



# Nowruz in the Republic of Azerbaijan

The Republic of Azerbaijan is the only non-Persian speaking country the government of which has declared Nowruz as a national festivity and celebrates it in a very beautiful way. Nowruz is an official holiday in the Azerbaijani calendar. Traditions and customs related to Nowruz ceremonies in this country are more similar to those in Iran as compared to other neighboring countries.



### History of Nowruz in Azerbaijan

Like Iran and some countries in the region, Nowruz is celebrated as a national and religious holiday in Azerbaijan at the beginning of spring, as a long-standing tradition.

During the communist era, Nowruz, as a national and religious holiday, faced many ups and downs. At the beginning of the communist era in the Soviet Union, the celebration of Nowruz in Azerbaijan was allowed by the Bolsheviks. Gradually, however, and due to the anti-religious nature of the Soviet government, the Nowruz ceremony faced restrictions by the government in 1928 because it was considered a religious ceremony, and it was completely banned on December 5, 1936.

Following Stalin's death, restrictions on the celebration of Nowruz were gradually lifted. From 1967 onwards, Nowruz was allowed to be celebrated as the Festival of Spring, but this permit did not last for more than three years, and from 1970, Nowruz, or the Festival of Spring, was banned once again. With the coming to power of Mikhail Gorbachev and following the adoption of the policies of Glasnost (political open space) and Perestroika (economic reform), the people of Azerbaijan were able to celebrate the March 21 festivity with its traditional name, Nowruz, and not with the name of the festival of Spring.

After the independence of the Republic of Azerbaijan in 1991, Nowruz came to be recognized as a national festivity, which begins every year on March 20 and continues for five days that are official national holidays.



### Nowruz Customs in Azerbaijan

One of the Nowruz customs in the Republic of Azerbaijan is "Khaneh Takani", which, like in Iran, is performed in the days before the arrival of the New Year with the help of all family members. Every house should be ready for receiving unexpected guests on Nowruz days. In the past, people used to make Samanou from wheat sprouts. Samanou is also called "Isfahan Halvasi" or Isfahani Halva.

In the week preceding Nowruz, there is a lot of activity in Baku. People paint fences and light poles. Fresh flowers are planted in the squares of the city. Different parts of the city are decorated with lights and replicas of Samanou and green sprouts and most of the shops, shopping centers, hotels, and tourist resorts arrange special decorations and place them at the entrance of the city and other plac-

es. In short, everywhere smells of freshness and newness.

In the Republic of Azerbaijan, people celebrate four Wednesdays preceding Nowruz. The first Wednesday is called "Su Charshanba Si" or "The Wednesday of Water, the second Wednesday is called "Oud Charshanba Si" or "The Wednesday of Fire, the third one is called "Topraq Charshanba Si" or "The Wednesday of Soil, and the last Wednesday is called "Ya'el Charshanba Si" or "The Wednesday of Wind. These names are based on the ancient belief of the people who believed that the world is composed of the four elements of water, earth, wind, and fire. In "Bayrami Charshanba", which is held on Tuesday night, young people light fires, and boys and girls jump over them.

There were some other customs in the past that have, more or less



become symbolic these days. One of these customs is called “Kasa and Kachal” (The Jar and the Bald). Kasa (jar) is the symbol of spring which wears green clothes and a green hat, and Kachal (bald) is the symbol of winter who wears blue clothes and his bald head is a symbol of winter’s barrenness. The two challenge each other by singing songs with background music and the spectators clap and dance. Kasa wins the challenge and then each of the spectators gives him a gift, and finally, a prayer is recited for the people’s Nowruz and the ceremony ends.

Another custom of the Azerbaijani people on Nowruz is what is called “Papaq Atapaq”. Papaq in Turkish means hat and this term means to take a hat around. In this ceremony, the children hold hats and go to the neighbors’ houses, and the neighbors put sweets, chocolate, and

apples in their hats. Eavesdropping which is called “golakh fali”, is also practiced among girls in Azerbaijan. The girls secretly listen to the neighbor and then tell their mother that I heard the neighbor tell her child to go and turn on the lights. The girl then asks her mother for her interpretation, and the mother tells her that next year will start with light.

On the first day of Eid, the President of the country officially announces the beginning of Nowruz and from this day, celebrations, traditional music festivals are held in the tourist parts of the city and in two shifts from morning to noon and noon to evening. Young and old wear new clothes and participate in these ceremonies. Local food and all kinds of kebabs are cooked and all kinds of handicrafts of Baku and its sweets and jams are put on public display.

In the afternoon of the last day of

the month of Esfand or March 20, the day before Nowruz, Baku cemeteries are full of people holding Samanou trays to the number of their relatives who have passed away. Some graves have two or three trays sprouts on them, indicating that several families are present there. The view of the cemetery on this day is amazing as if the Azeri people also make their deceased one participate in the celebration of Nowruz.

On the Nowruz eve, all members of the family gather at the house of one of their elders and have dinner together. The most important and main food of Nowruz in Azerbaijan is fish, which must be on the table. They put a ring on the head of the fish, which should be worn by the oldest unmarried girl in the family. According to popular belief, this makes the girl get happily married.

The Nowruz table of the Azerbaijanis is different from the Nowruz table of the Iranians, and at present, there are no Haft Sean, Haft Shean, or Haft Meam on them, but each of its components has a special meaning.

Sweets such as Shakarbureh, Pakhlava (or Baqlava), and Shour Gogal are also baked and consumed by the people of Azerbaijan. Shakarbureh, which is the most famous sweet of Azerbaijan, consists of flour, almonds, sugar, cardamom seeds, wheat, eggs, sour cream, butter, and milk.

Pakhlava is another famous sweet of the Azerbaijani people, which consists of walnuts, butter, eggs, wheat flour, sugar, rose, saffron, and almonds. Shakarbureh and Pakhlava are served with tea in the public areas of Baku.