



# AZERBAIJAN CUISINE





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# **THE AZERBAIJANI CUISINE**





The Azerbaijani cuisine is one of the richest, most ancient and delicious cuisines in the world.

Not only is it about meals and techniques of their cooking. The cuisine in Azerbaijan is an integral part of the country's multi-centennial culture, harmoniously absorbing local history, philosophy, dietary and nutritional traditions, culture of feast, physiology, hygiene, ethics, aesthetics, poetry and many other aspects that constitute the basis of the Azerbaijani identity.

Azerbaijani Cuisine has been created for millennia by our ancestors residing in the territories contemporary Republic of Azerbaijan, the Southern Azerbaijan (nowadays Northern provinces of Iran), Iravan Khanate (duchy), Zangazur and Geoycha regions (nowadays Armenia), Borchaly District (Georgia), Derbend (Autonomous Republic of Dagestan, Russia) and many other areas of the region.





Climate is one of the major natural factors instrumental in the formation of the cuisine. Azerbaijan is truly blessed with an enormous climatic diversity. Nine climatic zones with very diverse and versatile flora and fauna create favorable conditions for rich and diverse cuisine. That said, besides rich flora and fauna development of an affluent cuisine requires traditions of agricultural production and processing which in turn necessitates high level of farming and cattle breeding in the respective society.

Another important aspect in the history of cuisine is that complex dishes from pastry and grain could only appear when agricultural production exceeds vital needs of the population. Surplus in grain created favorable conditions for people to experiment and thus come up with more complicated dishes capable of withstanding the test of time. Their recipes passed from one generation to another became a public asset and formed the basis for the national cuisine. Archaeological discovery of cheten, an archaic type of colander weaved from reed, provided an evidence of grain processing and cooking in the territory of Azerbaijan dating back to the 5-6th centuries B.C. On the other hand, this indicates rich grain yields and high level of agricultural production in the area typical for that period.

Large harvests in grain, developed agricultural production and processing supported by ramified system of irrigation provide a clear evidence of the settled lifestyle in Azerbaijan in this period. It should be also noted that deeply-rooted traditions of farming and cattle breeding in Azerbaijan turned the country into one of the major granaries for the whole region of the Caucasus. For example, back in 1888 the Georgian scholar M.I.Tkshelov provided the following comments regarding the Azerbaijani population of Iravan Khanate: "In rural areas they are engaged in tillage, grain and fruit cultivation so typical for the lowlands, whereas in yaylags (summer pastures – T.A.) they are involved in cattle-breeding. Due to the fact that Azerbaijanis reside on the river banks they should be considered land tillers".

I.L.Segal in 1902 noted that "Muslim people mainly live on the banks of the river like Bazaarchay, Ayrichay, Bergushad, Ohuchuchay, Choundurchay, as well as along



their tributaries, and on the banks of the Araxes (Araz – T.A.). As far as Azerbaijanis are concerned, they live in the plains very suitable for farming”.

Notes by various travelers, scholars, merchants and diplomats backed up by archaeological findings provide sufficient evidence of centuries-old traditions of farming and horticulture in Azerbaijan where wheat, oat, rice, sesame, soybeans, beet-roots, melons, water-melons, grapes, apples, pomegranates, quince and other products had been cultivated from times immemorial.

Surplus of the products mentioned above, as well as fish, caviar, honey, saffron, etc. was traditionally exported to the neighboring areas.

It goes without saying that Caucasus was the major market for the foodstuffs produced in Azerbaijan. According to U.D.Angabadze and N.G. Volkova “in the markets of Tiflis cheese was traded by the Ossetians and the Azerbaijanis, as well as by the Borchalians (Azerbaijanis from Borchaly district of Georgia – T.A.) and residents of Geoycha lake (Azerbaijani residents of nowadays lake of Sevan in Armenia). Since trout was in high demand in the Tiflis markets, it was also delivered from Azerbaijan” (U.D.Angadze, N.G.Volkova, Old Tiflis)

Thus with tremendous food production and processing traditions the Azerbaijanis were among those Caucasian nations that historically had enormous opportunities for developing a rich and versatile cuisine recognized far beyond the region of the Caucasus. Influence of the Azerbaijani cuisine may be traced even in some Persian and Arabic dishes. E.g. Javad Hoyat in *The Comparison of Two Languages* mentions about 60 culinary definitions of the Azerbaijani origin in the Persian language.

Etymology of some of the traditional Azerbaijani dishes oftentimes provides an interesting insight into the technology of their cooking. For instance, names of dishes like gatlama, dolma, dogramach, ezme clearly indicate the methods of their preparation, i.e. gatlama means layering; dolma - filling, dogramach - cutting, ezme - pressing, etc. Dishes like gizartma, partlama, govurma, bozartma, dondurma,









etc. indicate various ways of thermal processing, names like dindili kufta, nazik yarpag hangal, juha, lyula-kebab indicate geometrical forms of the meals, yarpag dolmasi, yarma hashil, duyu chancuru, sebze-kuku, bal-gaymag point to the major ingredients of the dish, gatig, sulu hangal, horra emphasize the food's condition; turshu, shoraba, shirin nazik stress organoleptic properties of the dish (i.e. sweet, sour, plain etc.), sajichi, tava-kebab, kufta, churek the type of heating tools; Ganja pakhlavasy, Tovuz hangaly, Garabagh bastirmasi, Sheki halvasi – specific areas of the dishes' origin.

Another interesting detail worth hereby mentioning is that oftentimes a dish with the same name could have numerous varieties and types, like for instance dolma with about 30 varieties or plov (pilaff) with almost 200 options.

Along with the climate type of oven is another serious factor influencing any ethnic cuisine. For example, a great number of baked, boiled and stewed dishes in Slavic cuisines (e.g. the Russian cuisine) are this way or another bound with the possibilities of the Russian oven. The very existence and development of the Azerbaijani cuisine is closely related with various types of open and covered ovens and barbeques, such as tandir, kura, buhari, kulfa, chala odjag, sadj, mangal and etc.

Prior to utilizing natural gas and electric power for cooking people use wood, charcoal and dry dung (kizyak) as fuel. Use of kizyak is of a special interest for it substantially reduces the need to chop trees and bushes and hence prevents deforestation. Apart from this, places of kizyak storage have no negative impact on respiratory organs. According to the Indian scientists' research the smoke of kizyak has antiseptic properties as well.

Another indication of the overall level of the culinary culture is the use of clean water and the attitude towards water. Since the very ancient times the Azerbaijanis divided water into the black and the white one depending on the concentration of metals and minerals. Only so-called white water is used for making drinks and cooking. The Azerbaijanis have a long-time tradition of planting weeping willows



on the river banks and water channels (aryk) for the roots and branches of this tree are known for their antiseptic effect. Sometimes branches of weeping willow or some pieces of silver were put into the water for purifying purposes. Sediments and other impurities were oftentimes treated by apricot kernels. One of the earliest natural ways of cleaning water applied in Azerbaijan is called su dashy (the water stone). This is a hollow pyramid made of black and white sandstone installed upside down on a wooden stand with a tank for clean water beneath.

While filtering water through the stone people could also use willow branches or silver stuff as well. Water leaking through the pores in the stone was collected underneath drop by drop. Not only does the water processed in this way get cleaned, but it is also cooled down due to pressure difference.

Clay distillation device of the 7-8 century A.D. discovered in the district of Gabala provides an interesting evidence of alcohol production in the territory of Azerbaijan. From the standpoint of cuisine this means a broad assortment of soft and alcoholic beverages.

Historic links and ties with neighboring or distant cultures is another important factor impacting ethnic cuisines. Very advantageous geographic location of Azerbaijan at the intersection of trading routes led to intense contacts with numerous cultures, both neighboring and distant. Long-





term contacts with the Arabic merchants made the Azerbaijanis familiar with coffee, the Chinese tradesmen using the Great Silk Route introduced the culture of tea. Contacts with the Russian and other Slavic cultures left the legacy of famous vegetable soups like schi and borsch. Rapid development of the oil industry in Baku in late 19-early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and huge influx of newcomers created conditions for a greater exposure to the European cuisine, still prevalent in the restaurant culture.

That said, being a part and parcel of the Turkic culture the Azerbaijani cuisine has certain commonalities with cuisines of certain Turkic nations. Cuisine of Seljuk Turks, particularly that of the Anatolia region of Turkey is the closest to us so far.

Religion and traditional beliefs constitute another important factor influencing the cuisine. Zoroastrian (fire-worshipper) cults professed in Azerbaijan since the times immemorial left an indelible imprint the people's philosophy, mentality, customs and cuisine. Traditional reverence towards fire and hearth (ojag) as a symbol of a household has this very origin. Dissemination of Christianity in Azerbaijan in the first centuries of our era left an obvious impact on the national cuisine, and the influence of Islam is something that goes without saying.







Refusal from golden utensils, pork, prohibition of alcohol are but a few of the traditions introduced by Islam. The cuisine was also heavily influenced by a number of religious holidays and fasts. In fact, dietary traditions related to certain religious prohibitions and taboos are a subject of a separate research. What should be hereby admitted is that dietary requirements of Islam, no matter how rigorous, were scientifically substantiated. For instance one of the Islamic recommendations is to abstain from eating peeled off fruit and grains. Recent researches proved that majority of vitamins and microelements are found in peel.

Beef has been a part of nutrition in Azerbaijan since very olden times. Some sources indicate the use of horseflesh at certain periods of initial cuisine development. Nowadays no horseflesh is used in the Azerbaijani diet any more. Some elderly people may recall the taste of camel meat, especially used for gutabs (flat cakes stuffed with either meat or other filling). Meat of wild animals is not infrequent in the Azerbaijani cuisine today. That said, meat of young female and emasculated animals is given preference for being softer and more delicious. Meat of animals from mountain areas is highly valued. Unfrozen meat is considered preferable. The advantages are given to the fresh meat in comparison with the frozen one. Besides meat, fatty tails of sheep and certain internal organs are used as well.

For centuries people developed techniques of storing fresh meat. Sheep fat was used for frying meat on clay jugs. Besides this, storage of dried meat (duhuj at) was widely practiced. The Azerbaijani cuisine uses a lot of eggs of both wild and domesticated birds. Poultry, such as geese, ducks, turkey and chicken is also popular. As far as wild birds are concerned, the fall is considered the most appropriate season for hunting them.

Domesticated birds are bred in special conditions with limited capacities to move and special fodder leading to fast fattening. Meat of fattened birds is considered to be of a higher quality than that of the animals. The culture of diet in Azerbaijan has a long tradition of using ground meat, like in dolma, kufte, etc.

Presence of large water basins, such as the Caspian Sea, the Kura and the Araz rivers, lakes and water reservoirs (Goygol, Jeyranbatan, Geoycha, etc.) enriched the Azerbaijani cuisine with lots of fish. Fish is cooked both whole and in parts and may be also served minced. Black and red caviar have been traditionally popular.

Eggs are another important component of the local diet. Chicken and quail eggs are widely used in the daily meals, as well as in such popular dishes as *gayganag*, *chalhama*, *kuku* and *chyghyrtma*.

Multiple dairy products of the Azerbaijani cuisine include *agizsud*, *boulama*, *karamaz*, *gatyg*, *pendir*, *doog*, *gaymag*, *chiya*, *ayran*, *shor*, etc. which are used as main ingredients in dairy dishes like *dovga*, *dogramach*, *ayranashi*, *atilama*, *sudlu sayig* etc.

The Azerbaijanis have a particular reverence to bread in its very various forms and types, such as *juha*, *fetir*, *lavash*, *sengah*, *hamrali tendir-chorek*. A usual course of meals in an Azerbaijani family starts with bread as the staple food. An oath on bread is considered equally powerful as swearing on Holy Qur'an.

Pastry products occupy a special place in our cuisine. As it was noted before, combination of pastry with meat is generally typical for the Turkic cuisines. As the historian Farig Sumer mentions in *Ogoozi*, by eating *tutmaj* (traditional Turkic meal made of pastry, meat and beans), as well as other dishes of this type cooked of flour and meat, such as *hangal*, *sulu hangal*, *yarpag hangal*, *goorza*, *dushbara*, *hashil*, *horra* and other pastry meals primarily cooked in winter time) the Seljuk Turks were proving their Turkic origin.

With the weather getting warmer the share of meals cooked of flour and meat in the daily diet is gradually decreasing giving way to more vegetal meals made of both cultivated and wild plants, such as *kyata*, *soyug*, *dovga*, *ajab-sandal* and others. Numerous salads are made using wood louse, spinach, beetroot, mint, eggplants, tomatoes, etc.







Dishes cooked from grain and beans have a special role in the local diet. Sayig, plov (pilaff), chilov, govurga and hadig are just a few to mention. Plov (pilaff) is considered the most delicious among them. Since Azerbaijan has a very old tradition of rice cultivation, there are about 200 various types of plov (pilaff). In some areas of Azerbaijan rice was used as a substitute of bread. For instance, in old-days Lankaran, south Azerbaijan, bread was not used at all.

Substantial production of sugar in Azerbaijan explains a significant place of pastry and confectionery in the local cuisine. Initially sugar was manufactured from sugar cane promoted by Count Potyemkin following the order of the Russian Empress Catherine 2. This type of sugar was called takhta gand (wooden sugar). The other type of sugar was extracted from beetroots. This kind of sugar was considered raw and non-refined even though the historical sources mentioned the process of sugar refinement in the territory of Azerbaijan back in the 10th century A.D. Nizami Ganjavi, the famous poet of the 12-th century, reported of this raw sugar produced from reed and beetroot.

Besides this, another type of sugar called nabat was extracted from fruit. A number of honeys and sweet drinks like bekmez, doshab were used either as deserts or for medicinal purposes. Traditional sweets and baked confectionery included paklava, shakarbura, rahatlukum, richal, sudjuk, peshmek, peshvenk, ter halvasy, guymag, gatlama, juha halvasy, etc. Most of them constitute a true pride of the Azerbaijani cuisine. Using honey, sugar, bekmez and fruits the Azerbaijanis succeeded in creating some truly outstanding jams, marmalades and other confections with cornelian cherry, quince, cherry, figs, nuts, rose petals, etc.

The skin of animals is used for food storage and processing up to now. Some types of feta and cottage cheese (motal pendir and motal shor) are prepared in sheepskin. Choban basdyrma is another famous dish cooked in sheepskin when meat cut into small pieces, mixed with salt, thyme and other seasoning is wrapped into a piece of lamb skin and stewed either in smoldering charcoal or in traditional ovens like tendir or kure.





In the northern areas of Azerbaijan, such as Gabala and Sheki, stones are still used for certain types of cooking. The fire is set underneath a flat stone size 1.5 to 2 meters. Once the stone gets hot enough, lamb fat is spread upon it hot enough, lamb fat is spread upon it and the meat (goat, mutton, veal, chicken, fish, etc.) is laid upon it and pressed by another flat stone. The dish cooked in this manner is called dasharasy, i.e. something in-between the stones.

Tools and utensils made of animal skin, stone, wood, clay, glass and metal are still widely used in the Azerbaijani cuisine. Even today shepherds of Ismayilly district use sheepskin as sort of frying pans, particularly in summer grasslands in some remote highland areas like Laghyj.

Tinned vegetables (tutma) made with the help of sour base and salt (turshular and shorbalar) are very popular in Azerbaijan as well.

Medicinal and dietary meals have a special place in the Azerbaijan cuisine. Dishes like umaj, hash, horra, guymag have been used for treating various diseases for ages. A large portion of the national cuisine is related to various rites and holidays. Dishes from semeni (wheat seeds) are made only during Khydyr Nebi Holiday, whereas hedik and govurga are served for the first tooth of a baby and the last tooth of a centenarian.

During Kichik chille, one of the winter holidays celebrated as a forerunner of the spring holiday of Novruz (50 days prior the vernal equinox on March 21), people serve water-melons specially stored for this day since summer.

Drinks constitute a special part of the national cuisine. Araq, i.e. vodka infused on mulberry, cornelian cherry and some other plants is used mainly for treatment. The word 'araq' means 'white drink'. In some sources it is interpreted as 'pure drink'. By means of distillation of various plants, numerous medical and alcoholic extracts and araqs were produced, such as araqsiz mint, gulyabi, chal arag, etc. Specific type of beer known as buza beer was brewed in Azerbaijan since the very ancient times.



Like other Turkic nations the Azerbaijanis also use various kinds of drinks made of sour milk, like ayran, atlama, bulama, etc.

Soft drinks (sherbet) are prepared from fruit juices, extracts of plants, sugar and its derivatives. Sherbets are served with plov (pilaff) during the holidays and ritual meals. Some soft drinks like ovshara, gyandab, mushmuli, sal'ab, were also used for medicinal purposes.

The role of tea in the Azerbaijani cuisine is second to none indeed. Not a single meal can ever be served without tea. Use of coffee and cocoa is less frequent. In the morning boiled warm milk, dairy drinks and products are served. In the meantime Azerbaijan is known for some famous brands of mineral waters like Badamly, Sirab, Istisu, etc.

Some drinks with medicinal use like bekmez (doshab) are produced by boiling mulberry, water-melon, sugar-cane, beet-roots, grapes, wild persimmon etc. to a very dense condition. Another drink of this sort, iskenderjebi, is used with main courses to relieve thirst and promote digestion. The drink is a mixture of honey and vinegar. In some cases sugar is used instead of honey. Traditional Azerbaijani drinks like hoshab and paludi may be compared to the Russian compote and kissel. Soft drinks are usually served cool.

Snacks include yakhma (non-covered sandwiches) and durmek (stuff rolled into flat bread). Along with flat bread like lavash or yakha oven bread (tendir choreyi) may be used as well. Durmeks are oftentimes made in the shape of a pocket, hence their name jibbi or bukme (wrapped or pocket stuff) and may be served both cold and hot.

Salads constitute another type of snacks. Chara, a kind of desert comprising fresh and dried fruit, nuts and sweet meals is usually served at the end of meals. Another interesting feature revealing richness of the Azerbaijani cuisine is multiplicity of sauces (zvar). Back in the 12-th century the Turkish traveler Evliya Chelebi mentioned about a dozen of various sauces in Azerbaijan made of yogurt (gatyg), vinegar,







garlic, juices of fruit, etc. Some sauces were made of pastila and lavashana (types of marshmallow). One of the most famous Azerbaijani sauces, narsharab, made of pomegranate juice is particularly good with fish.

Typical menu of an Azerbaijani family depends on season, weather, age, life-style, traditions, area etc. Hence there are various types of dishes and meals, e.g. Aran meals (meals of lowland areas), dietary meals for woman in childbirth, meals for fiancée, meals for children, youngsters and elderly ones, etc.

The Azerbaijani cuisine is very diverse with about 200 various dishes to offer. Anthony Jenckinson, a British traveler, mentioned that “Abdulla khan from Shamakhy was served 150 types of dishes at a time, then 140 dishes were taken away and replaced by another 140 new dishes”. Such a variety could be only accomplished with a substantial number of experts and household cooks.

Elviyya Chalabi describes 12 cookeries named after the 12 Imams (recognized religious leaders) in the places he attended. They employed thousands of cooks known after the type of food they were specialized in, e.g. chorekchi, yukhasalan, shatir, ashchi, pitichi, kebabchi, chaychi, halvachi, sherbetdar etc. Such a meticulous division of labor led to its higher productivity on the one hand, whereas on the other hand it resulted in numerous varieties of one and the same dish, like 200 types of plov (pilaff), 30 sorts of dolma, 20 kinds of lule kebab, etc.

It may be also assumed that the Azerbaijani cuisine and traditions of healthy nutrition were among the causes of a high life expectancy in Azerbaijan and a very large number of centenarians in the country.

The Azerbaijani tradition allows eating with hands. Some flat and thin types of bread like yukha or sangah may be used as a substitute of spoon with some liquid dishes. This eating technique is reported to have some advantages of its own:





1. Human fingers have sensitive nerve endings increasing the feeling of taste and temperature. The same tactile endings are used by the blind to perceive the subjects.
2. Eating with hands has a positive impact on speed and thermal regulation, therefore Islam prohibits using hot meals. Warm temperature is preferred.
3. Use of metal spoons and forks leads to gradual fluorine and iodine deficiency and ultimate destruction of teeth by the ions contained in metal.

4. Traditions of eating by hands promote rigorous hygienic rules as the hands should be washed thoroughly and the whole eating procedure turns into a feast and quite a lengthy ceremony.

Influence of each nation on the respective region may be sometimes identified by the role and popularity of its cuisine. From this point of view the role of the Azerbaijani cuisine is sometimes compared to that of the Chinese cuisine in Asia or the French cuisine in Europe.

That being the case, what is the most important issue in the Azerbaijani cuisine is not the food, dishes or drinks per se, but the culture of socialization and, first and foremost, the Guest.

So, welcome to be our Guest!





Cayana

## The travellers about the Azerbaijani cuisine

The music of aromas, poetry, tastes, the game of rich color gammas... You may continue this nice list and it will still not be enough to characterize our cuisine.

The Azerbaijani cuisine is one of the most ancient, delicious and varied cuisines of the world. There are about 2000 dishes that comprise the foundation of the Caucasian Cuisine.

From ancient times Azerbaijan supplied markets of the neighboring countries with meat products, fish, grains, fruits, vegetables, flour, dairy products, sugar, salt and many others products and its cuisines. As a matter of fact, all the Caucasian cuisines are based on the cuisine of Azerbaijan. Dishes such as dolma, sudjuk, basash, hapama, gayzaba, basdirma, borani, nazik, asuda, chilov, plov, shashlyk, pakhlava, bozartma, arishta, kufta, harisa, kyata, gata, lavash, djad, odjab, sarelal, hangah bekmez, doshab, alani and many others that are widespread dishes of the Caucasian peoples were originated by a genius of Azerbaijan people, with the help of the God, on flourishing lands of Azerbaijan.

But it's not good to be praised by ourselves. It would be better to give a word to our guests.

**Antonio Jenickson** - an English sea sailor (XVI Century), who visited Shamakhy described meal at Abdulla Khan's house: "Tableclothes were laid on the floor and various dishes were served. They were put by the row in accordance with the kinds



of the dishes: according to my reckoning there were 140 dishes. Then the dishes together with the tablecloths were taken away, and new tablecloths were laid and 150 dishes with fruits and other feast food were brought. So, 290 dishes were served by 2 servings.”

**Baron Fyodor Korf** visited Azerbaijan in 1834-1835. “Fruits are good in general, grapes, peaches, apricots, cherry, melons and waters melons grow in plenty ... juicy and aroma fruits gilded by the glorious East Sun... Servants entered, carrying many kinds of bread on their shoulders. The first dish consisted of mutton cheese, onion, radishes, aromatic greens and so on. After that, different kinds of fried eggs, boz-bash, soup, fisindjan, sour-sweet sauces made from meats and almonds, fried meats, plov (pilaff) with meat, sultana and saffron with almonds were served. At the end, the whole mutons with heads and legs fried on spit were delivered. I found ninety nine dishes at our table, so the quantity and variety of every dish served could be determined. There were plenty of wines and sherbets.”

**Ambrosio Kontorini** was the Ambassador of Venice (XV century). “We were served many different viands, cooked, according to local traditions and generally, they were very tasty.”

**Tomas Benister** and **Jeffrey Dsket** were English merchants of the XVI century. “An incredible number of nuts of the same kind and quality of our forest nuts, is taken off from Zegam, which are tasty and have thin nutshell. Mutton is very good there... The Caspian Sea is astonishingly rich in fish, there are special kinds of fish which can't be found in other parts of the world”.

**Al Garnati** from Grenada (XII c) writes: “So I saw on the coasts of the Hazar (Caspian in the Azerbaijan language – T.A.) sea, near the city, which is called Baku. This area rises above the sea, there are much grass and game animals. Such as gazelles and so on. People cut their meat and put into skins with salt, grains and spices, like rice, wheat or others. Then take a pipe from reeds, thick at both ends, tie the meat into the skin with the rope. Then they put it into the ground and the other end of the pipe leave on the land. The meat is boiled in the ground and the foam comes through the pipe, then the process is stopped, so the meat is ready. Then it is taken out and it's boiled, like in harise.”

**Jakut Al-Hamavi** (Arabian traveller of XII c) writes: “Azerbaijan... great number of

fruit trees. I've never seen so many gardens and so many rivers like here... there grow the best peas, nice pomegranates, which have no equal in the whole world, and amazing figs... I've never seen such tasty apricots... Here fine grapes, grain and cotton grow ripe. Many fruits, especially nuts and chestnuts are the best in the world. Ar – Rass (the Araz River) – so lots of various fish are found here. The fish, known as Shurmachi is found only here”.

**Alexandre Dumas** (father) the French cooks and writer of the XIX c. “Kebab is the tastiest dish that I've ever seen. It's necessary to include it into the list of the popular dishes of France. Now I'm going to tell you, how to cook it, and I'm sure when you cook it and eat, you'll remember me with gratitude...”

**Marco Polo** – Venician traveller (XVIII c): “it is surrounded by wonderful gardens, from which nice fruit is gathered.”

**Adam Oleari**, Holstein ambassador (XVII c): “Suggacht – the smoked fish is wrapped with the piece of cloth, put on the hearth, covered with cinders and roasted in this order. It has such a pleasant taste...”

32 big dishes, full of food were brought to us. Firstly, boiled rice of different colors and fried chickens, ducks, beef, mutton, fish were placed on all dishes. These dishes were cooked nicely and were tasty enough...”

**Eveliya Chelebi** – The Turkish traveller (XVII c). “They Served 11 sorts of plov, with mayoran, chicken, musaffar plov, plov with aloe, plov with origans, chosh plov, chilav plov with ginger, garlic, kese plov, dyusei plov, fried vegetables with rice, fragrant like a beautiful lady's lips, soup of mastaba and nice herisa. Everything was tasty... 26 kinds of juicy pear were brought. Tasting the “maladja abbasi”, “ordubadi” one can feel like there's candy in one's mouth.

40 kinds of fragrant plov, herise, and soup from egg-plants. Local cooks have 12 more kinds of soups and sauces in store. 7 kinds of nutmeg grape juice enjoy popularity, koknas, the pomegranates juice, made from the flowers of pomegranate, winter drinks from honey, buza from millet and rice, divine wine from grape meleki.”

This is only a small part of the admiration for the food, which different travellers, merchants, diplomats and guests expressed when they visited our country.





## Tea in the Azerbaijani cuisine

One of the most fascinating features of tea is that being introduced into various cuisines it starts generating new customs and traditions thus becoming an integral part of the local culture, lifestyle, and thus going far beyond being just a mere drink. History of medieval Tibet provides sufficient evidence of this. Some travelers of the 14-17<sup>th</sup> centuries mentioned the following: "Tea is a vital necessity for the Tibetans... Lack of tea causes a huge distress among them, so that they may easily fall sick."

The same holds almost true with the Azerbaijanis. Tea was presumably introduced in the territory of Azerbaijan in the first centuries A.D. by the Chinese merchants passing through the area as a part of the Great Silk Route. The Legend of Samak Ayyar (10<sup>th</sup> century) mentions chay-khane, a traditional eatery where tea was served. Since that time tea had become a part and parcel of the Azerbaijanis' day-to-day life. Though, it is necessary to mention that they are used to drink tea with sugar and jam served separately, whence the sweet tea is usually served for breakfast.



The procedure of having a tea party is a sort of feast of its own. For the Azerbaijani culture it is a true ritual held in a very relaxed mode and friendly atmosphere and oftentimes very prone to poetry and elevated mood. Lots of songs, poems and literary works were created at a tea table. Therefore chaykhana will never boil down into a fast food enterprise.

Evidence of an enormous popularity of tea in Azerbaijan may be found in the memoirs of numerous travelers. One of them, Adam O'Leary who visited the area back in 1636-1639 noted places he called 'tzou chatau chane'. "It is such an eatery where people drink warm foreign water ... from plants, brought from China by the Uzbeks and Tatars. This plant is called tea by the Chinese (thee). The Japanese and Indians call it cha or choa and are treated with respect by these people."

Cultivation of tea in Azerbaijan started in 1896. Nowadays it has grown into one of the leading local agricultural products. Tea is usually made in samovars, special devices for boiling water. The most ancient boiling device of this type excavated in the vicinity of Sheki, North Azerbaijan, is 3700 years old while similar findings in Egypt are only 2000 years old. Water was heated by wood or charcoal. An exhaust pipe with handle, about 1 meter long, was placed atop the samovar. Samovar was equipped with a tiny penny whistle on top which got activated once the water started boiling. Exhaust pipe could be removed and replaced by a porcelain teapot (dyamkesh) where the tea was brewed. Prior to brewing raw (dry) tea, dyamkesh was rinsed with boiling water, then filled with dry tea up to one third, then boiled water was added to the tea approximately at one eighth of the pot's volume and the teapot was put aside to a warm place for a couple of minutes. Then dry tea and water were added again and the teapot set aside for another 3 minutes.

Tea was served in special glasses called armudi (or boghmaly) due to their pear-shaped configuration. First they poured some brewed tea from the teapot, then boiled water was added from samovar. The shape of armudi glasses with larger area for evaporation on top, narrow middle part and widening bottom enabled to retain hot temperature of tea for longer time for the tea should be served only hot in







Azerbaijan. Some people compare the shape of these glasses with maiden waist. The glass with tea is held gently, and the tea is drunk in a slow and measured pace.

Tea is usually served with sugar in Azerbaijan. As it was mentioned before, there were several kinds of sugar, i.e. sugar produced from cane (takhta gand) and sugar extracted from beetroot (sheker). The third type of sugar (nabat) was based on fructose. In some cases sugar could be replaced by dried fruit, mulberry, sultane or jams. Traditional pastry like shekerbura and bamiyye could be also served with tea. Lemon is almost irreplaceable in the tea feast. Lemons cultivated in Lankaran, southern part of Azerbaijan, are given a special preference.

Tea is almost always served for breakfast together with dairy products, eggs or sweets. The Azerbaijanis are prone to using black tea. Green tea is less popular, whereas red and yellow types of tea are not served at all.

In certain instances the use of tea may have a purely ritual character like in cases of betrothal. Consent of the bride's family is expressed either by serving tea of different colors (symbolizing unity of a bride and a groom) or through offering sweet tea to the groom's family.

These were just some insights on the nutritional and ceremonial role of tea in the Azerbaijani cuisine and the nation's cultural life. With this...

Enjoy your tea!





RECIPES  
OF THE AZERBAIJANI  
CUISINE









## Kutabs with greens

### Ingredients:

Spinach 600g, Green onion 200g, Coriander 200g, Cheese (dry curds) 60g, Dill 200g, Wheat flour 600g, Lavashana 20g, Butter 300g, Salt.

### Techniques:

make dough from flour, slice greens and mix them with cheese or curd, roll layers 3-4 mm thick each, cut dough into circles 20-25 cm. diameter each, put the stuff (green, cheese or curd) on one half of the dough layer, grate 20g of butter, close with another part of the layer, press the edges. Bake in oven on both sides. When ready take out of the oven, put butter on both sides while still hot. Serve with yogurt.





## Dolma with wine leaves

Fresh wine leaves - 47 qr, for stuffing - 100 qr, mutton - 164 qr, fat of sheep - 25 qr, onion - 20 qr, coriander or mint - 24 qr, rice - 30 qr, muss of stuff - 202 qr, mass of half ready product -240 qr, mass of ready dolma - 225 qr, cinnamon - 0,2 qr.

Clean wine leaves, cut the stalks, scald. Blanch fresh leaves, but fermented ones let out - during 20-25 minutes. Wrap the stuffing into every leaf, put into the pot, pour water to cover all dish and stew for 50-60 min.

For stuffing, mince mutton with sheep fat and onion, add finely shredded greens, salt, black pepper, cleaned rice and mix.

For 1 portion take 6-8 pieces of dolma, pour the sauce, in which dolma was stewed, sprinkle with cinnamon. Separately serve yogurt (150gr), with pressed garlic (3gr).



### Piti in Sheki style (for 1 person)

#### Ingredients:

Mutton 160g, Sheep fatty tail 25 g, Nuts (peas) 1 table spoon, Cleaned chestnuts 1 piece, Quince 1 slice (25-30g), Onion 1 piece, Cherry-plums 5-6 pieces, Dry mint 1 dessert spoon, Salt, pepper (personal choice).

#### Technique:

Piti is cooked in one portion clay pots (kupa), in volume of 0,8 l. Meat-bone pieces of mutton, chest, back neck parts, cut into a small pieces, together with the pieces of sheep fat and peas, soaked in cold water for 4-5 hours, put into kupa, pour 0,5 l of cold water, and put on oven. After boiling the broth, put finely cut onion, chestnut, quince, alycha, salt to taste. When ready, put spices and saffron infusion. When serving, sprinkle with finely cut dry mint.





## Tomato & egg-plant dolma

Egg plants – 269 qr, mutton (chop meat) – 164, melted butter – 20 qr, mass of stuff – 142 qr, tomato – 163 qr, onion – 300 qr, yogurt – 50 qr, greens (basilica, coriander, dill) – 15 qr, cinnamon – 0,2 qr, mass of half-ready food – 340 qr.

Take out seeds from the insides of eggplants, blanch for 1-2 minutes, stuff, put into a pot, put aside slices of tomatoes, pour little water or broth, and stew 25-30 minutes.

For stuffing, take meat, onion, mince everything, add pepper and salt, fry on butter for 20-30, minutes, constantly mixing, till the minced meat is ready. Cool it, mix till unique consistence, add shred greens and mix. Grind mutton with onion, add pepper and salt. Fry it on butter, cool and mix with greens. Choose average size and hard tomatoes, cut the tops and put out a core. Stuff ready tomatoes and cover upside with cut tops. Pomidor dolmasi put on a frying pan. Fry

the taken-out parts of tomato on butter, add broth and stew under close cover for 15-20 minutes till readiness.

Serve with its own gravy stewed in the course of cooking. Yogurt and cinnamon to be added.



## Shakh plov (for 30 persons)

Rice 3 kg, Saffron 0,01 g, Lavash 250 pieces, Melted butter 3kg, Boneless lamb 1 kg, Albuhara (dried cherry-plum, no kernels) 250 g, White raisin -300 g, Dried apricot-200 g, Cleaned chestnut-0,15kg, Salt and pepper.

Boil rice in salt water till half readiness. Salt and pepper the meat and cover it with alcha paste. Butter the bottom of the pot and the sides, (of the pot), put 5 buttered lavash, and

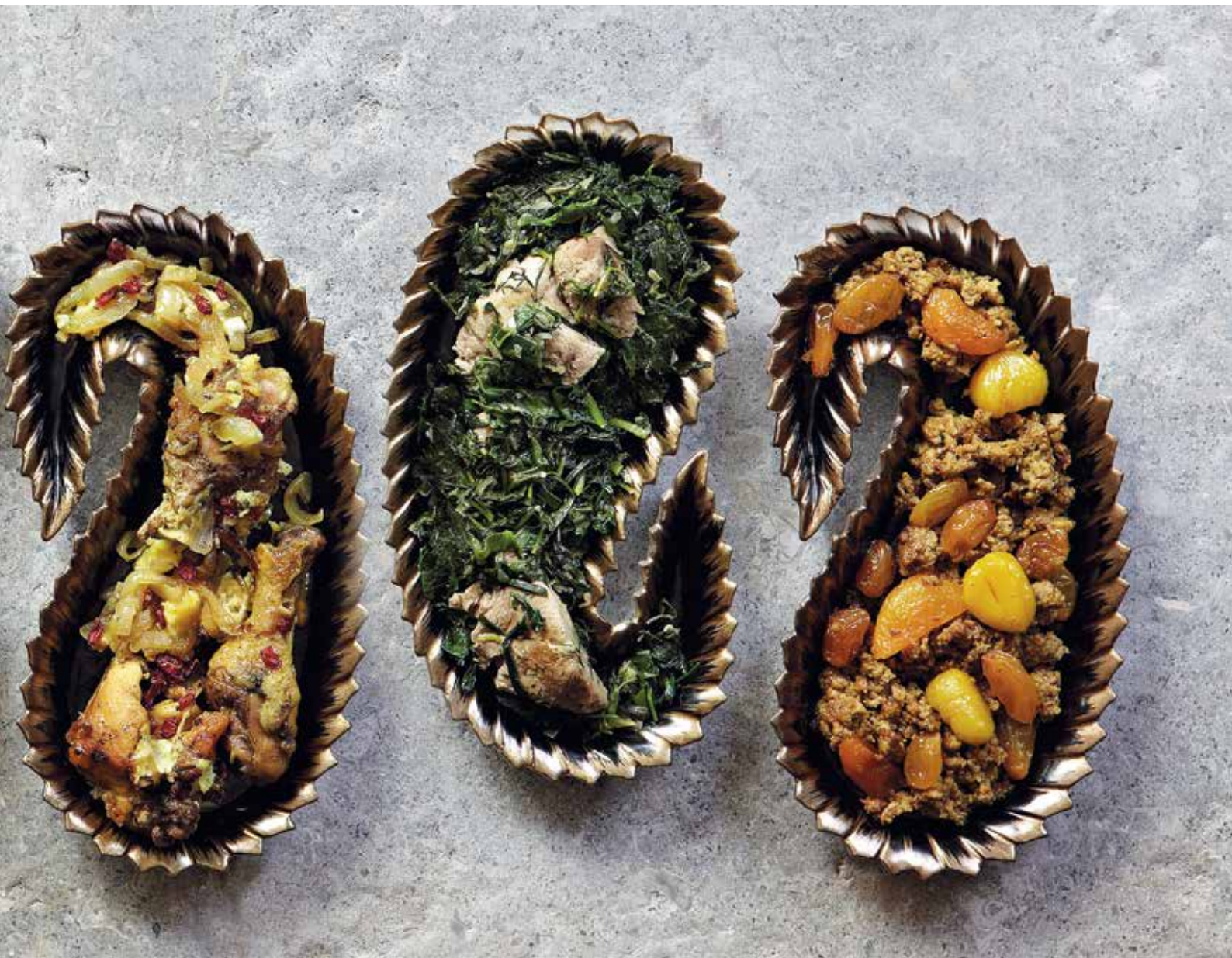
then cover the sides of the pot with lavash, 5 sm from each other (also buttered on both sides). Lavash should come out of the pot at 5 sm.

Put rice on a colander, put it on the bottom of the pot, 5 sm of thickness, then put on rice boiled chest nut, albhara, raisin, then a layer of rice boiled again, then meat and everything again – rice, chest nut, albhara, raisin and rice. After, roll the outer sides of the lavishes inside, cover rice with them, top it with 5 buttered lavashes and put into oven. After 40 minutes pour the plov with melted butter. Bring to readiness in the oven at 1300C. Plov is cooked for 3 hours.









The Azerbaijani plov (pilaff) is served with different types of garnish, such as chestnut, greens, alycha (turshu), vegetables, mutton, chicken or turkey.







SWEETS  
IN THE AZERBAIJANI  
CUISINE





## Shekerbura (1 kg – of ready product)

### Ingredients:

Wheat flour high grade 560g,  
Melted butter 240g, Cream 250 g,  
2 eggs, Dry yeast 10 g

### Techniques:

Stuffing: 260 g peeled almond  
and nuts, 260 g sugar. Heat the  
cream till 30-35°C;  
add yeast, salt, eggs, knead hard  
dough from adding flour. Leave  
for 1-1.5 hour. Then  
form balls, 30 g and roll them in  
round layers in 3-4 mm of thick-  
ness.

Put the stuffing in the middle,  
press the edges, patterned.

Pattern by means of special tongs.  
Bake at 180°C for 25-20 minutes.

Stuff: blanch walnuts and clean  
from skin.



## Guba pakhlava

Rice flour 280 g, Sugar 420 g, Walnut 140 g, Lemon acid 1 g, Coriander seeds 2 g, Cardamom 0.5 g, Saffron 0.2 g.

### Techniques:

Knead thin dough from rice flour, add 120 g of water. The dough is poured out with the help of special tool, which has 11 holes and bake reticular rishta (cells of dough). Add ground walnuts are added to grated cardamom and coriander seeds. Put 8 layers of rishta on a copper tray, then put the stuff on it. Then put 5 layers of rishta again, make a round shape. Decorate with saffron in the form of square and bake during 15-20 minutes over burning coals, on both sides.

Prepare syrup from sugar, citric acid and 100 g of water, pour on bakhlava. Keep for 8-10 hours to make bakhlava soft.





## Cornelian cherry jam

Cornelian cherry 1kg, Sugar 1,3 kg, Water 300 g

Pour syrup on cornelian cherry, bring to readiness. Then remove from fire. Cool and again bring toboiling. Repeat until ready. At the end of process take away the foam.

## Cherry or sweet cherry jam

Cherry or sweet cherry (no kernels) 1 kg, Sugar.1.5 kg.

Put sugar on fruit and keep for 3-5 hours until it takes the appearance of juice. Boil slowly till readiness.

## Fig jam

Fig 1 kg, Sugar 1 kg, Citric acid 1-2 g, A pinch of vanilla.

Peel off the fig's skin, add sugar and leave for 10 hours for producing juice. Then boil on slow fire for an hour. At the end of boiling add diluted citric acid in 1 spoon of water.

## Lemon sherbet

Lemons 4 pieces, Sugar 250 g,  
Water 1l

Clean a lemon, wipe, pour 2 glasses of water, boil during 3 minutes. Then cool it. Squeeze the juice from peeled lemons, put in a separate dish, the rest part of lemons pour on hot water (80-85°C), cool, filter, join with the broth of citron. Prepare syrup from water and sugar. When boiling put the juice and cool till 18-20°C. When serving cool or serve with pieces of ice.

## Sherbet from basil (reyhan)

Basil 100 g, Sugar 100 g, Water 1  
liter, 2 g citric acid.

Cut basil, pour 1 liter of water in a pot, bring it to boiling, add sugar and citric acid, dissolved in a little quantity of water, put on a colander and get it cooled down.







## Ordubad rolls

400 gr wheat flour of high sort, 250 gr sour cream, 100 gr butter. Stuffing: 200 gr walnuts, 180 gr sugar, 40 gr honey, cinnamon, clove, coriander, 1 yolk of an egg for decoration. Knead dough from butter, sour – cream and flour. Mix the ground nuts, sugar, honey (thin consistence), and spices. Cut ready dough into portions of 40 gr.

Roll each portion in a ribbon, in 4-5 mm of thickness. One end is wider than another. On a wider end put 30 gr of stuff and roll in the shape of a pipe. Cover the pipes with yolk and bake on buttered griddle, at 190-200C for 20-30 minutes.





