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# “SURAKHANY” – WORLD’S FIRST-EVER TANKER MUSEUM

A landmark event occurred in Azerbaijan's cultural life on March 1, 2021 with the opening of "Surakhany", the first-ever tanker museum in the world. The significance of this milestone is highlighted not only by the fact that it is the first museum serving scientific-technical purposes in the country, but also by its location upon a tanker that had transported oil and oil products for decades. In other words, it is a product that has emerged due to the reuse of technical facilities, which is gaining an ever-growing importance in the present-day world.

The "Surakhany" oil tanker was built at the Baku shipyard named after Vano Sturua in 1958. The shallow-water three-islander with a single deck is a ship of the "Engineer A. Pustoshkin" type. The vessel's length is 123.5m, while its width is 16m and its deadweight equals 6,520 tons. The ship, which had a 32-member crew, floated at a speed of 11 knots per hour over a distance of 3,523 nautical miles. The ship, which operated not only in the Caspian Sea but also in the world ocean, has an extensive history. It was later used in the Caspian as a cleaning vessel.

In 2017, a decision was passed to turn the "Surakhany" tanker into a museum. The HS01 tanker museum project had been developed by the Marine Engineering Bureau and the Caspian Marine Engineering Bureau. The ship was cleaned by removing oil products, repaired and redesigned into a museum. The staff and technical resources of Azerbaijan Caspian Shipping Closed Joint-Stock Company Bibiheybat Shipyard, as well as human and technical resources of Khazar LLC, were drawn for the purpose. Over 2,000 local ship repairers were involved in the repair and renovation of the frame and other parts of the ship. The equipment and relevant furnishings were restored, along with providing suitable conditions for the cargo pumping compartment, the engine room, the boiler and tiller rooms, as well as "the red corner", the cafeteria, refreshment room staff and the kitchen, the rooms of the ship captain, senior and deputy assistants, the third mate, the radio operator, the wheelhouse, the navigation room, the radio room and the radio operator's warehouse. The authentic anchor and mooring devices, lifeboats and other deck equipment were restored.

The extensive experience of countries with shipping traditions, including Britain, the Netherlands and Turkey, was used to turn the "Surakhany" tanker into a museum. In an effort to meet international standards, implementers of the museum project collaborated with more





than 100 well-known foreign and local companies. The concept and design of the project was presented by Britain's Freeman XP, while the Dutch company Hypsos was involved in its development.

The tanker museum, located in the new part of Baku Boulevard (seaside park) near the Aquatic Palace, has 11 exhibition halls, a restaurant for 68 people and a cafe on an open-door deck with seating capacity of 84 people. The special features of this museum require teamwork of its personnel and crew. Thus, the ship crew includes several employees who have a track record of sailing on such vessels spanning decades and represent living history in this regard.

Each of the museum exhibits is unique and cutting edge technological solutions were employed to create these interesting samples. Gamepads designed for the museum ensure interactivity and a visitor's involvement in ongoing developments, which draws the attention of the younger generation.

The exhibition starts upon a ship cistern and visitors are greeted by monitors in the "Greetings" hall. The ship captain and his senior aide further tell visitors about the vessel crew members and their responsibilities. The facility also features exhibits describing occupational safety and maritime rescue equipment. Furthermore, the visitors go down to a lower tier of the main deck into the "Raise the anchor" hall. It provides information regarding the purpose of the vessel's anchor device and

chain, the history of anchors, maritime knots and the rules of mooring. Remarkably, a special gamepad offers an option of mooring a vessel without assistance.

The "Caspian spirit" hall, which is comprised of two sections, covers the history of the Caspian Sea. A unique screen with a 360-degree view, which is a novelty in Azerbaijan, allows visitors to be directly involved in the developments that have taken place in the country since the ancient times in an unusual format. Once visitors leave the video room, they will be able to see one-of-the-kind exhibits related to shipping of the 18th-20th centuries.

The "Ships and Shipping" hall shows a 5-meter-long model of "Surakhany" that features the tanker itself, including its smallest details. It also provides information about ships of this type and a video about the creation of the ship museum. Moreover, the hall features models of ships pertaining to Azerbaijan as well as the legendary vessels that have sailed away both in the Caspian and the world ocean. It also shows over 40 mock-ups of cruise ships, tankers and container carriers that had served their designated purpose loyally for decades. Visitors may enjoy viewing their amazing design for hours. Special touch-screens allow visitors to select any vessel and comprehensively familiarize themselves with it.

Another hall tells visitors about navigation and communication tools. The "Navigation and communication" hall features models of three world-known beacons



and allows visitors to try sending each other messages using the Morse code. The facility showcases various technical devices, such as the previously used compass and astrolabe, and finally, modern transmitters, radars and guiding tools. One of the unique museum exhibits placed behind the glass shelves is a maritime quadrant that dates back almost 300 years. The astronomical tool was used from the times of Tycho Brahe until the early 21st century to measure the altitude of celestial bodies. Only two such ancient quadrants are still available in the world. In addition to the quadrant stored at the “Surakhany” museum in Azerbaijan, there is one more such sample in the National Maritime Museum in Greenwich.

The navigation table depicting celestial bodies is particularly worth mentioning. These objects are located in the same order as they were on May 28, 1918, a date marking the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic, the first such state established in the East. The navigation table also allows tracing routes, external communications and navigation of ships floating in the Caspian. In addition, a special section called “Flag” that helps a wide

audience to easily study maritime signaling flags and their functions was created in that hall, while the “Cargo transportation” hall allows visitors to learn about the purpose of freight ships and the specifics of container transportation. An interactive model located in this area enables people to carry out shipment and unloading and familiarize themselves with a mock-up of OOCL Hong Kong, one of the largest container ships in the world. The hall also features mock-ups of the present-day Alat seaport and the Baku shipyard.

A detailed look at the Oil Wall installation allows visitors to learn about the history of oil production in Azerbaijan. One of the facilities, titled the Container Theater, provides an option for children to watch the transportation of goods while seated on big coffee bags. Young visitors of the museum may also try “docking the vessel” with the use of an interactive model.

The hall called “Solidarity in values and commitment to development” offers visitors a journey into the 160-year-long history of the Azerbaijan Caspian Shipping Company. The facility contains a chronicle of the heroism of Azerbaijani sailors during the Great



Patriotic War and the developments that occurred on January 20, 1990. In addition, it presents materials reflecting the contribution of Azerbaijani national leader Heydar Aliyev to the development of the Caspian Shipping Company. It also features interactive data, including information about the 44-day Patriotic War, while an item called "President Ilham Aliyev and the Shipping Policy" is dedicated to the merits of the head of state concerning the development of navigation.

The "Engine Room" displays "the heart" of the ship, i.e. the main engine, as well as auxiliary motors and pumps,

in other words, all the devices that set the vessel in motion. Virtual reality glasses allow visitors to go back to the mid-20th century and familiarize themselves with the everyday life of the crew members working in the engine room.

The "Gallery of Sailors" offers visitors to get acquainted with the backgrounds of legendary Azerbaijani seamen. This section also features the cabins of the crew members redesigned into their original condition, as well as the ship's kitchen, which look exactly the same as they were in the 1960s. Household appliances and items that were once used on the "Surakhany" tanker are available as well. The museum also allows a visitor to have a firsthand look at the way the crew members lived on that tanker in the past. The sailors' facilities are cozy rooms with beds and tables attached to the floor. There is also a leisure area that allows you to relax with a game of chess or read newspapers.



The "Little Bridge/Radio and Navigation" hall offers familiarization with the "command bridge" and the radio room, which are important checkpoints for running the "Surakhany" ship. These sections have



been reconstructed into their initial state and look identical to the appearance they had many years ago. This hall displays all types of equipment for running a tanker in the mid-20th century.

The "Malacofauna" facility houses one of the interesting museum exhibits, namely, a section featuring malacofauna, corals and other samples of maritime wildlife collected in numerous seas and oceans.

The restaurant at the "Surakhany" museum could be considered one of the remarkable locations in the seaside park area. The restaurant serves both seafood and dishes of the national cuisine. A special environment of maritime romanticism has been created in the restaurant by means of special accessories and elements. Moreover, visitors of the museum may delve into a world of navigation at the summer terrace located on the ship deck outdoors. The souvenir store offers interesting items related to navigation.

The opening ceremony of the tanker museum was held on March 1,

2021. Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev and First Lady Mehriban Aliyeva attended the event. A great number of people have visited the museum since its opening. Employees are confident that the tanker museum will play the role of a bridge connecting the past and the future of shipping in Azerbaijan and turn into one of the new symbols of the capital Baku where history blends harmoniously with modernity. 🌟

