



## Highlights of Albania (#21035)

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### Overview

A Journey through Albania.

### Trip Highlights

Berat-Saranda-Gjirokastra-Gjirokaster-Korce-Tirane

### Detailed Itinerary

**Day 01**

**Day 1. Airport – Berat**

Meet with the guide and transfer to the charming UNESCO town of Berat.



Just before entering Berat, we'll stop for a little break in one of Albania's top wineries for a wine tasting session and some snacks. Upon arrival check in the hotel followed by a short walk around the lower part of the city.

The tour of the city will comprise the lower quarters and the upper fortress passing by ottoman laic architectures, byzantine churches and elegant mosques. Berat: is also known as "The town of a Thousand windows" due to the many large buildings that decorate the houses of the old town. The town is still renowned for its historic architecture and particular beauty and is declared as a world heritage site by UNESCO. Historical Berat consist of three quarters. The quarters of Gorica and Mangalem are situated on the slopes of two hills that are divided by the river Osum.

Dinner and overnight in Berat.

### Day 02

### Day 2. Berat – Apollonia – Vlore - Sarande

After the breakfast continue the guided tour of Berat, upper part.

Kalaja (fortress) quarter stands on the top of the Magalemi hill and is enclosed by a fortification wall that dates to the IV century BC. The town has several XV century mosques, very well decorated and a very large numbers of Byzantine orthodox churches. Several of the churches has frescoes by the well-known painter Onufri and his school and from other later famous schools of frescos and icons of the Balkan area. Of particular interest are: The icons museum located in the old cathedral church of the Castle and the Ethnographic Museum hosted in an old house in the Mangalem quarter.

After the visit drive towards the Archaeological Park of Apollonia founded in 588 BC - walking tour of the park of Apollonia.

the beginning of the VII century BC. by Greek colons coming by the cities of Corinth and Corcyra. Apollonia became an emporium of merchandising between Greeks an Illyrians and was taken by Aristotle as a model in his analysis of oligarchy due to the distinct and separate Greek and Illyrian communities. The city prospered very much in roman times. It was a vital stronghold in Caesar's civil war with Pompey and important in early Christian history as the resident bishop attended the councils of Ephesus and Chalkis in 431 and 451. The discovered monuments on the site are the fortification wall of the city, the Prytaneon, the Bouleuterion, the big and small Stoas, the Odeion, the Theatre, the Nymphaeum and many more. The museum of Apollonia is hosted in the nearby monastery of the XIV century when can be visit also the Church of St. Mary.

Continue to Vlora and panoramic tour of the city.

Leave towards the Albanian Riviera. After 1 hr drive, we will reach firstly the National Park of Llogara.

We will continue our tour that will bring us through the woods following the same paths that Julius Cesar together with his army followed to reach the ancient city of Apollonia where he fought his rival Pompeu's. Here we will enjoy a walk with



breathtaking views and wonderful nature. The Llogaraja National Park takes its name from the passage with the same name which, is over 1000 meters in height and extend along the road that from the city of Vlore goes toward the south of the country. This impressive panoramic Ionian Road was built by Mussolini in the Thirties. The park is characterized by a wild and untouched nature where the peaks of the “Malet Vetetimes” or the Mountains of the Lightings, are often surrounded by clouds and so much more evocative. The breathtaking views enjoyed from the park, especially on the side where the hills fall abruptly into the sea below.

Albanian Ionian Riviera dubbed by some as “the last secret of Europe”, boasts stunning Mediterranean beaches of the Ionian coast. It’s a stretch of coastline between Vlore and Sarande in south-west Albania. This is the most beautiful part of the coast in Albania and one of the most beautiful areas in the whole Ionian Sea. The road goes through breathtaking scenery, with mountains rising dramatically up from the coast and the deep blue sea shimmering in the sunlight. The Ionian coast here is very rugged, with rocky coves along the narrow coastal strip and steep mountains rising almost straight up along much of its length. The sea along this part of the coast has clear blue water and the beaches are usually made of small pebbles, but there are also many sandy ones, especially in the south. In Llogara we’ll make a yoghurt stop to taste the local yoghurt served with honey.

Stop at “The Gulf of Porto Palermo” for a visit at the Fortress of Ali Pasha Tepelena situated on an attractive island.

Arrival in Saranda for dinner and overnight.

### Day 03

### Day 3. Saranda – Butrint - Blue Eye – Gjirokaster

After the breakfast will be visiting the UNESCO site of Butrint.

Butrint: is a National Park that includes a very well-preserved archaeological area, an uncontaminated vegetation area of Mediterranean maquis, and has also a lake that is connected to the Ionian Sea by a natural channel. The wetlands around the lake are shelter for different animals and aquatic species in danger of extinction. The excavations and studies have proved that during the VII and the VI centuries BC. Butrint was a protourban centre. By the V century BC Butrint has got the full form of an ancient city. During the VI century the city was equipped with new buildings such as the theatre, the agora, temple and the stoa. The complex of the sanctuary of Asclepius forms the most magnificent part of the city. The main importance and magnificence of the Site was in the Roman period when the city was proclaimed a Roman Colony and used by the roman aristocracy as a holiday destination. Even during late antiquity Butrint maintained its importance. The construction of the Great Basilica and of the baptistery dates to this period. The baptistery has the floor surface covered by a mosaic decoration of a very fine processing, which is very well preserved.

After visiting Butrint we’ll take a short drive to Ksamil for some free time to enjoy the magnificent scenery.



Continue towards the UNESCO town Gjirokastra. En route visit of the water spring of Blue Eye declared a Monument of Nature.

Arrival in Gjirokastra where we'll have a free later afternoon to relax and enjoy the town with its perks.

Dinner and overnight in Gjirokastra.

#### Day 04

#### Day 4. Gjirokaster - Labova – Gjirokaster

We'll spend the day in Gjirokastra and its surroundings visiting its main highlight with enough time in between to digest what we've seen and of course enjoy the culinary delights the area offers.

Our first visit will be in the village of Labove e Kryqit where one of the oldest and the most beautiful Byzantine churches in Albania, dedicated to St. Mary built in 554 is located.

After a guided visit we'll have lunch in a local house where we'll meet the locals and enjoy their cooking.

We'll return to Gjirokastra for a guide tour of the town. We'll visit its Castle which the biggest in Albania and the house of Skenduli.

UNESCO World Heritage Site is known by many as the City of Stone and comprises hundreds of Ottoman-style tower houses with distinctive stone roofs, wooden balconies and whitewashed stone walls. Dominated by the sheer flanks of its vast castle, Gjirokastra is a magical city with a tumultuous past. From feudal stronghold to Ottoman jewel to Italian colony, the city has known many rulers and has inspired poets, authors and artists. A walk around the network of cobbled streets will transport you back in time. A visit to the vast 13th-century Castle brings the adventurous tales of medieval rulers and communist atrocities alive.

Overnight in Gjirokaster.

#### Day 05

#### Day 5. Gjirokaster – Permet - Korce

In the morning, after the breakfast, we will drive Along the Vjosa river Valley to reach the town of Permet. From here we will take a short walk to visit the church of Leuse.

Just before arriving in Permet, we'll stop at dairy product place to taste some of the local cheeses etc as well as meet the locals.





Church of Leusa (Shen Maria) in Leusa village near Permet features outstanding iconography paintings. Probably the most spectacular church in Albania, it was not burned in WW2 from it resembling more an art gallery than a church. Referring to the painted inscription on the gate on the north side, the iconostasis of Leusës Church was completed in 1817. Although in inscription states that the church is "built from the foundations" the main buildings date to the 16 century and the existing church was raised upon another one dating to the 11 century.

After the visit, we'll visit a family-owned business where the famous local (Gliko) dessert is produced where we'll be able to taste some of their finest products.

Just before lunch we'll have a short cooking class with one of the local chefs on how to make Lakror, a local specialty.

We'll drive southeast toward the city of Korçe. The long and winding road from Gjirokaster to Korça is a spectacular ride - this numbers among the most scenic routes in Europe. It is the main trunk road to the southeast of the country, and parts of it are poorly paved. You will enjoy every minute of it, dramatic mountains, lush meadows, rushing river torrents and waterfalls crashing down sheer mountainsides, more rickety bridges, eagles swooping in front of the eyes as they plunged off the side deep into the valley below, horses and donkeys with their wooden-framed saddles trotting along, cheery waves from their riders. The countryside will grow ever more remote and stunning views. At 1400 meters, Erseke is Albania's and Balkan's highest town. The high mountains are always snowy, and the hillsides are covered in young oak trees. As the road approaches Korça, the valley opens out to a plain in the lead of the mountains.

Along the way to Korçe will be different stops. Upon arrival in Korçe, start the visit of the city centre and of the main attractions including the famous Museum of Medieval Arts, the restored Old Bazar with its many attractions, the ABC museum where the first Albanian school was open etc.

Korça: is known as the centre of culture and arts. The first Albanian language school, originally for boys only, opened in 1887 and today it houses the National Education Museum. A separate school for females was opened in 1891. A French Lyceum opened in Korça in 1917 following independence. Historical documents referencing the city date from the early medieval period. The city has served as a very important trading market. Throughout the centuries Albanian caravans began their travels from here to Greece, Turkey, and Russia. In the second half of the 19th century, the city rose to be a very important economic, trade and cultural centre. Korça city today remains the most important economic and cultural centre in the region. It exhibits eastern characteristics, along with traces of French influence in its urban scheme and grand architectural planning. Korça enjoyed a heightened period of prosperity in the interwar period when many of its characteristic cultural institutions, mansions and boulevards were built. Visitors can experience this by walking through the city's many parks, clean streets and characteristic cobblestone walkways and roads.

Dinner and overnight in Korçe.



**Day 06**

**Day 6. Korce – Pogradec - Tirane**

After the breakfast, some free time to wonder around the old Bazaar and set off to Tirana. En route we'll stop in the town of Pogradec situated in the shores of Ohrid Lake recently UNESCO listed.

Arrival in Tirana and check in the hotel with some free time. Later afternoon we'll continue with a guided tour of Tirana including visits at the National Museum, BunkArt and Et'hem Beg Mosque. The oldest discovery in downtown Tirana was a Roman house, later transformation into an aisle less church with a mosaic-floor, dating back to the 3rd century A.D. Modern Tirana was founded as an Ottoman town in 1614 by Sulejman Bargjini, a local ruler from Mullet. Tirana became Albania's capital city in 1920 and has a population of 600.000. The city is host to many public institutions, public and private universities, and is the centre of the political, economic and cultural life of the country.

Dinner and overnight in Tirana.

**Day 07**

**Day 7. Tirana – Shkodra – Kruja - Tirana**

After breakfast leave Tirana heading north to reach Shkodra. Upon arrival walking tour of Shkoder – visit Rozafa's Castle, the city centre with its monuments and Marubi Museum.

Shkoder: Set on the banks of a sparkling lake at the foot of the wild and rugged mountains of High Albania, Shkodra, was once the largest and most flourishing town in the country. Even today, it remains the cradle of northern Albanian culture. Its mighty fortress, Rozafa, still rises proudly over the Drin and Buna Rivers as a symbol of Shkodra's will to survive. Shkodra itself was a hybrid town. The half-Catholic, half-Muslim population was western-oriented and had close ties with Italy.

After the visits we'll drive toward the countryside to reach the famous Mrizi I Zanave farm for a short visit and lunch. On to Kruja and start the tour of the city visiting the Ethnographic Museum located within the Castle Ruins & and the old bazaar.

Kruja: Having survived for thousands of years, nearly disappeared at the beginning of the 20th Century and been brought back to life during the last 50 years. Some of the main points of interests include the restored Castle and Citadel that it is tied to the legend of the hero who fought against the Turks for about 25 years. The Skanderbeg Museum located inside the castle and erected in memory of the Albanian national hero. Skanderbeg was in fact from these parts and Kruja was a strategic point in the anti-Ottoman resistance. The Old Restored Bazaar has a truly oriental look, multi-coloured and overflowing with goods of every description. The citadel includes the restored house of the Pasha of Kruja, dating from the ottoman period, which hosts the Ethnographic Museum.

Return to Tirana for dinner and overnight.



### Day 08

### Day 8. Tirana - Airport

After the breakfast free time at leisure and just before going to the airport we'll make a visit to the National Art Gallery.

### Note

For rates and other details please contact us.

### Program Touring / Guide

Private touring

### Periodic Departure

