



Discovering Azerbaijan

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GOYGOL AND MARALGOL LAKES: gift from Kapaz mountain





There is a multitude of beautiful lakes in Azerbaijan and nearly each of its regions has its own water “pearl”. Goygol and Maralgol, the most well-known such basins, are located in the country’s west, in particular, in the vicinity of the city of Ganja. Although tourists had long been unable to reach this destination, there is currently free access for the public to these beautiful places.

The Goygol region lies beyond Ganja. The landscape changes simultaneously and the highway continues to rise. The alternating beautiful scenes dazzle the visitor incessantly. The incredible hills are bright green in summer and have cinnamon color in winter. Furthermore, the spurs of Mount Kapaz are hidden behind the fog. The mountain is similar to the backbone of a fancy animal amid the usual snow-capped peaks. It appears as if one of its vertebrae was torn off and this is not far from the truth.

On September 30, 1139, the entire territory of Ganja was hit by one of the most devastating earthquakes in the history of mankind. The 11 magnitude quake razed to the ground all surrounding settlements, killing 230,000 people. It also swept through the mountains, splitting the Kapaz peak in half. Huge stone slabs descending from the height of 3,000 meters blocked the Aghsu river flowing in the valley in several areas. Almost two dozen beautiful lakes emerged in the area

shortly thereafter as if nature sought to justify the damage inflicted by the disaster. The largest and most frequently visited of those lakes, Goygol (translated from Azerbaijani as “a blue lake”), was named symbolically after its blue color. In order to see its true color, one should look at it from above. Haze often looms over the lake’s shores, which turns its color into silvery emerald shades. A lot of people and even animals enjoy observing the crystal-clear waters of Goygol. It reflects forest-covered mountains and local giant trees. Deers and roe deers living along the shores frequently come here to drink water. However, it is hard to see these animals because they are rather timid as they still remember the sounds of artillery shelling that were heard from behind the Murovdagh ridge in the past. The war was literally just around the corner as Karabakh is located nearby. The incredible beauty and harmony of these places is in acute contrast with the grievous memories of people, captivating them nevertheless with the observation of numerous hornbeam or beech trees. Moreover, lake-colored blue flowers emerge at their roots through blackberry bushes. A great number of various flowers are available in the area, including the simplest ones that grow in fields, as well as exotic ones, such as red-berry and orchids. In winter, wild saffron blooms upon the lawns warmed up by the sun. Unfortunately, a visitor has to admire all this scenery in a hurry, since there are

plenty of people who long to see Goygol. The area becomes rather noisy in summer; the tourist season lasts from May to October. Suitable conditions have been provided for visitors, who can either take a bus heading to this destination from Ganja or use private transport instead. Visitors are required to purchase a ticket at the entrance and may further use electric cars or walk up to the lake, breathing in pure mountain air. A parking lot is open in the area during the tourist season, along with a restaurant that has a picturesque view of Goygol, a cafe by the lake, kiosks selling keepsakes and snacks, as well as picnic areas to enjoy qutabs (a popular dish made from thinly rolled dough using meat, herbs or other filling) and have tea brewed in a “samovar” (a metal container traditionally used to boil water). Walking on the lake shores is prohibited as this is a protected area, but visitors may feast their eyes on the view from a specially equipped area or a small pier. Swans frequently approach these areas to get something tasty to eat. There is also an abundance of trout in the water that could be seen from time to time on the surface.

Despite the beauty of Goygol, tourists should definitely visit Maralgol as well. During their visit, they may bond with nature and finally walk along the shores. Buses leaving the Goygol area are available, but visitors may also travel on foot. The road goes uphill and the seven-kilometer trip would be easy only in cool weather. Otherwise, using public transport is more appropriate. Another minor challenge is a 300-step staircase ascending to the lake from the parking lot. At first glance, this may appear as a daunting task, but in fact, the ascent is not difficult and the long stair flights allow the visitor to pause and take a breath, as well as enjoy looking at the surrounding forest.

Traces of activity left behind by brown bears are frequently encountered on the steps. Visitors should not expect to come across bears as wild animals inhabiting national parks dislike approaching people. Animals are rarely seen by rangers and these mainly include such small predators as wolves, jackals or boars. Having gone up the stairs, visitors can finally see Maralgol and enjoy the emerging fabulous view. The small lake is located at the altitude of 1,900 meters, which is 400 meters above Goygol. Since fewer people could be encountered in this secluded area, it has a completely different environment, which makes it essentially perfect for those seeking meditation and communication with nature. It is not immediately clear where visitors should go once they reach the destination. You can either turn right





toward a large rock hanging over the water or go left in the direction of a fancy snag.

The Maralgol shores are a ballad glorifying natural beauty. There is a dense forest on one side of the hill and old stand-alone trees stretching their branches toward the lake on the other. Large brier bushes grow in the area. Thyme and mint are found on the ground occasionally as well. These herbs may be picked up and further used to brew excellent tea at home. Water in the lake is suitable for drinking and known for its valuable mineral composition. This body of water contains a considerable trout population, just like Goygol. Baby fish are regularly released into water to renew the population of species, considering that this is a natural reserve and the paramount task is safeguarding biodiversity. You can spend hours at the very edge watching what is happening inside the lake. It is a real garden-like space under water. It is an amazing, breathtaking spectacle! Numerous plants available in the emerald-colored or blue waters seem to be swaying in a dance. Moreover, the scene is adorned by fallen leaves that cover up the shores like a soft carpet in fall. The rocky material at the bottom of the lake underscores the domination of mountains, which shape a marvelous landscape in this area. Kapaz appears very close from this point and its broken ridge









may be clearly discerned. Almost a millennium after the deadly earthquake, the mountain is delightfully breathtaking, not frightening, both in terms of its appearance and the miracles it created. The Goygol and Maralgol lakes are real gifts of nature, which should be definitely seen and appreciated. 🌸

