

## Discover Albania, Europe's best kept secret (7 nights - 8 days)

*This is a must tour for any visitor who would like to discover Albania within an acceptable time frame. It offers a great introduction into Albania's past and present history, customs and traditions. It touches all the gems of the country from ancient sites to architectural buildings and towns, comprising three UNESCO World Heritage sites. All this is accomplished in style, with excellent guides, acceptable drive lengths and stays in carefully selected high standard hotels with character.*

### Day 1: Airport – Vlora

Meet and greet at the airport and drive to Vlora a town on the Albanian coast where the country's Independence was declared.

**Hotel 4\***



### Day 2: Vlora – Albanian Riviera - Ali Pasha Castle Porto Palermo – Saranda

After an early breakfast depart to Monastery of Saint Mary, also known as the Monastery of Zvernec, is an important cultural monument on the Zvernec Island in the Narta Lagoon. At the heart of the monastic complex you'll find the Church of holy Mary, a beautiful place of worship surrounded by evergreens. After the visits we drive through the so-called Albanian Riviera with spectacular views on the Ionian Sea. Llogara pass at 1000 m above sea level with a Birdseye view of the coast is probably the most breath taking of them all. We will stop at Porto Palermo for a visit at the fortress of Ali Pasha a fortification used to control the sea trade routes. Then we continue to Saranda, drive up to Lekuresi castle for a spectacular view of the bay of Saranda and the island of Corfu. Afternoon free to relax and explore the town. Overnight in Saranda. **Hotel 4\***



### Day 3: Saranda – Butrint (UNESCO) – Ksamil Beach – Saranda

After breakfast depart to the ancient city of Butrint a UNESCO world heritage site and the most important archaeological discovery in Albania. Legend associates this city with Trojan settlers who fled Troy under the leadership of Aeneas. In fact the city was first settled by Greek colonists and was continuously inhabited for centuries forming archaeological layers of several eras of civilization. Apart the beautiful antique ruins it has the added benefit of being situated in a beautiful peninsula, rich in flora and fauna. After visits we spend the afternoon at Ksamil Beach one of the most beautiful in this region, known as the Bahamas of Albania due to its white sand and beautiful turquoise sea colour. Late afternoon return to explore the centre of Saranda where an ancient synagogue was supposed to have been discovered. Overnight in Saranda. **Hotel 4\***



#### Day 4: Saranda – Gjirokastra (UNESCO) – Apollonia – Berat

After early breakfast we drive to Berat. On our way lays Gjirokastra, a UNESCO site and museum town built almost entirely in stone and with a remarkable architecture. Visit the medieval Castle which used to be a political prison during the communist dictatorship and the Ethnographic Museum which is also the house the Albanian dictator was born in. We suggest the group should stop for lunch in a village just outside Gjirokastra. Continue on to the city of Apollonia one of the most important ancient centres in Roman times on the famous Via Egnatia. The famous Roman orator Cicero, astonished by the beauty of Apollonia named it in his Philippics, magna urbs et gravis - a great and important city. Established in the 7<sup>th</sup> century B.C., by Greek settlers from Corinth and Corcyra, the ancient city is located 11 km to the west of the city of Fier. In the first century B.C., Octavian Augustus studied philosophy there until he heard news of Caesar's murder in the Senate and went on to become the next emperor. Visit the city and an Orthodox monastery turned into archaeological museum. On the way back to Berat visit the famous Cobo winery . Continue on to Berat where we check in at the hotel and the group is then left at leisure to explore Berat. Overnight in Berat **Hotel 3\*+**



#### Day 5: Berat (UNESCO)

After breakfast we visit the beautiful UNESCO protected, museum town of Berat. We will walk through the Mangalem old district and visit the King's Mosque and Helveti Teke which show the religious tolerance of Albanians. Afterwards we proceed to visit the Castle and the Onufri Museum. Berat castle is of particular interest as people still live within its walls in their traditional houses, as have their ancestors for centuries. The castle used to have over 40 churches of which 7 still remain, including St. Mary's church turned into Onufri Museum. Onufri was an Albanian Icon master painter of the 16th century who painted many orthodox churches in Albania and Greece. Overnight in Berat **Hotel 3\*+**



#### Day 6: Berat – Kruja – Tirana

After breakfast we proceed to Kruja - the centre of Albanian resistance against the Turks under our national hero Scanderbeg. He kept the Ottoman armies engaged in and around Albania for 25 years thus impeding their progress into Western Europe. This earning him fame and recognition including the title "Champion of Christ" given by the Pope of the time and an opera from Vivaldi named "Scanderbeg". We visit the Skanderbeg Museum, a very rich Ethnographic Museum and the Old Bazaar where the best handmade souvenirs can be purchased. After the visits drive to Tirana where we visit the National Museum of History where you will be quickly introduced to the history of Albania from ancient times to present day concentrating on the communist era. The rest of the day is free to explore on your own the vibrant capital. Overnight in Tirana. **Hotel 4\***



### Day 7: Tirana, full day tour

After breakfast take a walk through the Scanderbeg Square surrounded by different architectures starting with the Mosque the Clock-Tower as the oldest examples from the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century, continuing with the ministry buildings of the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the communist architecture of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. Continue on to visit the Pyramid a construction initially dedicated to the late communist leader Enver Hoxha, designed by his daughter and son in law. It was conceived as the dictator's mausoleum without its body in it, however its interior was destroyed when democratic changes swept the country in 1991. We continue down the boulevard and make our way to an area known as Blloku (The Block), a huge square shaped area where members of the communist politburo had their villas. An area which until 1991 was guarded by soldiers with Kalashnikovs and guard dogs and was forbidden to ordinary Albanian citizens. Just before entering this area we will observe the memorial with three objects representing terror, paranoia and isolation, as instruments of dictatorship. We will have a look at Hoxha's villa in Bllok before heading to Tirana's newest attraction a Communist Era Nuclear Bunker built by the late communist dictator Enver Hoxha in 1970s to prepare for a possible nuclear attack by "American imperialism or Soviet revisionists." Only opened to the public in 2014, 23 years after the fall of communism the bunker is a 5 storey building inside a hill, built to withstand a Hiroshima strength bomb hitting it directly, and displays very interesting original artefacts. Overnight in Tirana. **Hotel 4\***



### Day 8: Tirana - Airport

After breakfast, free to explore until time of transfer to Airport. End of our services.