist over the phone or via Skype.

Title IX

Participants should be aware that if they contact their home institutions regarding their experience of harassment or assault or if American Councils contacts the institution, your home institution’s Title IX representative or office will respond. The type of response may vary depending on the institution. You can contact your home school’s Title IX office to find out what their response might be in such a case.

Online or Phone Resources

- **Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network (rainn.org)**- Rainn provides a 24-hour free confidential online hotline live chat in which a survivor can chat with a trained advocate. To connect to the online hotline: [https://ohl.rainn.org/online/](https://ohl.rainn.org/online/).

- **Sexual Assault Support and Help for Americans Abroad (sashaa.org)**- SASHAA provides a live chat options that are both free and confidential.

  - To connect via computer, go to [https://sashaa.org/](https://sashaa.org/) and click to chat at the top right hand corner.

State Department Resources

[https://travel.state.gov/content/passports/en/emergencies/victims.html](https://travel.state.gov/content/passports/en/emergencies/victims.html)

Male/Female Interactions

Relations between men and women in Azerbaijan tend to be more sexually laden than in the U.S. American females are likely to find that they are the object of frequent male attention. At the same time, it may be easier to meet and socialize with men than women, since young men tend to be more assertive and outgoing in Azerbaijan.

It is possible for a woman to have a male friend (as opposed to a boyfriend), but there may be an expectation that this could turn into a sexual relationship. Women should be extremely cautious about spending time alone with Azerbaijani male friends. Your friend may assume that you would be open to a sexual relationship, even if you have not given any indication of this. It is best to be very clear that you consider male friends to be like your brothers and be clear about the boundaries of your relationship.

Attitudes toward Sex

You may be surprised by the conservative attitude many young Azerbaijanis have toward sex. At the same time, some Azerbaijanis consider foreigners to be exempt from the usual rules regarding sex and may assume that they can act differently toward someone from a different country than they would toward someone from Azerbaijan. The following advice can help you avoid unsafe or uncomfortable situations:

- Women should avoid eye contact with male strangers. If you do make eye contact, do not smile. American friendliness is often misinterpreted as a sexual invitation.
- Usually the best response to unwanted stares, comments, or touches is to ignore the harasser and move away quickly and calmly. Cursing your harasser can sometimes result in additional unwanted attention or behavior. If you continue to be followed, spoken to, or touched after repeated attempts to get away, try to go to a very public place. Tell your harasser firmly and calmly to leave you alone. Sometimes threatening to get the police is effective, but you cannot always count on the police to be supportive.
- If you invite someone of the opposite gender to spend the night in your room (a violation of TOF policies and potentially very rude to your host family), or if you accept an invitation to spend the night at this person’s apartment or room, you should know that the person will likely understand your action as a clear and unambiguous invitation for sex. You should never accept such an invitation if you are not certain you want to be sexually involved with that person.
- If you are going to someone’s house for the first time and are not certain that other people will be there, bring along a friend. Not only will this take some of the linguistic pressure off of you, but also it will remove any possible sexual innuendo from the visit and give you a chance to observe the motives of your acquaintance.
- Be blunt if you are not interested in a sexual relationship. Often candid talk is enough to stop unwanted advances, but be ready to respond firmly to determined attempts to cajole or verbally coerce you. Many men in Azerbaijan still believe the “no means yes” myth. Be even more cautious if you and/or the man have been drinking.
- Do not judge your friends by physical appearance. You may be inclined to trust someone because he or she is nicely dressed, well groomed, confident, and outgoing. Sometimes the most fashionable people are the most skilled con artists or those who make a mission of befriending Americans in order to gain money, goods, visas, or sex.
- Ask yourself, “Would I be friends with this person in the U.S.?“ If you answer no, reassess why you want to spend time with him or her. If you want to continue to see someone but suspect sexual or financial motives, always meet in public places and/or bring along a friend.
TOF Participants & Other Foreigners

It is wise to assess the character of everyone you meet, including fellow TOF participants and other foreigners. You will likely form close friendships with many different people over the course of the program, but be careful not to do something you would not do at home or take unnecessary risks just because you are wrapped up in the excitement of being abroad. If you do not feel comfortable with someone, avoid spending time alone with him or her. Make sure that your choices about romantic relationships and sexual activity are what you really want, and if someone is making you feel uncomfortable, remove yourself from the situation as quickly as possible. If you are concerned about a situation, talk with your Resident Director and ask for help.

Money Safety

ATMs and exchange shops can attract criminals who are looking to steal money. When you visit an ATM or exchange shop:

• Go with a friend when you exchange money or use an ATM.
• Avoid exchanging or withdrawing money in unfamiliar parts of town or when it is dark.
• Do not call attention to yourself by speaking loudly or in English.
• Count your money before stepping away from the exchange counter. There have been reports of exchange workers not giving foreigners the proper amount of money. Use your cell phone calculator to figure the exchange rate and be sure you received the right amount of money.

Cash is widely used in Azerbaijan, so you will need to carry around a supply of Azerbaijani manat with you. Follow these tips when dealing with cash:

• Do not display large quantities of money on the street. Take out only the amount of money needed for a purchase.
• Exchange small amounts of money frequently rather than large amounts all at once. You will get the most current exchange rate and will be less of a target.
• Never carry more money than you need or can afford to lose.
• If you need to carry substantial amounts of money, wear it under your clothes in a concealed money belt or pouch.
• Lock your money and credit cards in a suitcase in your room at home and be discreet with money around your host family. Even if you trust them, you may not be able to trust people who come by to visit while you are out.

Although cash is still the most common form of currency in Azerbaijan, credit cards are gaining popularity, and many large stores now accept Visa and MasterCard. Follow these tips when using a credit card:

• Inform your credit card company before you leave that you will be using the card in Azerbaijan. If you do not, the company may suspend your card on theft alert.
• Write down your credit card company’s phone number and find out if you can call the company collect to report loss, theft, or fraud.
• Check to see if you will be charged extra fees for using the card abroad.
• Find out terms on cash advances. These can have very high fees, so make sure you understand the terms before requesting a cash advance.
• Always check the total and do the math on the exchange when you use your credit card in Azerbaijan. Some places prey on foreigners who sign the receipt without checking the accuracy of the price. Also be careful that your credit card is not swiped more than once because the machine "didn't work" the first time.
• Make sure you are signing only one credit card charge sheet, not one with carbon copies beneath that may be used to make multiple withdrawals from your account.

The Police

Although the situation has improved in recent years, the police (polis) in Azerbaijan are known for being corrupt. They have been known to single out people who stand out as tourists and target foreigners for bribes.

As much as possible, avoid interacting with police officers in Azerbaijan. If you are stopped by the police, follow these tips:

• You may be asked for your identification papers, which is within the rights of the police. Be sure to carry a copy of your passport, visa, and identification card at all times. If you are asked, first show your Azerbaijani identity card. Then if requested, show a copy of your passport.
• Be respectful but cautious. Do not resist inquiry, and be cooperative but firm.
• If approached, ask to see police credentials or to speak with a supervisor (müdir). In some cases, foreigners have been robbed by individuals posing as police officers.
• If the situation does not seem serious, use Azerbaijani pleasantries to communicate with the police officers. Oftentimes, an encounter can be diffused by the fact that you speak Azerbaijani or Turkish. However, never nod or agree to anything you do not understand, as you might be implicating yourself in a crime without understanding what is happening.
• If you do not speak Azerbaijani well, you should speak only in English. You need to make sure that you understand the entire conversation.
• If the situation becomes serious or you are brought to the police station, request to contact your Resident Director and the U.S. Embassy immediately. If you cannot reach your Resident Director immediately, call the other staff contacts on your emergency card.
• Never let your passport leave your hands. Show the officer the information yourself, but do not hand the passport to the person.
• Never initiate a bribe with a police officer. However, if a police officer demands money or takes money from you, it is best not to argue.
• Never, under any circumstances, sign any document without first speaking with your Resident Director, the U.S. Embassy, or another emergency contact person.

Taking Photos

It is prohibited to take photos of certain locations in Azerbaijan. Avoid photographing Metro stations, bridges and other transportation infrastructure, military buildings, factories, and other sensitive locations. There is a long history of suspicion regarding foreigners who photograph these locations, as it is assumed these people may be spies or terrorists. Also avoid photographing embassy buildings. Past participants have been stopped by the police and embassy guards for photographing the Iranian Embassy. Taking prohibited photographs not only endangers you but also creates difficulties for your hosts, who are considered responsible for you during the program.

Travel Safety

Buses and the Metro

Buses, marshrutkas (mini-buses on set routes), and the Metro can be very crowded, making them ideal places for pick-pockets and thieves. Keep your purse or bag close to you, making sure that pockets on bags are facing inward instead of outward, and keep an eye on your belongings. Be especially careful when exiting, as pickpockets often work in pairs, with one person blocking the victim and the other picking the victim’s pocket.
**Taxis**

Any motorist may stop and offer a ride for a fee, but American Councils discourages taking rides from private cars. Robberies have been reported by these unofficial drivers, so it is best to use official taxis, which are driven by professional drivers and have a taxi sign, light on the top, and blue license plate. You can also order taxis by calling 189 or *9000 or use the Uber app.

**Tips for taking taxis include:**

- Taxis are not usually metered, so you should agree on a price with the driver before getting into the car. Find out from a local Azerbaijani how much a trip should cost so that you know what is a fair price, since many drivers will try to overcharge a foreigner. Most trips within Baku are not more than 10 manat, and trips within the downtown area are usually 5 manat or less. If the price seems too high, you can bargain with the driver or refuse the ride and find a different taxi.
- Do not rely on street names when giving directions, since many taxi drivers do not know street names. It’s better to give directions based on major landmarks such as a large hotel, Metro station, park, or embassy.
- Pay for taxis with small bills. Some taxi drivers will not be able to break large bills, and others will pretend they can’t, even if they could. Tipping is not usually expected.
- Few drivers speak English. It might help to have your destination written down so that you are sure the driver can understand it.
- Do not get into a taxi if there is someone else in the car with the driver.
- Wear a seatbelt whenever possible, even if locals do not or the driver tells you it isn’t necessary.
- Scrutinize your taxi driver before getting into the car, particularly at night. If the person seems suspicious or appears to have been drinking, do not get in the taxi.
- Women should avoid riding in taxis alone, particularly at night.
- Check with your Resident Director for advice on ordering a taxi by phone.

**Trains**

There are occasional incidences of robbery and theft on overnight trains. Always lock your cabin door and use the supplemental latch at night. Place all your belongings in the storage compartments under the lower bunk, and carry as few valuables and money as necessary. Understand in advance that you will likely share a cabin with strangers, so be guarded with your valuables.

**Emergency Procedures**

In case of emergency or severe illness, contact your Resident Director immediately. If you cannot reach your Resident Director, call other local TOF staff, whose numbers you will be given.

Make sure to keep minutes on your cell phone and the battery charged so that you can call and receive calls in case of emergency. If there is an emergency, your Resident Director and local staff director will work with American Councils staff in Baku and Washington, D.C., to find the best possible resolution to the situation.

AUL and local TOF staff will establish and inform you of an emergency meeting location during the in-country orientation.
Section IX: Returning Home

Reverse Culture Shock
When you return home, you may experience reverse culture shock. Reverse culture shock refers to feelings of anxiety, disorientation, uncertainty, or confusion and difficulties in adjustment after returning home from a period of living abroad. Often a person idealizes the home while abroad and may be upset to find that there are problems at home just as there were problems abroad. Many people also expect to feel completely familiar and comfortable when they return home and have trouble coping with changes that have occurred while they were away.

Symptoms of reverse culture shock may include:

- Frustration
- Feelings of alienation
- Mutual misunderstandings or differences in assumptions about life, study, or the future
- Restlessness
- Reverse homesickness: intensely missing people and places from abroad
- Boredom, insecurity, uncertainty, confusion
- Need for excessive sleep
- Negativity toward American attitudes or behaviors
- Feelings of resistance toward family and friends
- Irritability and the desire to have greater personal space

You may experience the following types of situations:

- People don’t seem to care about your experiences abroad
- It feels like nobody understands and you are different from your friends and family
- Others might appear jealous of your experiences abroad
- You might feel stuck in one place without foreseeable opportunities to travel again
- You might feel bogged down by the realities of everyday life: having to enroll in classes, plan for the future, pay off student loans, take care of a sick relative, etc.

Although these feelings are difficult to cope with, you should recognize that they are part of the normal process of readjusting. Just as you had to adjust to life abroad, you have to give yourself time to adjust to life at home again. Here are some tips to help cope:

- Find an outlet for sharing your experiences:
  - Volunteer to speak about your experience at a school.
  - Join a language circle or club where like-minded people gather.
  - Stay in touch with fellow TOF alumni and friends from your host country.
  - Join an international club at your school, where you can meet students from around the world.
- Continue to study your target language and read news about your host country.
- Recognize that things may have changed for people at home while you were away and show an interest in other people’s activities and interests. If you show an interest in their lives, others might be more willing to show an interest in your experiences abroad.
- Journal about your thoughts and emotions.
- Participate in TOF alumni activities.
- Try cooking your favorite Turkish or Azerbaijani food and invite your friends or family to eat it with you.
- Go through any photos you may have taken to re-experience your trip. Showing them to people and explaining what you saw will help bridge any gaps that may have developed.
• Search for future opportunities to study, travel, or live abroad. Consider other American Councils programs (www.americancouncils.org).
Appendix A: Contact Information

In-country emergency contact information will be provided during orientation.

American Councils for International Education, Washington, DC
1828 L Street NW, Suite 1200
Washington DC 20036

Contacts:
Victor Frank, Managing Director, vmfrank@americancouncils.org
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40 J. Jabbarli Street, 2nd Floor, Baku, Azerbaijan AZ1065
Tel/Fax: +994.12.436.7529/30/31
Office cell line: +994.50.225.8178

Azerbaijan University of Languages
134 Rashid Behbudov Street
Baku, Azerbaijan AZ1014
General Phone: (+994 12) 441-22-31
Fax: (+994 12) 441-22-72

U.S. Embassy in Baku
111 Azadlyg Prospecti
AZ1007 Baku, Azerbaijan
General Phone: (+994 12) 498-03-35
U.S. Embassy Duty Officer Phone: (+994 12) 498-03-35/6/7 (ask to speak to a Duty Officer)
(Baku is 9 hours ahead of Washington)
http://azerbaijan.usembassy.gov/index.html

Primary contact: Aidin Debaleh, Resident Director

In case of emergency, relatives and close friends should contact the American Councils Turkish Overseas Flagship Program office at 202-833-7522.
### Measurements

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<th>Conversion</th>
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<tr>
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### Temperature

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</table>
Appendix C: US Department of State Country Information - Azerbaijan

Embassies and Consulates

U.S. Embassy Baku

111 Azadliq Prospecti

AZ1007 Baku, Azerbaijan

Telephone: +(994) (12) 488-3300

Emergency After-Hours Telephone: +(994) (12) 488-3300

Fax: +(994) (12) 488-3695

ConsularBaku@state.gov

Destination Description

See the Department of State’s Fact Sheet on Azerbaijan for information on U.S.–Azerbaijan relations.

Entry, Exit & Visa Requirements

You must register with the State Migration Service (SMS) within ten calendar days of arrival if your intended period of stay is more than ten days. Visit the State Migration Service website for the most current registration information.

Some HIV/AIDS entry restrictions exist for visitors to, and foreign residents of, Azerbaijan. Medical tests are required for those applying for temporary or permanent residence permits and must be performed at designated clinics in Azerbaijan.

Residency applications by people with health issues, including HIV/AIDS, are reviewed by the State Migration Service and approved on a case-by-case basis. Please verify this information with the Embassy of Azerbaijan before you travel.

Law enforcement officials have at times detained individuals from Armenia or with Armenian surnames for questioning or denied them entry into the country.

Find information on dual nationality, prevention of international child abduction, and customs information on our websites.

Please be aware that traveling to the region of Nagorno-Karabakh and the surrounding territories via Armenia could make you ineligible to travel to Azerbaijan in the future.
Engaging in commercial activities inside Nagorno-Karabakh can make it difficult to conduct business inside Azerbaijan or with the Government of Azerbaijan. For more information on commercial activities in Nagorno-Karabakh, please visit the Country Commercial Guide.

For immunization information, please visit The Traveler’s Health page on the Center for Disease Control (CDC) Website.

**Safety and Security**

Credible information indicates terrorist groups continue plotting possible attacks in Europe. European governments are taking action to guard against terrorist attacks; however, all European countries remain potentially vulnerable to attacks from transnational terrorist organizations.

Avoid demonstrations and riots, which police have previously suppressed with force.

The U.S. Government is unable to provide emergency services to U.S. citizens in Nagorno-Karabakh.

Casualties continue to occur in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Be extremely cautious near the line of contact between the conflicting parties. Despite the declaration of a cessation in hostilities, intermittent gunfire and use of heavy weaponry, including landmines and mortars, continue. Landmines result in a handful of deaths and injuries each year.

U.S. citizens of Armenian descent may encounter anti-Armenian sentiments in Azerbaijan.

Exercise caution in the region of Nardaran, located 45 km from Baku on the Absheron Peninsula. Nardaran is culturally conservative and has been the site of several volatile anti-United States and anti-Israel protests. It has also been the subject of government raids, which have sometimes resulted in violence.

Crime: Crime is relatively low. The majority of reported crimes involve burglary, assault, or petty crime such as pickpocketing.

Be careful in areas that attract large crowds or are very isolated. Criminals have targeted foreigners walking alone, late at night, or under the influence of alcohol.

Some women have reported incidents of unwanted male attention, including groping and other inappropriate behavior while walking alone and taking taxis. Sexual assault may be underreported due to cultural stigma.

Financial scams are increasingly common. While the majority involves internet dating, there are reports of scams related to fraudulent real estate deals, licensing requirements, and travel advertisements.

There are reports of increased credit and bank card fraud, such as credit card skimming.

See the Department of State and the FBI pages for information on scams.

Victims of Crime: Report crimes to the local police by dialing 102 and contact the U.S. Embassy at (+994 12) 488 3300. Local authorities are responsible for investigating and prosecuting crimes.
See our webpage on help for [U.S. victims of crime overseas](#).

We can:

- Help you find appropriate medical care
- Assist you in reporting a crime to the police
- Contact relatives or friends with your written consent
- Explain the local criminal justice process in general terms
- Provide a list of local attorneys
- Provide our information on victim’s compensation programs in the United States
- Provide an emergency loan for repatriation to the United States and/or limited medical support in cases of destitution
- Help you find accommodation and arrange flights home
- Replace a stolen or lost passport

Domestic Violence: U.S. citizen victims of domestic violence may contact the U.S. Embassy for assistance. Local resources for victims of domestic violence include shelters, medical assistance, and legal aid. Victims may contact the State Committee for Family, Women, and Children Affairs by telephone at +994 12 498 00 92 or office@scfwca.gov.az for assistance.

For further information:

Enroll in the [Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP)](#) to receive security messages and make it easier to locate you in an emergency.

Call us in Washington at 1-888-407-4747 toll-free in the United States and Canada or 1-202-501-4444 from other countries from 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. Eastern Standard Time, Monday through Friday (except U.S. federal holidays).

State Department's travel website for, Worldwide Caution, Travel Warnings, and Travel Alerts.

Follow us on Twitter and Facebook.

See [traveling safely abroad](#) for useful travel tips.

**Local Laws & Special Circumstances**

Criminal Penalties: You are subject to local laws. If you violate local laws, even unknowingly, you may be expelled, arrested, or imprisoned. Your U.S. passport will not prevent you from being arrested or prosecuted.

Furthermore, some crimes are also prosecutable in the United States, regardless of local law. For examples, see our website on crimes against minors abroad and the Department of Justice website.

Arrest Notifications in Azerbaijan: If you are arrested or detained, ask the police or prison officials to notify the U.S. Embassy immediately. See our webpage for further information.

There are often delays in consular notification.

You can be legally detained in jail for up to three months during an investigation.
It is illegal to take photographs of military installations and equipment. Police may stop you even if you take photographs of non-military sites, like oil fields, buildings, and public squares. Cooperate with the police.

Special Circumstances: Azerbaijan has mandatory military service for male citizens ages 18 to 35. If Azerbaijan considers you a citizen, you could face fines or arrest if you have not completed your military service. Dual citizens may renounce their Azerbaijani citizenship at any Azerbaijani Embassy or Consulate.

Faith-Based Travelers: See the Department of State’s International Religious Freedom Report

LGBTI Travelers: Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) individuals are not specifically protected by antidiscrimination laws. Societal intolerance, discrimination, and violence based on sexual orientation and gender identity remain a problem in Azerbaijan. It is not illegal to organize LGBT events, but societal intolerance generally prevents LGBT events. LGBTI individuals have reported that employers sometimes find other reasons to fire LGBTI employees due to their sexual orientation. One of the main concerns for the local LGBTI community is the perceived failure of law enforcement agencies to act on violations of LGBTI individuals’ rights and indifference to investigating crimes committed against the LGBTI community in Azerbaijan. The Department of State’s 2015 Human Rights Report documents numerous incidents of police brutality against individuals based on sexual orientation and noted that authorities did not investigate or punish those responsible.

See our LGBTI Travel Information page and section six of the Human Rights Report for further details.

Travelers Who Require Accessibility Assistance: Individuals with disabilities may find accessibility and accommodation very different from in the United States.

No laws require access to public or other buildings, information, or communications for persons with disabilities.

Accessibility for those with disabilities is very limited throughout the country, including stores, sidewalks, road crossings, most tourist spots, and public transportation.

Many older buildings, including buildings visited by tourists, do not have elevators or facilities to accommodate handicap access.

Other than in major international hotels in Baku, there are few handicap-accessible toilets.

Students: See our students abroad page and FBI travel tips.

Women Travelers: See our travel tips for women travelers.

Health

International SOS operates one medical clinic in Baku that provides adequate 24-hour care for minor medical problems and limited emergencies. We do not advise undergoing surgery in Azerbaijan unless it is for a life-and-death emergency. Bring adequate amounts of prescription medicine in its original packaging, along with your doctor’s prescription for the duration of your visit, as pharmacies often do not carry all brands or doses.

- We do not pay medical bills. Be aware that U.S. Medicare is not valid overseas.
• Tuberculosis is prevalent.

Medical Insurance: Make sure your health insurance plan provides coverage overseas. Most care providers overseas only accept cash payments. See our webpage for more information on insurance providers for overseas coverage.

We strongly recommend supplemental insurance to cover medical evacuation.

Vaccinations: Be up to date on all vaccinations recommended by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Further health information:

• The World Health Organization
• U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

Travel & Transportation

Road Conditions and Safety: The information below is provided for general reference only:

Fatalities from traffic accidents are high and continue to rise each year. Driving in Baku is dangerous.

Reckless driving is very common. Many drivers do not pay attention to traffic regulations, signals, lane markings, pedestrians, or other drivers. Drivers often travel at extremely high speeds, and accidents are frequent and often serious.

Older Sections of the roadway system are poorly constructed and poorly lighted. Many rural roads are largely unpaved. Driving hazards, such as open manholes, debris, and potholes are common in Baku.

Unfinished road sections may be extremely dangerous due to lack of proper construction and hazard signage.

Watch out for pedestrians. Pedestrians routinely disregard vehicles, crosswalks, signs and signals, and general safety awareness.

Traffic Laws: Routine traffic stops are common. If you are driving, keep all required documents with you, including passport or local registration documents, driver’s license, vehicle registration documents, and proof of insurance.

Public Transportation:

The Baku metro system is an inexpensive option for transportation. Security cameras provide excellent coverage of all metro platforms throughout the system. There are police units at each metro station, and bag checks may be carried out at the entrance to each station.

Because safety and licensing standards do not match those found in the United States, U.S. Embassy personnel are discouraged from using public buses.

For safety, we recommend using only marked taxis if you chose to take one. Public transportation throughout the rest of the country remains overcrowded and poorly-maintained.

See the Azerbaijani Ministry of Transport and our road safety page for more information.
Visit the website of Azerbaijan’s Tourism Information Center.

Aviation Safety Oversight: The U.S. Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) has assessed the Government of Azerbaijan’s State Civil Aviation Administration as being in compliance with International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) aviation safety standards. Further information may be found on the FAA’s safety assessment page.
Appendix D: Azerbaijan 2015 Crime and Safety Report

Overall Crime and Safety Situation

Crime Rating: Medium

Crime Threats

Criminal acts committed against foreigners are infrequent occurrences in Baku. The majority of reported crimes involve Azerbaijani citizens, with burglary and assault being the most common.

Expatriates are at greater risk of being victims of petty crime in areas that attract large crowds or are very isolated. Petty theft, such as pickpocketing, while not common, is perpetrated against foreign citizens in Baku. Late-night targeted attacks against lone males are the most common crimes perpetrated against foreigners and often involve alcohol.

Some Western women have reported incidents of unwanted male attention, including groping and other inappropriate behavior, while walking on the streets alone. While the number of reported sexual assaults is statistically very low, they are likely underreported due to cultural stigmatization. In 2014, the Regional Security Office (RSO) was informed of three rape cases; one stalking case; one case in which the use of a rape drug was attempted, although the assault was thwarted; and one sexual assault case against U.S. citizens in Baku. The RSO is aware of instances in which men have forced their way into a female’s apartment in an apparent attempt to have sexual relations. These instances are believed to be partially the result of serious, cultural miscues.

Azerbaijan is a traditional cash society. However, the introduction of credit and bank cards has given rise to burgeoning crime targeting their usage.

Registered Crimes 2014

Total Crimes: 24,607 (14 percent grave crimes, 86 percent non-grave crimes)

167 people were prosecuted for illegal possession of firearms.

Nine criminal gangs comprised of a total of 19 people were arrested for human trafficking.

3,046 cases (801 cases of possession for sale) involving 58 criminal groups led to 150 people arrested on narcotics charges and 673 kg of illicit drugs seized.

1,223 crimes were reported as a result of victim/witness calls to 102.

269 crimes were disclosed using Baku city cameras.

2,193 fugitives were detected, including 73 by other Interpol countries and 27 for other Interpol countries.

Total number of people fined: 2,336,488

Areas of Concern

U.S. citizens are encouraged to exercise caution if traveling to the village of Nardaran, which is located 30 km from Baku on the Absheron Peninsula.
Travelers are cautioned to avoid travel to Nagorno-Karabakh and the surrounding occupied areas. Nagorno-Karabakh is a contested area in the southeastern portion of the lesser Caucasus Mountains. Fighting erupted over control of the region in the early 1990s. Although a cease-fire has been in effect since 1994, there are regular exchanges of gunfire across the line of contact. Some areas may be heavily land mined. In the autumn of 2014, violence along the line of contact escalated. Open sources reported the downing of a helicopter, the death of its crew, and 19-27 soldiers killed in 2014, in what has been called the deadliest year in recent history. It is not possible to enter the self-proclaimed “Republic of Nagorno-Karabakh,” which is not recognized by the U.S., from Azerbaijan. Photographing these areas is discouraged and may result in detention.

**Transportation-Safety Situation**

Road Safety and Road Conditions

Azerbaijan has been undergoing a massive infrastructure improvement program, with many major highways and main thoroughfares under construction. Although the newer sections of the road system are significantly improved, the unfinished sections remain dangerous. Road conditions are generally poor, with better conditions in larger cities. Driving hazards (debris, sinkholes, potholes) are common. Roadways outside of metropolitan areas are poorly lit at night, and the lack of visibility at night compounds daytime driving hazards. Construction zones may or may not be marked or may be indistinguishable until the driver is upon them. Pedestrians contribute to the hazardous driving conditions by disregarding vehicles, crosswalks, and signals.

Driving is risky. Traffic police enforce traffic laws inconsistently. Drivers do not pay attention to traffic regulations, signals, lane markings, pedestrians, or other drivers. Drivers often travel at extremely high speeds, and accidents are frequent and serious. Exercising extreme care during winter is recommended, as local authorities do not clear roadways of snow or ice, increasing the rate of accidents.

Public Transportation Conditions

The Baku metro system is an inexpensive and good option for transportation. Security cameras provide excellent coverage of all metro platforms. There are police units at each metro station, and bag checks may be carried out at entrances.

Use established taxi companies and/or professional private drivers for travel. Most taxis are not metered, and foreigners are often overcharged. Visitors should be sure to negotiate the fare before entering a taxi. Asking for a reasonable fare is expected and appropriate. The 189 telephone taxi service will provide the fare in advance and specify the license number of the taxi to be dispatched. Purple London-style taxi cabs (9000) are metered, but passengers should confirm that the meter is activated appropriately. It is not recommended for people to use unmarked taxis. Hiring a private car through a reputable hotel is generally regarded as safe (although more expensive).
Other Travel Conditions

Sidewalks are often uneven, have loose stones or bricks, and have potholes. Many sidewalks, public courtyards, and park walkways are paved with marble. Marble edges of sidewalks and marble paving stones are extremely slippery when wet or icy. The number of injuries resulting from falling on marble-paved walkways increases significantly during rainy or icy conditions. Sidewalks do not meet U.S. standards for handicap accessibility.

Political, Economic, Religious, and Ethnic Violence

The political situation in Baku is stable.

Political Violence Rating: Medium

Local, Regional, and International Terrorism Threats/Concerns

In June 2014, local authorities arrested 20 people in Badamdar for being members of what was termed a “radical religious group.” The arrests coincided with a raid on the Lezgi Mosque in the historic core of Baku. The arrests were reported to be associated with the recruitment of foreign fighters for the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant.

Terrorism Rating: High

Anti-American/Anti-Western Sentiment

In early 2009, Nardaran was the site of numerous anti-American and anti-Israel protests. On January 21, 2015, protestors in Nardaran burned the flags of the U.S., France, and Israel in protest of the French magazine Charlie Hebdo. The community has had several violent confrontations with the government over social and economic issues. The people of Nardaran tend to be suspicious of outsiders, including other Azeris, and have an anti-Western outlook.

Civil Unrest

Demonstrations are infrequent. However, since January 2013, there have been periodic demonstrations relating to education reforms, military hazing, and disapproval of other government actions (or inactions). Opposition demonstrations are normally accompanied by a heavy police presence. Violence associated with demonstrations is not common but may occur. The authorities may impose high fines on those found guilty of unauthorized protesting/gathering or sentence them to administrative detention. Visitors should avoid demonstrations, as hostile elements within crowds can escalate the situation.

Religious/Ethnic Violence

Though rare, violence motivated by religious or ethnic differences does occur. Rural areas are generally less tolerant of religious and ethnic differences than metropolitan areas.
Post-specific Concerns

Environmental Hazards

Azerbaijan is located in a seismically active area, and minor earthquakes are common. A significant earthquake occurred on November 25, 2000, measuring 5.9, and another quake measuring 6.3 followed a minute later, the strongest experienced in 150 years. According to the U.S. Geological Survey, the epicenter was in the Caspian Sea, some 25 km to the south south-east of Baku. An earthquake measuring 4.5 affected Baku on February 10, 2014. According to the U.S. Geological Survey, its epicenter was Saatli (60 km to the south-west of Baku). Due to the risk of earthquakes in the region, U.S. citizens are encouraged to maintain a 72-hour kit with basic emergency supplies, food, water, and clothing.

Personnel Background Concerns

Baku is metropolitan, and its population is more experienced with and tolerant of foreigners. There are fewer of these attributes farther outside Baku and in more rural areas. The RSO is aware of one racially-based crime in which an African-American NGO worker was severely beaten near the Dagestani border.

While Azerbaijani society is not particularly tolerant of open expressions of homosexuality, there have been no incidents of physical violence toward individuals. In Baku, there is an active LGBT community, but in the regions there is little or no tolerance.

Police Response

The police presence in Baku is significant. However, most officers are not experienced in dealing with Westerners, and the number of English-speaking policemen is low. Outside of the capital and in rural areas, this is more pronounced. The level of police training and response changes from region to region and unit to unit.

Police may stop individuals and ask to inspect identity documents. All citizens and visitors must present an official form of identification (passport or driver’s license or a certified copy thereof) to an officer upon request. Failure to produce identification may result in temporary detention. If stopped by police, drivers should have all required documents with them, including a passport or local registration documents, driver’s license, vehicle registration documents, and proof of insurance.

How to Handle Incidents of Police Detention or Harassment

Solicitations for bribes are common during police traffic stops. Drivers are encouraged not to pay bribes; they should request that the officer issue a ticket.

Crime Victim Assistance

The emergency number for police is 102. An English-speaking operator is available 24-hours a day and should be requested. The Ministry of Emergency Services also connects calls made to 911 directly through to 102 for those
foreigners who are unaware of the 102 number.

If U.S. citizens become a victim of crime, they should report the incident to the Embassy’s American Citizens Services section at (994 12) 488-3300. In addition, the Ministry of Interior has established an office to assist foreigners victimized by crime that can be reached at (994 12) 590-9532 or after hours at (994 12) 490-9452.

Police/Security Agencies

The Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) is the central executive agency responsible for public security, including the prevention and exposure of criminal offences within the framework of authorities provided by national legislation.

The Transportation Police Department, which falls under the MIA, is responsible for law enforcement activities on roads, railroad, air, and water transportation facilities, as well as environmental crimes in the basin of the Caspian Sea and the national network of rivers, lakes, and other aquatic resources.

The Ministry of Emergency Situations is charged with responding to natural disasters, industrial accidents, fires, and collapsed buildings and is responsible for other public safety response and accident prevention.

Medical Emergencies

Contact Information for Recommended Hospitals/Clinics

SOS International: A private urgent-care clinic staffed by Western doctors 24/7. Payment is in Azerbaijani Manats or credit cards. Billing receipts are insurance-ready.
Location: Safarov 1, Baku
Tel: (992 12) 493-5003

Central Clinical Hospital: A private clinic and hospital with a large Turkish influence and 24/7 emergency room. This is an adequate, basic-care hospital with excellent care in cardiology. Some doctors speak English. Payment is in Manats only. The equipment is new, but skill in using and interpreting results may be rudimentary.
Hospital Location: 76 Parliament Prospect
Ambulatory: 5 Zarifa Aliyeva Street
Tel: (994 12) 492-1092

MediClub: A primary health care clinic that also provides basic emergency care and some pediatric care and can do minor surgery. Best emergency pediatrics.
Location: 45 U. Hajibayov Street
Tel: (994 12) 497-0911

Recommended Air Ambulance Services

SOS can assist in emergency medical evacuation.
Location: Safarov 1, Baku
CDC Country-specific Vaccination and Health Guidance


Tips on How to Avoid Becoming a Victim

Scams

Some American citizens have reported being victims of crimes that occur late at night and in bars frequented by Westerners. The crime occurs when a patron is approached by a young woman who asks the male individual to buy her a drink. After buying the woman a drink and talking for a while, the customer is presented with a bill for 250 AZN (U.S.$300). When the customer protests, he is approached by several men, detained, and forced to pay the full amount under threat of physical violence.

Situational Awareness Best Practices

The RSO recommends that U.S. citizens remain aware of their surroundings at all times and travel with a companion if possible, especially at night. The potential for crime is real, and basic security precautions should always be exercised. Visitors are advised not to walk alone at night. Visitors should carry a copy of their passport and visa at all times. Visitors should vary their times and routes, especially from their place of residence or hotel to their work locations.

Visitors are advised to maintain a low profile and to carry only the amount of money necessary for the day’s activities. Whenever possible, visitors should keep cash and identification in their front pockets. A lost credit card, driver’s license, and/or other documents can be difficult to replace. Purses should be tucked into the crook of the arm and protected while going about daily activities. If carrying a bag with a shoulder strap, keep a hand over the clasp and do not allow the bag to hang freely.

To help protect against credit card fraud, the RSO recommends that U.S. citizens notify their banks and credit card companies with the dates and locations of their travel and closely monitor their accounts once they have returned from travel. Credit cards typically have more protection than bank debit cards. Avoid using debit cards tied directly to checking or savings accounts.
U.S. Embassy Location and Contact Information

Embassy Address and Hours of Operation

111 Azadliq Prospekt, Baku, Azerbaijan 1007
American Citizens Services hours: by appointment only. Monday-Thursday, 2:00 p.m.-4:30 p.m., and Fridays 9:00 a.m.-12:00 noon, except for American and Azerbaijani holidays.

Embassy Contact Numbers

Azerbaijan Country Code: 994
Baku City Code: 12 (012 if calling from a local mobile phone)
Embassy Operator: (994 12) 488-3300
American Citizens Services (Consular Section): (994 12) 488-3300; ask for the duty officer after-hours
RSO: (994 12) 488-3300; ask for the RSO
Marine Post One: (994 12) 488-3333
Website: http://azerbaijan.usembassy.gov/index.html.

Embassy Guidance

U.S. citizens are encouraged to register with the Department of State’s Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP) to become part of the Warden System in order to receive important information in the event of an emergency or crisis.

Because of the existing state of hostilities, consular services are not available to Americans in Nagorno-Karabakh.

OSAC Country Council Information

The OSAC Country Council meets quarterly in Baku. The primary point of contact is RSO Daniel B. Hunt, reachable by email at HuntDB@state.gov or BakuRSO@state.gov or by telephone at (994 12) 488-3300. To reach the OSAC Europe team, please email OSACEUR@state.gov.