

Albania - Culture, Nature & Fun

Albania is a fascinating Mediterranean country situated in South-Eastern Europe, in the West of the Balkan Peninsula, in the crossroads between east and west. It is a mixture of history starting with the proud and warrior like Illyrians in prehistory, continuing with the Greeks, Romans, Slavs and the Ottomans. The wars throughout the centuries and the 50 years of Communist isolation have left their scars in a peaceful and freedom loving people. Today Albania is a country with an ancient history, spectacular nature, rich traditions, vibrant and diverse culture and genuinely hospitable people.

DAY 1. – THE WELCOME

“Tirana the capital” The charming and vivid heart of Albania



Tirana is relatively a new city founded in 1614 by Sulejman Pasha of Mullet. The city began to grow at the beginning of the 18 century, but it remained an unimportant town until it was proclaimed Albania's capital in 1920. Today Tirana is not only the most populated city in Albania but also the most important political and economic centre in the country. An area known as “Blloku” because the villas of the communist elite were based here, has become the hotspot of nightlife in the capital with trendy bars, pubs, cafes and nightclubs. In recent years the dull communist-style buildings have been altered by an artist turned Mayor, through the ingenious idea of painting their facades in bright colours, and abstract patterns.

Dajti Express Cable Cart is a Austrian built panoramic cable lift which takes you in less than 10 minutes from the city to a mountain atmosphere at around 1200 metres. Wonderful panoramic views from the top await any visitor taking the ride.

Bunkart. A unique anti-nuclear bunker occupying an entire hill on the outskirts of Tirana built by the communist regime to accommodate the entire government and party officials in case of a nuclear attack. Around 150 rooms and the necessary equipment



Timescale Itinerary

Arriving: Morning if possible

- 10:15 – 12:00 Visit the Ethem Bay Mosque and National History Museum
- 11:45- 12:30 Transfer to Dajti Mountain through the Dajti Express panoramic cable cart
- 12:30 – 13:30 Traditional Lunch at Panorama restaurants with fantastic views of Tirana City below.
- 13:30 – 14:00 Return by Cable Cart
- 14:00 – 15:30 Bunkart Visit
- 15:30 – 16:00 Transfer to a luxurious hotel where the guests will spend the night for relax
- 18:45 – 19:45 A welcome Drink at Sky Bar a rotating bar with wonderful views of the capital 360 degrees.
- 20:00 - 21:45 Dinner at the SKY restaurants with great views of the city.

DAY 2. – CULTURAL ENLIGHTENMENT

Berat the UNESCO town founded 2400 years ago by the Illyrians and perfected by the Ottomans.



Berat is considered as one of the most beautiful of Albanian towns due to its distinct Ottoman architecture of white washed houses with their many windows which look like they have been built on top of each other. The several hundred year old houses built in this way have given the town a nick name the “Town of one over one windows”. It is considered as one of the best examples of Ottoman architecture design and building outside of present day Turkey.

Berat Castle and Magical Onufri Museum. The castle is the only one in Albania that still has houses and inhabitants within its walls, going about their daily life in exactly the same place their predecessors did centuries ago. We will visit the Fortress, St.Marys Church turned into Onufri Museum .Onufri was an Albanian master painter of the 16th century who painted many church icons in Albania and Greece and is famous for its red colour named after him. Berat is also famous for its two codex as they are known. They are two of the oldest bibles “New Testaments” one from 5th century and one from 9th century AD have been found here, buried under the altar of St. Mary’s Church.

Berat a Splendid Example of Religious Tolerance We also make our way down for a visit to the beautiful Kings Mosque and Helveti Tekke built next to each other while a few hundred meters away one can see the minarets of the Leaden Mosque and immediately next to it the bell towers of the Orthodox Church. This certainly makes Berat a fine example of the religious tolerance of Albanians renowned in Europe, but certainly not the only one as this is a reoccurring theme through many villages, towns and cities in Albania. After the organized visits free to explore the old quarters of Berat on your own, before heading back to Tirana.

Cobo Winery to taste some of the best wines in Albania.



Timescale Itinerary

- 08:00 – 08:30 Breakfast
- 08:30 - 10:30 Drive to Berat
- 10:30 – 12:30 Visit the castle and Onufri Museum
- 12:30 – 13:30 Lunch close to the castle
- 13:30 - 15:00 Visit the Leaden Mosque and Helveti Tekke and photo opp. of the beautiful architecture of Berat
- 15:00 – 15:40 Visit one of the best wineries in Albania just outside Berat, The Cobo Winery
- 15:40 – 17:30 Return to Tirana.
- 17:30 – 19:45 Relax at the Hotel or explore the surroundings on own
- 20:00 - 21:45 Dinner will be organized with a traditional cuisine “Iluminatum Residence”
- 23:00 - 03:00 “Cavaliero” Live Music Club with live singing starting at 00:00 (optional)

DAY 3: OPTION 1.– NATURE CALLS & WE ANSWER

4x4 Experience to Divjaka – Karavasta National Park a RAMSAR Site for its rich flora & fauna



This is a day full of natural beauty, adrenaline and fun. Departing with 4x4 vehicles from our hotel we will drive to one of the most beautiful Natural Sites with regards to flora and fauna., The Divjak-Karavasta natural Park. Karavasta Lagoon is the largest lagoon in Albania and one of the largest in the Adriatic Sea. It is separated from the Adriatic Sea by a large strip of sand. The Karavasta lagoon has a lot of pine trees and small sandy islands and is famous for the rare Dalmatian pelican which nests here in the only island of Pelican in this lagoon. In fact 6.4% of the Europe's population of this type of pelican is found in this lagoon. It was chosen as an area of international importance, protected by the Ramsar Convention of 29 November 1995. Inside the park's boundary we will have lunch at Divjaka Fish a restaurant in the forest, well known for variety of fresh fish. After the visits at Karavasta we will stop in the ancient city of Durres to explore the biggest amphitheater in the Balkans and the very rich Archeological Museum next to it. Return to our hotel in late afternoon early evening

Timescale Itinerary

08:00 – 08:30 Breakfast

08:30 - 10:00 Drive to Karavasta lagoon at Divjake.

10:00 – 10:30 A short verbal presentation of the Lagoon by one of the Biologists of the park

10:30 – 12:30 Explore the Lagoon

12:30 – 13:30 Seafood Lunch at Divjaka resort

13:30 - 14:30 Drive to Durres

14:30 – 16:00 Visit the Amphitheatre and Archaeology Museum

16:00 – 16:45 In the afternoon we will return to Tirana.

16:45 – 18:30 Relax at the Hotel or explore the surroundings on its own

18:45– 19:40 Colonia Café the most famous cocktail bar in Tirana imports unique ingredients to offer exotic cocktails, both in tastes & looks. You will learn to make your favourite cocktail with an experienced bar tender. And the best part about it, of course drinking it.



20:00 - 21:45 Dinner will be a “Slow Food” experience at “Mullixhiu” Restaurant

DAY 3: OPTION 2. – NATURE & ADVENTURE

Stand up Paddling – Sea Kayaking – Light Trekking & Pristine Beach at Cape of Rodon

This is a day full of natural beauty, adrenaline and fun spread over several activities which will suit everyone from the sport enthusiast to the not so sporty. We will reach Scanderbeg Castle at the tip of the cape through stand up paddling and sea kayaking. A walk back in history with the castle built in the 15th century while on the way through the lush vegetation we will see some unusual and huge anti-aircraft bunkers, out of the 700 000 bunkers thought to have been built all over Albania in the 45 years of a paranoid dictatorship. Close to our beach station stands the Catholic Church of St Anthony thought to have been built in the 15th Century by Scanderbeg as well, and which is supposed to have healing powers. At the beach we will relax practically with not anyone in site while local fisherman will prepare a simple but wonderfully fresh seafood lunch for us. Return to our hotel in late afternoon early evening



Timescale Itinerary

08:00 – 08:30 Breakfast

08:30: 09:50 drive to Lalzit Bay beach.

10:00- 11:30 Stand up paddling and Sea kayaking to cape of Rodon

11:30- 12:30 Walk through Scanderbeg castle, sea communist anti-air craft bunker and visit old church.

12:30 – 13:00 set up at the beach and relax

13:00 – 14:00 Lunch by the seaside

14:00 - 17:00 The group can sunbathe in one for the beautiful and untouched Adriatic Beaches.

17:00 – 18:00 In the afternoon we will return to Tirana. Relax at hotel.

18:00 – 19:45 Relax at the Hotel or explore the surroundings on its own

20:30 – 22:40 Gala Dinner at the Villa of the Albanian Dictator Enver Hoxha, hired only for our group. This is used by the President, Prime minister and Head of Parliament. A private tour of the villa and performance from the best string quartet will take place before the gala dinner.



23:00 - 03:00 "Cavaliero" Live Music Club with live singing starting at 00:00 (optional)



DAY 4. – THE GOODBYE

Kruja the town of Scanderbeg, the pride of the nation



Drive to Kruja, centre of Albanian resistance against the Ottoman conquests under our Albanian National Hero, Scanderbeg. He was born as Gjergj Kastrioti, a member of the noble Kastrioti family, he was sent as a political hostage to the Ottoman court, where he was educated and entered the service of the Ottoman sultan for the next twenty years. He rose through the ranks, and distinguished himself as a military commander of the Ottoman armies gaining the title İskender Bey which translates as Lord Alexander, a title honouring one of the greatest military leaders the world had known, Alexander The Great. Scanderbeg's career culminated in his appointment as sanjakbey (governor) of the Sanjak of Dibra in 1440. In 1443, he deserted the Ottomans during the Battle of Niš and became the ruler of Krujë, Svetigrad, and Modrič. In 1444, he was appointed the chief commander of the short-lived League of Lezha that consolidated nobility throughout what is today Albania. Skanderbeg's 10,000 man army marched through Ottoman territory winning against consistently larger and better supplied Ottoman forces, including two of the most successful warlike Sultans of the Ottoman Empire; Murad II and his son one of the greatest Sultan of the Ottoman Empire Mehmed II also known as Mehmed the Conqueror due to his capture of Constantinople. With the military tactics he learned at the Ottoman Royal Court, Scanderbeg managed to keep the mighty Ottoman armies from crossing into Western Europe for nearly 25 years earning praises from Christian Europe. The Pope gave him the title "Athleta Christi" while Vivaldi dedicated him an Opera. With the Death of Scanderbeg there was not stopping the Ottoman Armies reached the walls of Vienna. Europe was at the mercy of the Ottomans and its salvation came from an unlikely source the Sultan himself. Bayazid II the son of Mehmed II turned its attention away from the west and concentrated into an Eastern expansion.

In Kruja we will visit the Skanderbeg Museum and a rich Ethnographic Museum situated in the Ottoman style house of a local Bay with almost all items being original from the end of the 19th century. Finally we make our way through Kruja's famous Ottoman style Bazaar full of traditional handicrafts and souvenirs.



Timescale Itinerary

08:00 – 08:30 Breakfast

08:30 – 09:30 Transfer to Kruja

09:30 – 11:30 We will visit the Museums.

11:30 – 12:15 Transfer to the Airport for the flight back where we say goodbye

HOTEL OPTIONS

Option 1 . The Plaza Tirana 5*

Newly opened five star hotel in the centre of Tirana walking distance from the main monuments it offers modern external and internal architectural design and features. Being one of the tallest buildings in Tirana the rooms offer some unparalleled panoramic views. Offers a spa centre, sauna and hot tub. Total of 190 rooms.



Option 2 . Sheraton Tirana Hotel and Towers, 5*

This is the only 5 star internationally managed hotel in Albania. Modern with elegant furnishings has 151 rooms including 56 splendid suites, an impressive Presidential Suite, 95 beautifully decorated rooms. Offers indoor swimming pool spa and gym.



Option 3. Rogner Europapark 5*

Hotel Europapark in Tirana offers Albanian hospitality, add a very attractive architecture, combined with open space architecture which creates a relaxed and inviting atmosphere. It offers a beautifully arranged Mediterranean-style garden although situated in the main boulevard of Tirana. Outdoor swimming pool and modern spa centre complete the package. Total of 179 tastefully furnished rooms.



TRANSPORT

Transport will be provided with modern vehicles 2006-2010 production years. Samples below

