



## THE SHEKI-QABALA REGION

The Sheki-Qabala region is located in the northwestern part of the country, up to 1000 meters above sea level on the slopes of the Greater Caucasian Ridge. The total population of the region's 68 villages is 175 700 people. The region is the most popular destination in Azerbaijan for domestic tourism: each year around 15000 tourists, 40 % domestic, visit the region.

The administrative centre of the region, Sheki, is an ancient city with rich culture and a variety of historical monuments. Through the centuries, the region has been known for its qualified craftsmen working with pottery, copper work, silk production, painting, embroidery as well as many other traditional crafts. Many of the time-honoured skills are still being passed on to the younger generations.



Sheki has also been an important stop along the Great Silk Road that used to link European, Indian, Arabian and Far Eastern traders and merchants for centuries. A traditional caravanserai, a roadside inn for travelers, has also been fully restored at the center of Sheki and it currently works as a high end hotel.

Apart from the restored caravanserai, some of the other historical tourist attractions of the region include the following:



Palace of Sheki Khan, the summer residence for the local Khans, is located inside the restored castle walls. The palace boasts traditional shebeke glass mosaic windows that have up to 7 000 details per square meter as well as detailed frescoes depicting flowers, animals, battle and hunting scenes painted during the eighteenth century. Near the palace, work spaces for traditional artists including a shebeke glass mosaic master have been restored and are open to public.

The Albanian Christian church of Saint Eliseus, the oldest church in the Caucasus region, is situated in the village of Kish.

The Fazil village labyrinth built in the third century B.C. nowadays displays primeval artifacts and the everyday life of the ancient villagers.

Juma Masjidi, the Grand Central Mosque, dates back to 1750 when it was built by Chelebi Khan.

The potential for tourism is high: the region is well connected by road and rail to Baku and Tbilisi, it offers various historical and natural sights as well as accommodation and restaurants operating on international standards. However, development is also in huge demand in many sectors of the tourism business. Director of the Sheki Tourism Information Centre Nasib Imamaliyev (2014) states that the most important short term objective and development goal is improving the marketing of the local handicrafts. He also points out that development must be targeted towards the small villages around Sheki, many of which have historical and natural sights and unique traditions to offer. Some villages even have their own language and customs not comparable with any other village in the region.