

# DISCOVER THE UNDISCOVERED

## The Ultimate Travel Magazine

*A journey through cultural, heritage, and natural beauty*

**Year-Round Tourism**
Mountain Tourism
Coastal Tourism
UNESCO World Heritage Sites
Adventure Tourism
Agrotourism

Coastal Escapes | Hidden Gems | Culture & Heritage

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# ABOUT THIS MAGAZINE.

*LIFE CHANGING EXPERIENCES AS TOLD BY CO-TRAVEL ALBANIA*

## CREATED TO INSPIRE EVERY JOURNEY

This is more than a travel guide — it's an invitation. “Discover the Undicovered” is a digital magazine built for people who want to experience a country still largely undiscovered by mass tourism: dramatic alpine valleys minutes from turquoise coastline, Ottoman stone towns wrapped around Byzantine castles, and a culture of hospitality that turns visitors into guests of honor.

Across these pages, we move beyond the postcard version of Albania. You'll find a proper introduction to the country as a destination, a look at what each season actually offers, and deep dives into the places, experiences, landscapes, food, and history that define it — plus the hidden corners most guidebooks skip entirely. Every section is written to connect with the next, so the magazine reads as one continuous story rather than a stack of disconnected facts.

This issue is brought to you by Co-Travel — a team of travelers, photographers, and locals dedicated to showing Albania as it truly is: unfiltered, layered, and endlessly worth exploring.





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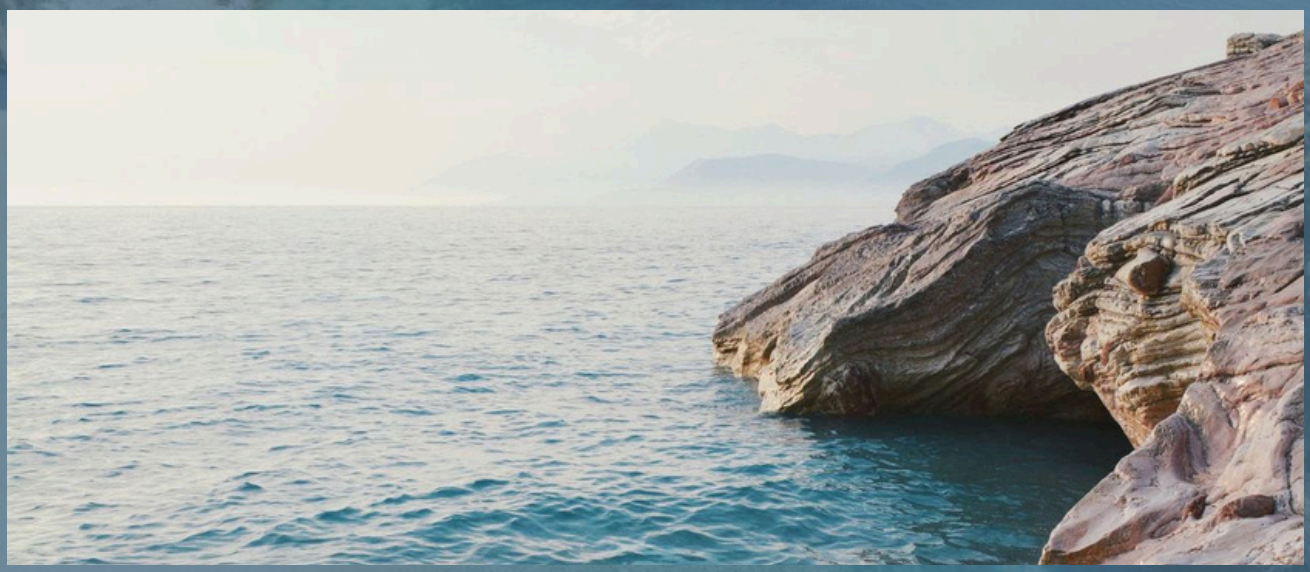
# WELCOME

**Albania as a Destination**

*Tucked into the southwestern corner of the Balkans, where the Adriatic meets the Ionian and mountains rise almost straight from the coastline, lies a country that Europe kept secret for decades — and is only now, slowly, revealing to the world.*

Albania is not a destination you rush through. It reads like a book with unexpected chapters: an Ottoman town frozen in time, half an hour from a turquoise beach; an alpine canyon where a shepherd still calls his flock the way his grandfather did; a Tirana boulevard bursting with colour that collides with the silvery-grey cobblestones of Gjirokastra. It is this constant contrast — between sea and mountain, ancient and new, rural calm and urban energy — that makes Albania one of the most intriguing destinations still left on the continent.

For years, political isolation kept the country off the tourist map. Today, that same history has become an advantage: the Albanian coast has not been paved over the way so much of the Mediterranean has, mountain villages still live much as they always have, and hospitality — a national value passed down through generations under the name "besa" — remains untouched by mass tourism. Whoever comes here today arrives in a version of the Mediterranean and the Alps that seemed to have disappeared elsewhere.



**“Albania is Europe's last blank map — and everyone who visits becomes, in some small way, a cartographer.”**

# GEOGRAPHY & REGIONS

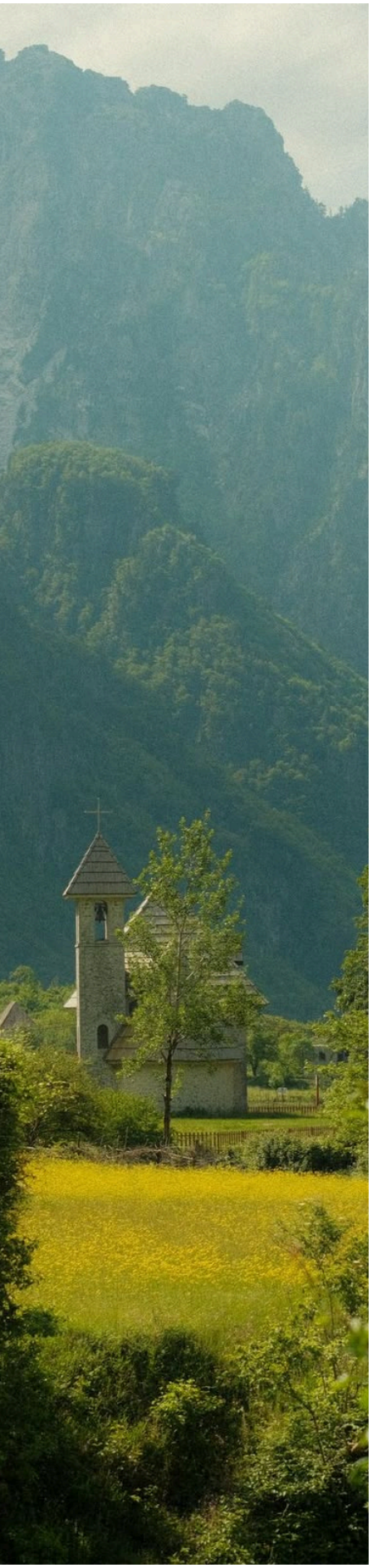
## A Land of Remarkable Diversity

Geographically, the country is a surprising compendium: more than 450 kilometres of coastline split between the Adriatic and Ionian seas, two basins with entirely different characters divided by the Karaburun peninsula; a hilly central belt planted with olive groves, vineyards and museum-towns; and a northern and northeastern arc of mountains — the Albanian Alps and the Korab range — that rival the Dolomites or the Swiss Alps in drama, minus the crowds and the price tags.

The cultural diversity is just as rich. Four millennia of history have left Illyrian, Greek, Roman, Byzantine, Ottoman and Italian traces, all layered onto the same small territory. The result is a national identity built layer upon layer: ancient cities like Butrint and Apollonia, Byzantine centres such as Berat, Ottoman architecture in Gjirokastra, and a capital, Tirana, that is now experimenting with some of the boldest contemporary architecture in the region.

**Quick Facts:**

- Capital: Tirana
- Population: Approximately 2.4 million
- Area: 28,748 km²
- Official Language: Albanian
- Currency: Albanian Lek (ALL)
- Time Zone: Central European Time (CET)
- Coastline: Over 450 km
- UNESCO World Heritage Sites: 4
- National Parks: 15
- Highest Peak: Mount Korab (2,764 m)



# 3 REGIONS One COUNTRY

Part of what makes Albania so rewarding to explore is how distinctly its regions differ from one another — despite the country's small size, crossing from north to south can feel like moving between three separate destinations. Understanding this three-part geography is the best starting point for planning any trip.

**Northern Albania**
**Mountains, Adventure & Ancient Traditions**

The north is Albania's wild, vertical half. Here, the Accursed Mountains (Bjeshkët e Namuna) rise sharply above 2,000 metres, carving out remote valleys like Theth and Valbona that remained cut off from modern roads well into the twentieth century — and still feel that way today. This is the Albania of stone kullas, shepherd trails, glacial lakes, and villages where old customs and codes of hospitality are still part of daily life. Shkodra, the region's cultural hub, and Lake Komani's dramatic ferry crossing serve as the gateway into this alpine world. Travellers come north for trekking, mountain scenery, and a slower, more traditional pace of life rather than beaches or nightlife.

*Highlights:*
Theth • Valbona • Koman Lake • Shala River • Vermosh



**Central Albania**
**History, Culture & Vibrant Cities**

Between the mountains and the coast sits central Albania, home to the country's largest and most historically layered cities. Tirana, the capital, anchors the region with its museums, contemporary architecture, and nightlife; Berat and Elbasan reveal centuries of Ottoman and Byzantine history within compact, walkable old towns; Durrës offers both a working port and a Roman amphitheatre in its city centre; and Korça, further east, brings an Austro-Hungarian-influenced old town and a strong café culture. This is the region where most journeys through Albania naturally begin and end, and it works well year-round — a hub connecting the alpine north to the coastal south.

*Highlights:*
Tirana • Kruja • Durrës • Berat

**Southern Albania**
**Coastal Beauty & Cultural Heritage**

The south is where Albania meets the Mediterranean at its most photogenic. The Ionian coastline running from Vlorë down to Sarandë — the Albanian Riviera — is defined by turquoise coves, cliffside villages, and a coastal road that climbs and dips through mountain passes like Llogara before dropping back to sea level. Towns such as Himarë, Dhërmi, Ksamil and Sarandë have become the country's most in-demand summer destinations, while inland, Gjirokastra's stone architecture and Butrint's ancient ruins add historical depth just a short drive from the beach. The south is Albania's warm-weather engine: sun, sea, seafood, and a lively summer social scene.

*Highlights:*
Gjirokastër • Butrint • Himara • Dhërmi • Ksamil • Saranda

**“Three regions, three rhythms — the same country never quite repeats itself from north to south.”**

# HISTORY & HERITAGE

**A Journey Through Time**

With a history spanning thousands of years, Albania is a land shaped by ancient civilizations, diverse cultures, and remarkable historical events. Its strategic location between the East and West has made it a meeting point of different influences, each leaving a unique mark on its identity.

The roots of Albania reach back to the ancient Illyrians, one of the earliest known peoples of the Balkans. Over the centuries, the region became part of powerful civilizations including the Greek, Roman, Byzantine, and Ottoman worlds, creating a rich cultural landscape that can still be experienced today.

Throughout the country, history comes to life through ancient archaeological sites, medieval castles, traditional villages, and historic towns. From UNESCO-listed cities with beautifully preserved architecture to ancient ruins overlooking the coast, Albania offers countless stories waiting to be discovered.

Beyond monuments and landmarks, Albania's heritage lives through its traditions, language, music, craftsmanship, and the strong connection between communities and their homeland.





# NATURE & LANDSCAPES



**Where Mountains Meet the Sea**

Albania is a country of extraordinary natural contrasts, where rugged mountains, deep valleys, crystal-clear rivers, peaceful lakes, and a spectacular coastline create a landscape full of diversity.

From the dramatic peaks of the Albanian Alps in the north to the turquoise waters of the Ionian coast in the south, nature is always within reach. The country's compact size allows travelers to experience completely different landscapes in just a short journey — from alpine trails and remote villages to Mediterranean beaches and hidden natural wonders.

Home to numerous protected areas and national parks, Albania preserves some of Europe's most remarkable natural environments. Its forests, rivers, wetlands, and mountains provide habitats for diverse wildlife and offer endless opportunities for exploration.

Whether hiking through mountain paths, swimming in secluded bays, discovering waterfalls, or simply enjoying breathtaking viewpoints, Albania invites travelers to reconnect with nature in its purest form.







## A TASTE OF ALBANIAN WISDOM

*"An Albanian's home belongs to God and the guest."*

This famous Albanian expression reflects one of the country's oldest traditions: hospitality. For generations, welcoming guests has been considered a great honor, and visitors are often treated not as strangers, but as friends.
In Albanian culture, a guest is a symbol of respect, connection, and friendship — a tradition that continues to shape the way travelers experience the country today.

A traditional expression representing the Albanian way of welcoming guests: offering food, sharing what you have, and opening your home with sincerity.

"Bread, salt, and heart."

# TOURISM IN ALBANIA

A Destination for Every Traveler

Albania is a destination where every journey is unique. Within a relatively small country, travelers can experience pristine beaches, majestic mountains, ancient cities, vibrant traditions, and authentic rural life.



In recent years, Albania has emerged as one of Europe's most captivating travel destinations. Rich in natural beauty, cultural heritage, and authentic experiences, the country offers an extraordinary variety of attractions within a remarkably compact landscape. From pristine coastlines and rugged mountain ranges to ancient cities and peaceful countryside, every journey reveals a different side of Albania.

One of the country's greatest strengths is its diversity.

Travelers can explore UNESCO World Heritage Sites, hike through the dramatic Albanian Alps, cruise across spectacular lakes, wander through centuries-old towns, or enjoy the tranquility of traditional villages—all within just a few hours of one another. This unique combination of landscapes, history, and culture allows visitors to experience multiple travel styles in a single trip.

Tourism in Albania is deeply connected to its people and traditions. Hospitality has long been at the heart of Albanian culture, offering visitors the opportunity to experience genuine local life, regional cuisine, and customs that have been preserved for generations. Every destination tells a story, not only through its landmarks but also through the communities that call it home.

Whether you're drawn to breathtaking scenery, outdoor adventures, cultural discoveries, or authentic rural experiences, Albania offers something for every traveler. Each region has its own distinctive identity, inviting visitors to explore at their own pace and uncover experiences that are both memorable and meaningful.

As tourism continues to grow, Albania remains a destination where authenticity is never far away. Its unspoiled landscapes, rich traditions, and warm hospitality create an experience that is both inspiring and deeply rewarding.

**The following pages explore the many faces of Albanian tourism, introducing the experiences that make this remarkable country a destination worth discovering.**

# YEAR-ROUND TOURISM

Tourism in Albania is a year-round enchantment, offering a diverse tapestry of attractions that captivate visitors throughout the entire calendar, owing to its picturesque landscapes, vibrant cultural legacy, and inviting Mediterranean climate. While the summer period, stretching from June to September, is especially popular for those seeking sun-soaked beach escapes, Albania also delivers remarkable adventures for tourists in every season,

## Coastal Tourism

During the summer months, Albania offers a diverse coastal experience. From long sandy beaches and hidden coves to charming seaside villages and dramatic cliffs, the coast combines natural beauty with authentic Mediterranean charm.
Whether you're looking to relax by the sea, explore picturesque bays, enjoy fresh seafood, or take a boat trip along the coastline, Albania's coast offers unforgettable experiences for every traveler.



## Mountain Tourism

Explore the Heart of the Albanian Highlands
Home to the spectacular Albanian Alps and breathtaking national parks, Albania is a paradise for mountain lovers. Scenic valleys, traditional villages, crystal-clear rivers, and panoramic hiking trails create endless opportunities for exploration.
Mountain tourism is not only about nature—it's also about experiencing local hospitality, discovering centuries-old traditions, and connecting with communities that have preserved their unique way of life.



# Adventure Tourism

Adventure Awaits Around Every Corner
Albania's diverse landscapes make it an ideal destination for outdoor enthusiasts. From hiking and rafting to kayaking, cycling, paragliding, and off-road adventures, the country offers exciting experiences for every level of explorer.
Whether you're crossing mountain passes, paddling through crystal-clear waters, or discovering hidden canyons, adventure is never far away.



# Cultural Tourism

Where History Comes to Life
Albania's cultural heritage reflects thousands of years of history, shaped by ancient civilizations and diverse traditions. Historic towns, archaeological sites, castles, museums, and UNESCO World Heritage Sites offer a fascinating journey through the country's past.
Beyond its monuments, Albania's culture lives on through its music, festivals, craftsmanship, cuisine, and the warm hospitality of its people.



# Agrotourism

Experience Rural Albania
Agrotourism offers a unique opportunity to discover Albania's countryside through authentic local experiences. Visit family-run farms, taste traditional dishes prepared with fresh local ingredients, sample regional wines and olive oil, and learn about rural traditions passed down through generations.
More than just a visit, agrotourism is a chance to connect with local communities, experience everyday life, and enjoy the simple beauty of Albania's rural landscapes.



# *The* MAIN DESTINATIONS

Albania's main destinations naturally fall into three defining pillars, each offering a completely different reason to visit.



# THE ALBANIAN ALPS

Rising in the northern part of the country, the Albanian Alps are among Albania's most spectacular natural treasures. Known for their dramatic peaks, deep valleys, traditional villages, and untouched landscapes, this region offers an authentic escape into nature. Often described as one of Europe's last hidden mountain destinations, the Albanian Alps attract travelers looking for adventure, tranquility, and meaningful connections with local life. Ancient trails lead through breathtaking landscapes, while small villages preserve traditions that have been passed down for generations.

At the heart of this mountain region are Theth and Valbona, two destinations famous for their scenic beauty, hiking routes, and warm hospitality. Surrounded by towering peaks and clear rivers, these villages offer unforgettable experiences for nature lovers and adventure seekers. Beyond hiking, visitors can discover traditional stone houses, taste homemade mountain cuisine, meet local families, and experience the unique lifestyle of communities that have lived among these mountains for centuries.



**Highlights of the Albanian Alps**

***Theth***
A picturesque mountain village known for its iconic church, traditional houses, Grunas Waterfall, and spectacular hiking trails.

***Valbona Valley***
A peaceful alpine valley surrounded by dramatic peaks and one of the most beautiful hiking areas in the Balkans.

***Koman Lake***
A breathtaking boat journey through a landscape often compared to Norwegian fjords.

***Outdoor Adventures***
Hiking, trekking, camping, photography, and exploring untouched nature.

# The ALBANIAN RIVIERA



Stretching along the Ionian coastline, the Albanian Riviera is one of the country's most breathtaking regions, known for its turquoise waters, dramatic cliffs, charming villages, and unforgettable sunsets.
From the winding roads of the Llogara Pass to the peaceful coastal villages of the south, the Riviera offers a unique combination of natural beauty, Mediterranean atmosphere, and authentic local culture. Hidden beaches, crystal-clear bays, and traditional stone villages create a destination that feels both peaceful and adventurous.

Beyond its stunning coastline, the Riviera is also a place of history and tradition. Ancient castles, old villages, local festivals, and centuries-old customs tell the story of communities that have lived along these shores for generations.
Visitors can explore secluded beaches, enjoy fresh seafood, discover historic landmarks, hike coastal trails, or simply slow down and experience the relaxed rhythm of Mediterranean life.

**Riviera Highlights**

***Dhërmi & Himara***
Charming coastal villages combining beautiful beaches, traditional architecture, and authentic local life.

***Porto Palermo***
A historic bay with crystal-clear waters and a fascinating castle overlooking the sea.

***Llogara Pass***
A spectacular mountain road offering panoramic views where the mountains meet the Ionian Sea.

***Ksamil & Saranda***
Famous for their turquoise waters, islands, and proximity to ancient Butrint.

# HISTORIC TOWNS & UNESCO HERITAGE

*STORIES WRITTEN IN STONE*

Beyond its natural beauty, Albania is a country where history can be experienced through ancient ruins, preserved architecture, and towns that have carried their stories through centuries.
Across the country, historic cities reveal the influences of different civilizations that shaped Albania over time. From Ottoman-era houses and cobbled streets to ancient archaeological sites and medieval castles, each place offers a unique glimpse into the past.
Recognized for their outstanding cultural value, Albania's UNESCO World Heritage Sites represent some of the country's most important treasures. These destinations invite travelers to explore centuries of history while discovering the traditions and daily life that continue to thrive today.

**ALBANIA'S HERITAGE IS NOT ONLY PRESERVED IN MONUMENTS — IT LIVES THROUGH ITS PEOPLE, TRADITIONS, AND STORIES.**

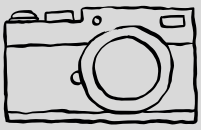


Old Town with Traditional Albanian Architecture

**Beyond these three defining pillars, Albania's character truly comes into focus at ground level — in the individual cities, towns and coastal spots that give each region its own personality. From the restless energy of the capital to the quiet stone lanes of a mountaintop bazaar, the destinations that follow are where the Alps, the Riviera and the country's heritage take shape as real, visitable places. Here is a closer look at the towns and cities that define each corner of Albania.**



# THE PLACES THEMSELVES

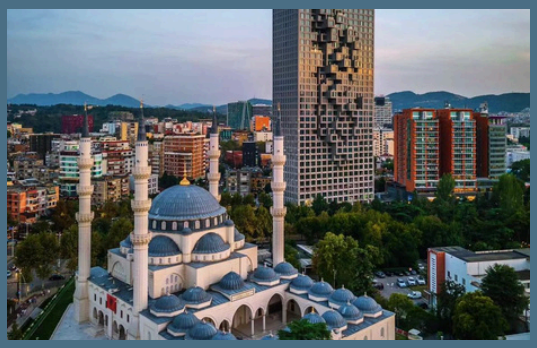


By Co-Travel Albania

Ten places that form the backbone of any trip through Albania — from an energetic capital to museum-towns and iconic coastlines.

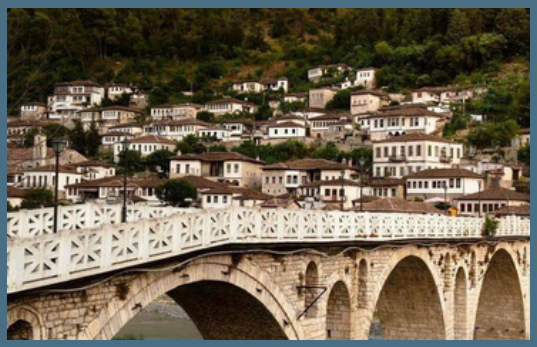
# Tirana — The Capital That Never Sleeps

Tirana best illustrates Albania's transformation over the last thirty years. Skanderbeg Square, rebuilt as a wide, traffic-free plaza, serves as the heart from which boulevards radiate toward the New Bazaar — a modern hub of restaurants, artisan shops, and nightlife that runs late into the evening. The colourful buildings championed by architect-turned-mayor Edi Rama, the reimagined Pyramid now serving as an innovation hub, and Mount Dajti's green ridge — reachable by cable car — make Tirana a capital that blends Balkan energy with European ambition.



# Berat — The City of a Thousand Windows

Stacked layer upon layer on a hillside above the Osum River, symmetrical Ottoman houses with their large windows gave Berat its iconic nickname. The Byzantine castle above the town, still inhabited by families living within its centuries-old walls, offers one of the most photogenic panoramas in the country. Berat was named a UNESCO World Heritage Site for its unique architecture, where Ottoman mosques, Byzantine churches, and interwoven Christian and Muslim quarters coexist without division.



# Gjirokastra — The Stone City

If Berat is the city of windows, Gjirokastra is the city of stone — fortress-like houses with steep, slate-tiled roofs, sloping cobbled lanes, and a commanding castle overlooking the whole Drino valley. Gjirokastra preserves one of the most authentic Ottoman bazaars in the Balkans and is the birthplace of two figures who shaped 20th-century Albania in entirely opposite ways: writer Ismail Kadare and dictator Enver Hoxha.



# The Ionian Riviera — Sarandë, Ksamil, Himarë

The coastal strip between Vlorë and Sarandë is considered by many European travellers the biggest Mediterranean discovery of the past decade. Ksamil, with its small islets reachable by swimming or kayak and Caribbean-toned turquoise water, has gone viral on social media; Sarandë functions as the Riviera's urban hub, with direct links to the Greek island of Corfu; while Himarë and the surrounding villages — Dhërmi, Vuno, Qeparo — offer secluded, crystal-clear beaches often reachable only by footpaths winding down from the mountains straight to the sea.



# Vlorë and Karaburun

Vlorë marks the point where two seas meet — the Adriatic and the Ionian — and the city also holds a symbolic place in history as the site where Albanian independence was declared in 1912. The unpopulated, protected Karaburun peninsula hides underwater caves, boat-only beaches, and one of the most untouched stretches of coastline in the entire Mediterranean.



# Shkodra and the Lake

In the north, Shkodra is the gateway to the mountains — a bohemian-spirited city, bicycles winding through its old streets, and Lake Shkodra straddling the border with Montenegro, home to waterbirds and fishing villages. From here, the road climbs toward the Albanian Alps.



# Theth and Valbona — The Heart of the Alps

Two of the most iconic valleys of the Accursed Mountains, separated by a mountain pass (Valbona Pass) that has become one of the Balkans' best-known trekking routes. Theth preserves stone kullas tied to its blood-feud history, the Grunas waterfall, and the Blue Eye spring; Valbona stretches along a green-turquoise alpine river, ringed by some of the country's most spectacular peaks.



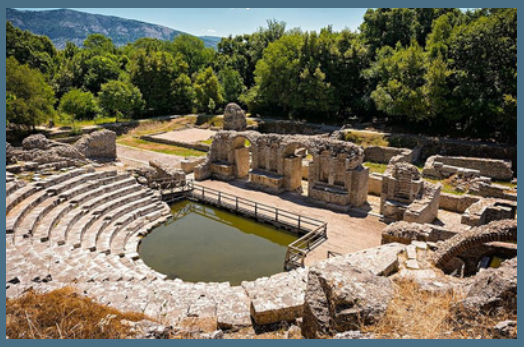
# Korça — The City of Serenades

In the southeast, on a high alpine plain, Korça combines Austro-Hungarian architectural heritage, Orthodox cathedrals, and a coffee-and-music culture that earned the city the nickname "Little Paris." It's also the gateway to Voskopoja, once a major Balkan trading centre, today a mountain village with remarkable Byzantine churches.



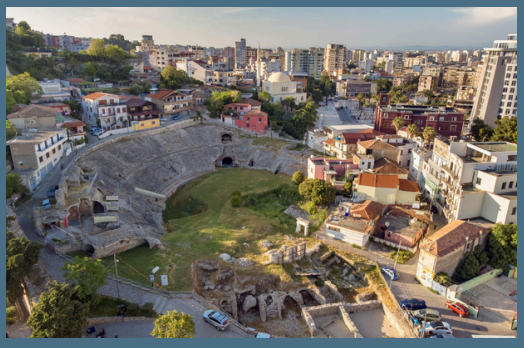
# Butrint and Apollonia — Living Antiquity

In the north, Shkodra is the gateway to the mountains — a bohemian-spirited city, bicycles winding through its old streets, and Lake Shkodra straddling the border with Montenegro, home to waterbirds and fishing villages. From here, the road climbs toward the Albanian Alps.



# Durrës — The Historic Gateway

The country's oldest city and main port, Durrës holds a Roman amphitheatre at the heart of the modern town, Byzantine walls, and a long urban beach that has made it a weekend destination for locals and visitors alike.







# *Tourist* VILLAGES

*Albania's tourist villages offer the perfect blend of hospitality, dining, and activities, making them an ideal destination for your next getaway. With a walth of picturesque and charming options waiting to be discovered, Albania provides a wealth of appealing choices for all travelers.*



Seventy kilometers from Shkodra, at the heart of the Albanian Alps, the village of **Thethi** remains the north's signature stop — a scatter of stone kullas beneath Mount Harapi, with the Blue Eye spring, Katarakti Cave and the roaring Grunas Waterfall all within reach on foot. A little further along the road, **Razma** offers a gentler introduction to the same mountains, its pine forests and sweeping peak views drawing both Albanian families and foreign hikers who want the Alps without quite as much altitude. Deeper into the Kelmend municipality near the Montenegrin border, at roughly 1,260 meters, **Lëpushë** has earned the nickname "Albania's little Switzerland" — its name borrowed from lepushtra, a yellow wildflower that blankets the valley each summer, while winter here can bury the village under more than four meters of snow, among the heaviest recorded anywhere in the country. Each August, Lëpushë hosts Logu i Bjeshkës, a folk festival that draws performers from Albania, Kosovo, and Montenegro.

Further east, wedged between the Valbona Valley and a chain of dramatic gorges, **Valbona-Tropoja** forms the Alps at their most cinematic — the starting or finishing point for the classic Valbona–Theth crossing, framed by glacial rivers and some of the country's highest peaks. Near the Kosovo border, the high plateau village of **Shishtavec** sits at around 1,300 meters, making it one of the highest inhabited settlements in Albania; largely home to the Gorani community, it carries a distinct folklore and dialect, and a skiing tradition said to trace back to Austro-Hungarian soldiers stationed here during the First World War, with landmarks like the solitary Morning Stone and Lake Novoseja nearby. And at the foot of Mount Korab — Albania's highest peak at 2,764 meters — **Radomira**, in the Dibër highlands, doubles as both a mountain-tourism village and the main basecamp for climbers heading to the summit, its alpine pastures and access to the Korab-Koritnik Nature Park making it worth a stay year-round, though its handful of guesthouses fill up fast.

In the plain of Zadrima near Lezha, **Kallmet** ranks among Albania's oldest continuously settled villages, home to the 13th-century Church of Euphemia and, fittingly, to the grape variety that shares its name — one of the country's most distinctive native wines. Less than an hour from the capital, **Shëngjergj** is defined by water: a waterfall, several small lakes, the ruins of a hilltop castle, and the Cave of Vali make it one of Tirana's favorite half-day escapes.

Twelve kilometers further out, the hilltop fortress of **Petrelë** anchors the village of the same name — a site with roots stretching back to the 5th–6th century AD, rebuilt in the 15th century and once commanded by Mamica Kastrioti, sister of national hero Skanderbeg; today a restaurant inside serves traditional dishes with views across the Erzen Valley, while the nearby Tyrbe e Nuses ("Bride's Tomb") adds a layer of local legend. In the Shpati mountains some 24 km from Elbasan, **Gjinar** has grown into one of central Albania's busiest weekend destinations, pulling in up to a thousand day-trippers in summer for Mount Bukanik, the frescoed Shën Kolli Church — painted in part by the celebrated Albanian iconographer Onufri — and the centuries-old, state-protected oak known as Dushku i Lleshanit. Near Korça, **Voskopoja**, once one of the largest trading cities in the Balkans, has shrunk to a village of only a few hundred residents, yet its churches, dating to around 1330, still hold frescoes by post-Byzantine masters David Selenicasi and the Zografi brothers — best paired with a plate of lakror në saç, roast lamb, wild plum raki, and the region's well-known "stark" apples. Above the same city, at 1,344 meters, **Dardha** has become a modern mountain retreat, its new guesthouses and hotels drawing visitors for summer hiking and light winter sports.





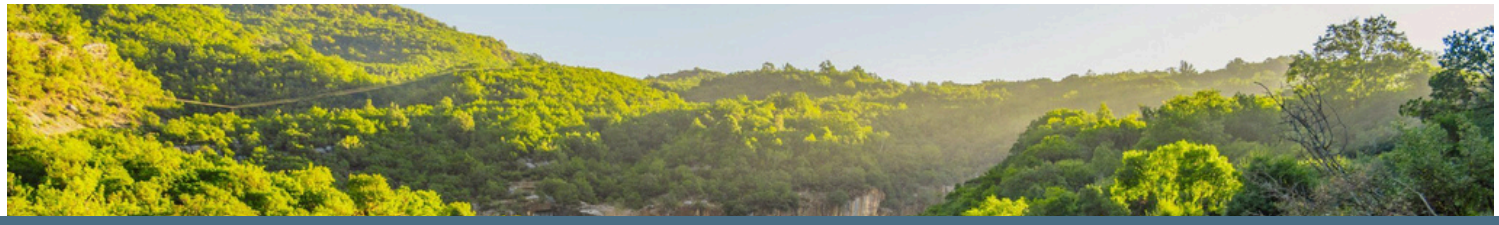





Seven kilometers from Korça, **Boboshticë** is known for two things found almost nowhere else in the country — a distinct local dialect still spoken by its older residents, and centuries-old mulberry trees used to distill a traditional brandy, alongside stone houses, early churches, and handwoven kilims that have earned it the nickname Korça's "forgotten" gem. At the foot of the Gramoz mountains, two kilometers from Ersekë, **Rehovë** is known simply as "the stone village" — dry-stone houses built without mortar, each with its own porch, lining the historic Rruga e Portave, the "Street of Doors," where centuries-old wooden doors still bear the marks of local craftsmen; try the village's signature dredhanik with walnuts before you leave. On the shore of Lake Ohrid near Pogradec, **Tushemishti** holds an unusual concentration of heritage for its size — fifteen churches, four of them protected cultural monuments — matched only by **Libofshë**, a village along the banks of the Seman River near Fier that shares that same density of fifteen churches alongside a distinctive local architectural style found nowhere else in the region. Closer to Gjirokastra, **Nepravishtë**, the largest village in the Libohova area, centers on the Castle of Melani and its adjoining teqe, alongside the paleochristian Church of Manastir, with a growing agribusiness scene bringing new life to the surrounding fields in recent years.

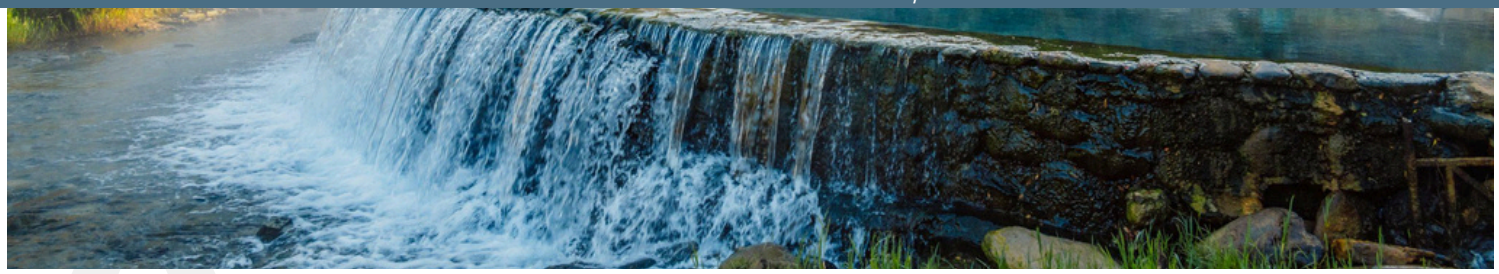


BERAT, ALBANIA



# HIDDEN GEMS

*Beyond the destinations already widely known, Albania still holds corners that even locals from other regions haven't fully discovered. Here are a few.*



**The Lengarica Valley and Bënja Thermal Springs**
Near Përmet, the Lengarica river has carved a deep canyon where natural thermal water bubbles up along its banks at around 28°C — small rock pools where you can soak among caves, far from any tourist infrastructure.

**Shën Pal Village and the Osum Canyon**
The Osum Canyons, near Skrapar, form a system of gorges cut from green-turquoise limestone, navigable by small inflatable rafts — an experience often compared to Turkey's canyons, yet almost entirely undiscovered by mass tourism.

**Sazan Island**
Closed to the public until recently as a military base, Sazan can now be visited on organised tours from Vlorë — an island preserving abandoned bunkers, untouched beaches, and some of the cleanest waters in the Adriatic.

**Dhërmi Village and Gjipe Beach**
Hidden among cliffs and reachable only via a roughly twenty-minute footpath, Gjipe remains one of the Riviera's most magical beaches — no road access, no noise, just sea, rock, and a small canyon behind it.

**Rrëzomë and the Karaburun Coast**
Small fishing villages between Vlorë and Himarë, where life still follows the rhythm of the sea, and where a family-run tavern might turn out to be the best discovery of the entire trip.

**The Cave of Pëllumbas**
Just southeast of Tirana, a short hike above the Erzen Canyon leads to a 360-meter karst cave where cave-bear remains and traces of Paleolithic settlement have been found — one of only a handful of sites like it in Europe, and a place locals once used as a wartime hideout.

**Karavasta Lagoon**
West of Fier, Albania's largest lagoon spans dunes, pine forest and shallow wetlands sheltering nearly half of Europe's Dalmatian pelican population each spring, alongside flamingos and over two hundred other bird species — one of the Mediterranean's most important, and least-visited, wetlands.

**The Bogova Waterfall**
Inside Tomorri Mountain National Park near Skrapar, a short forest hike from Bogovë village ends at a 20-meter cascade dropping into a jade-colored pool, cold enough to bite even in August — often paired with a rafting trip down the neighboring Osum Canyon.

**The Zagoria Villages**
South of Gjirokastra, a scattered cluster of stone hamlets climbs the slopes toward the Greek border, largely emptied by decades of emigration but still holding onto Ottoman-era houses, old stone churches, and mountain trails that see barely a handful of visitors a year.



# CULTURAL and NATURAL Heritage Sites

**UNESCO and the Ancient Cities**

Albania's heritage crown rests on three UNESCO World Heritage Sites that anchor the country's historical identity: the ancient city of **Butrint** near Sarandë, recognised by UNESCO since 1992 and protected under the Ramsar Convention for its wetland setting; the stone-built town of **Gjirokastra**, often called simply "the Stone City" for its distinctive tall, fortress-like houses; and **Berat**, one of Albania's oldest cities and among its most cherished repositories of national history and culture. Around these three sites sits a wider constellation of archaeological parks that rarely make it into standard itineraries but reward those who seek them out — among them **Amantia, Finiq,** and **Orikum**, each preserving fragments of Illyrian, Greek, and Roman life across the country's south.

**Apollonia, Bylis, and Antigonea**

Southwest of Fier, on a hilltop plateau above the Vjosa River — recorded in antiquity as the Aoos — lie the ruins of **Apollonia**, discovered in the early 19th century and named for the god Apollo. From here, the fertile plain of Myzeqe stretches toward the Adriatic with the hills of Mallakastër visible in the distance. Apollonia's fame once reached the heart of the Roman world: Cicero described it in his Philippics as a great and important city, and its renowned academy is where the future emperor Octavian, alongside the general Agrippa, studied and trained before rising to power — a detail that placed this quiet Albanian hillside at the edge of Roman imperial history. Not far away, near the village of Hekal in the Mallakastër area, the Illyrian settlement of **Bylis** sits on a hilltop offering panoramic views across the Adriatic coast, the Myzeqe plain, and Mount Tomorr, its ruins tracing back to the ancient civilisation of Ballaite. Further south, near the village of Saraqinisht in the Lunxhëri region east of Gjirokastra, the hilltop park of **Antigonea** preserves what is considered the most important ancient settlement of the Drino Valley — one of the largest ancient cities in the country, still largely unexcavated beneath its olive groves.

**Butrint's Wider Landscape and Lin on Lake Ohrid**

**Butrint** itself extends well beyond its central ruins: the national park surrounding it stretches from the villages of Berdenesh, Kallmi, and Qenurë in the north, east toward Xarrë and the ridge of Mount Milesë, south to Vrinë and Cape Stillo, and west to the Ksamil islands and the Greek border — making it one of the most ecologically and archaeologically significant landscapes in the Mediterranean, where Illyrian, Greek, Roman, Byzantine, and Venetian layers sit within walking distance of one another. On the opposite side of the country, on the western shore of **Lake Ohrid** some 20 kilometres from Pogradec, the village of **Lin** holds a quieter but no less remarkable story: inhabited since at least the Iron Age, its hilltop has yielded the foundations and mosaics of an early Byzantine church dating to the 6th century, with earlier Christian ruins and floor mosaics from the 4th and 5th centuries now included in the proposed UNESCO designation for the wider Lake Ohrid region.

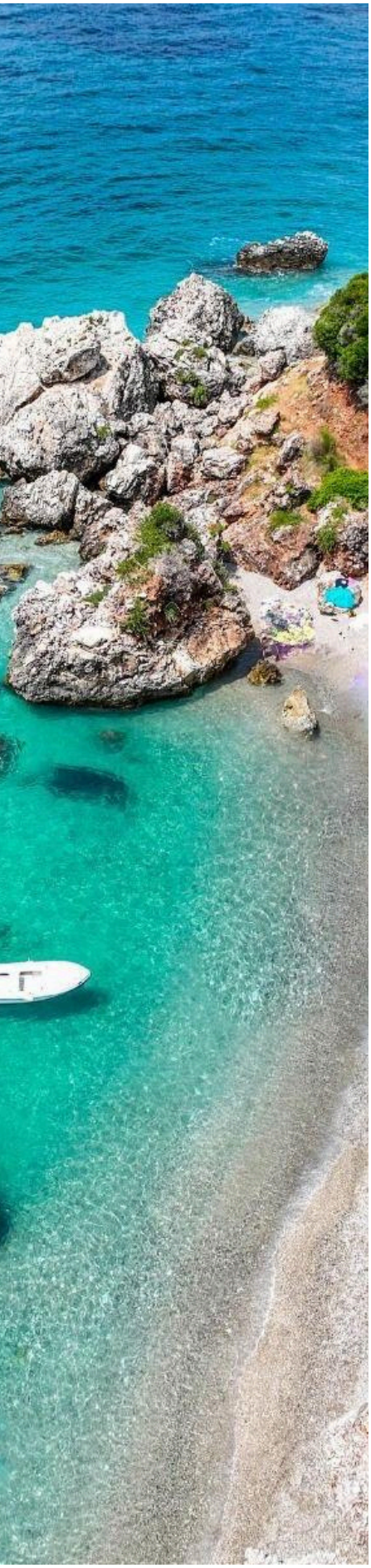
**Tirana and Durrës in Mosaic**

The capital carries its own dense layer of heritage within a compact centre: the **Et'hem Bey Mosque** and its neighbouring **Clock Tower**, the **National Historical Museu**m, the uncovered Tirana Mosaic beneath the city's streets, the historic Saraj of the Toptani family, and the preserved house of painter Sali Shijaku together sketch a timeline from Ottoman rule to 20th-century Albanian art. In Durrës, the **Orpheus Mosaic** stands as one of the finest surviving examples of Roman decorative artistry in the country, its intricate detail a reminder of the city's importance as a Roman port on the Adriatic.

**Churches**

Albania's religious architecture holds its own quiet surprises: the **Church of Shën Ndou**, built in stages between the 14th and 18th centuries, blends Byzantine tradition with Romanesque and Gothic elements, while the Shën Premte Church nearby shows a related but distinct Gothic-Romanesque style rarely found elsewhere in the region.





**Natural Monuments**

Nature carries its own protected monuments alongside these stone landmarks: **the Dragobi Cave**, designated a Karst Nature Monument, sits within a beech forest in the north, offering one of the country's most intimate cave experiences; the **Gashi River**, part of a UNESCO-protected old-growth beech forest, draws mountain tourism enthusiasts into a landscape of exceptional biodiversity; and in **Llogara National Park**, a 200-year-old pine — shaped by wind into the form of a flag and standing at 1,700 metres — has become a natural symbol of the park itself, valued as much for its scientific and ecological significance as for its striking silhouette.



**A Coastline and Countryside of Castles**

Few countries pack as many castles into so small a territory. In the north, **Rozafa Castle** rises above Shkodra with commanding views over the Drin, Kir, and Buna rivers, tied to one of Albania's most enduring legends. **Kruja Castle**, with roots in the 5th and 6th centuries, houses the museum dedicated to national hero Skanderbeg alongside a cluster of traditional Ottoman-era homes, while nearby **Rodon Castle** — also known as Skanderbeg's Castle — was built by Skanderbeg himself following his first siege of Kruja in 1452. Closer to Tirana, **Petrelë Castle** offers panoramic views over the Erzen Valley from its 15th-century walls, now home to a traditional restaurant, while on the coast south of Durrës, **Bashtova Castle**, constructed by the Venetians in the 15th century, is considered the only fortress of its particular type anywhere in the Balkans. Further south, **Borsh Castle** traces its origins back to the 4th century BC and looks out over both mountains and sea, while in Butrint, the triangular fortress built by Ali Pasha Tepelena once served as a Venetian stronghold before playing a pivotal role in conflicts with the Ottoman Empire. The same Ali Pasha built **Porto Palermo Castle** along the Riviera, its triangular design framed by Ionian views, and **Lëkursi Castle** above Sarandë, raised in 1537, still offers one of the best panoramas over the city and across to Corfu. Nearby, **Himara Castle** carries a history stretching back some 3,500 years, overlooking the coastal road between Orikum and Butrint, while inland, **Berat Castle** — dating to between the 7th and 5th centuries BC — remains one of the most profound single symbols of Albanian history, still inhabited within its ancient walls today.



# TRADITIONAL CUISINE

Albanian cooking splits, broadly, along the same line that divides the country's two main dialects — Gheg in the north, Tosk in the south — with a Mediterranean-leaning coastal register running through the middle.

The north, spanning the highlands of Shkodra, Kukës, Tropoja, and the Malësi and Dukagjin regions, leans heavier: more red meat, more bread, more dairy, more long-cooked dishes built for cold winters.

The south — Berat, Gjirokastra, Korça, Sarandë — leans lighter and more vegetable-forward, with more olive oil, wild greens, and seafood along the coast. Yoghurt, or kos, runs through both traditions alike, cooling the spice in a stew here, binding a topping there.

Nowhere is the northern tradition more theatrical than in **flija**, the layered "pancake cake" of the Malësi and Dukagjin highlands, made most famously around Theth and the villages of the Albanian Alps. Built from dozens of paper-thin layers — batter poured, covered under a domed iron lid called a saç, lifted, and layered again — a full flija can take three or four hours of constant attention to prepare, traditionally as a communal effort for weddings, Bajram, or Dita e Verës, the March 14th spring festival. It's often served with honey or yoghurt, and remains one of the clearest culinary markers separating the northern highlands from the rest of the country. Alongside it, northern tables also favor **mish gici i thatë**, pork dried or lightly smoked over days or weeks before being briefly grilled — a preservation method born from long mountain winters.

Central Albania holds the country's most celebrated single dish: **tavë kosi**, lamb baked in a garlicky yoghurt sauce until the top sets into a golden crust. Though eaten nationwide today, it originates specifically from Elbasan, where it's still called tavë Elbasani, and where the tangy yoghurt-and-egg topping that defines the dish first took shape in the 15th century — the same base recipe that later travelled into Kosovo and, via Ottoman kitchens, into Turkey as "Elbasan tava."

**"In Albania, the recipe changes with every mountain pass — but the table it's served on never stops feeling like home."**



The southeast has its own distinct specialties. Korça is known for **kërnacka**, small spiced grilled sausages of minced beef or lamb, sold as street food and served with bread, pickled vegetables, and a yoghurt-based sauce — a regional cousin of qofte, but firmly associated with Korça alone. The wider Korça, Pogradec, and Devoll area is also home to a lighter, crispier version of **lakror**, a savoury pie filled with greens, cheese, or meat, distinct from its thicker northern counterpart of the same name.

Deep in the south, Gjirokastra contributes two specialties found almost nowhere else: **qifqi**, small fried rice balls bound with egg, cheese, and dried mint, made without meat and shaped in a custom perforated pan unique to the city's kitchens; and **oshaf**, a delicate dessert of dried figs simmered gently in sheep's milk.

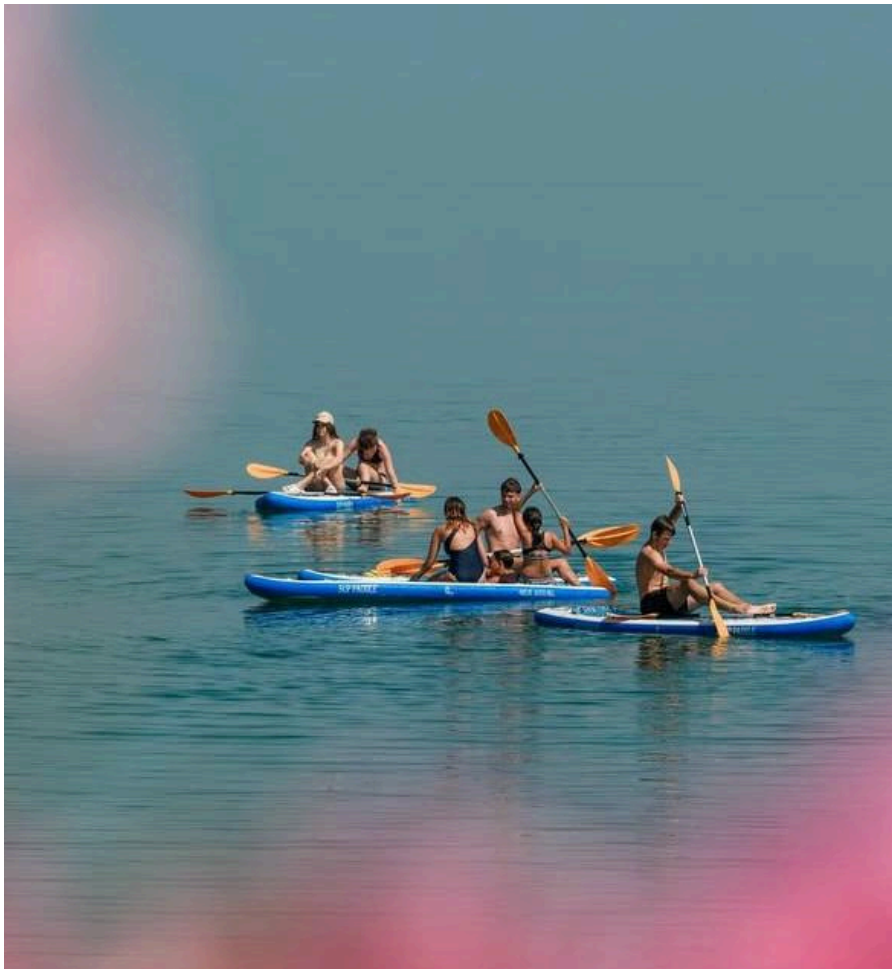
Threaded through every region are the dishes that belong to the whole country rather than to any one corner of it — **byrek** (called pite in some areas), the thin-layered pastry filled with spinach, cheese, meat, or potato and sold fresh from bakery ovens nationwide; **fërgesë,** the baked mix of peppers, tomatoes, and cheese most closely associated with Tirana; qofte, grilled spiced meat patties served with raw onion and salad; **tarator,** a cold yoghurt-and-cucumber soup that offers relief in the summer heat; and sujuk, a dry, garlic-and-paprika cured sausage typically sliced thin as part of a meze spread alongside **raki.**



*Albania's best beaches don't have addresses. You find them by boat, by footpath, or by accident.*



# ADVENTURES IN ALBANIA



There's a reason Albania keeps getting described, almost apologetically, as "undiscovered" — the compliment and the problem are the same thing. This is a country built on a scale that rewards movement: mountains that rise within sight of the sea, rivers still wild enough to raft, canyons deep enough to swallow a full day of walking. Increasingly, that's exactly how people are choosing to experience it — not from a bus window, but on foot, on water, in the air, or hanging off the side of a cliff.



Hiking is where Albania's outdoor reputation was really built, and the Accursed Mountains remain its proving ground. The crossing between Theth and Valbona over Valbona Pass — roughly eight hours through pine forest, high pasture, and a final descent into one of the most photographed valleys in the Balkans — is the classic route, but it's really just the entry point into a much larger network. Further into the Kelmend highlands, trails push toward Lëpushë and Vermosh, where snow can linger into early summer and villages still feel a full step removed from the modern road network. To the east, the approach to Mount Korab, Albania's highest peak at over 2,760 metres, draws a smaller, more serious crowd of climbers willing to base themselves in Radomira for the ascent. Closer to the capital, the terrain softens considerably: trails around Bovilla Lake and Mount Dajti offer a half-day taste of the mountains without leaving Tirana behind for long.

The same region has quietly built serious infrastructure around vertical thrill-seeking, too. The zipline at Petrelë, just fifteen minutes from Tirana, is the longest in the Balkans at 1,250 metres, sending riders across the Erzen Valley past Petrelë Castle at speeds up to 100 km/h — with a shorter but equally dramatic alternative in Theth itself, where a mountain zipline crosses over a kilometre of alpine terrain, and a third option at Belsh Lake near Berat combining the ride with canyon-and-lake scenery. For a gentler way up, the Dajti Ekspres cable car climbs 4.7 kilometres from the edge of Tirana to the top of Mount Dajti in fifteen minutes — the longest cableway in the Balkans, gliding silently over forest, farmland, and Cold War-era bunkers on the way to a mountaintop balcony over 1,600 metres above sea level, with hiking trails and a panoramic restaurant waiting at the top.

# OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES & UNFORGETTABLE MOMENTS

### Canyons, Caves, and the Water Below Ground

Albania's limestone geology has carved out some of its most dramatic terrain underground and underfoot. The Osumi Canyon near Berat is the country's best-known canyon system — a winding gorge of green-turquoise water and towering rock walls, explored by raft or on foot and often combined with a hike out to the icy plunge pool at Bogova Waterfall. Near Përmet, the Lengarica Canyon offers something gentler: a walk through a narrow gorge that ends at natural thermal pools warm enough to soak in year-round. For those wanting to go underground entirely, Pëllumbas Cave outside Tirana and the Dragobi Cave in the north both open into extensive, mostly undeveloped karst systems — dark, quiet, and largely left as nature made them.

### Rivers Worth Chasing

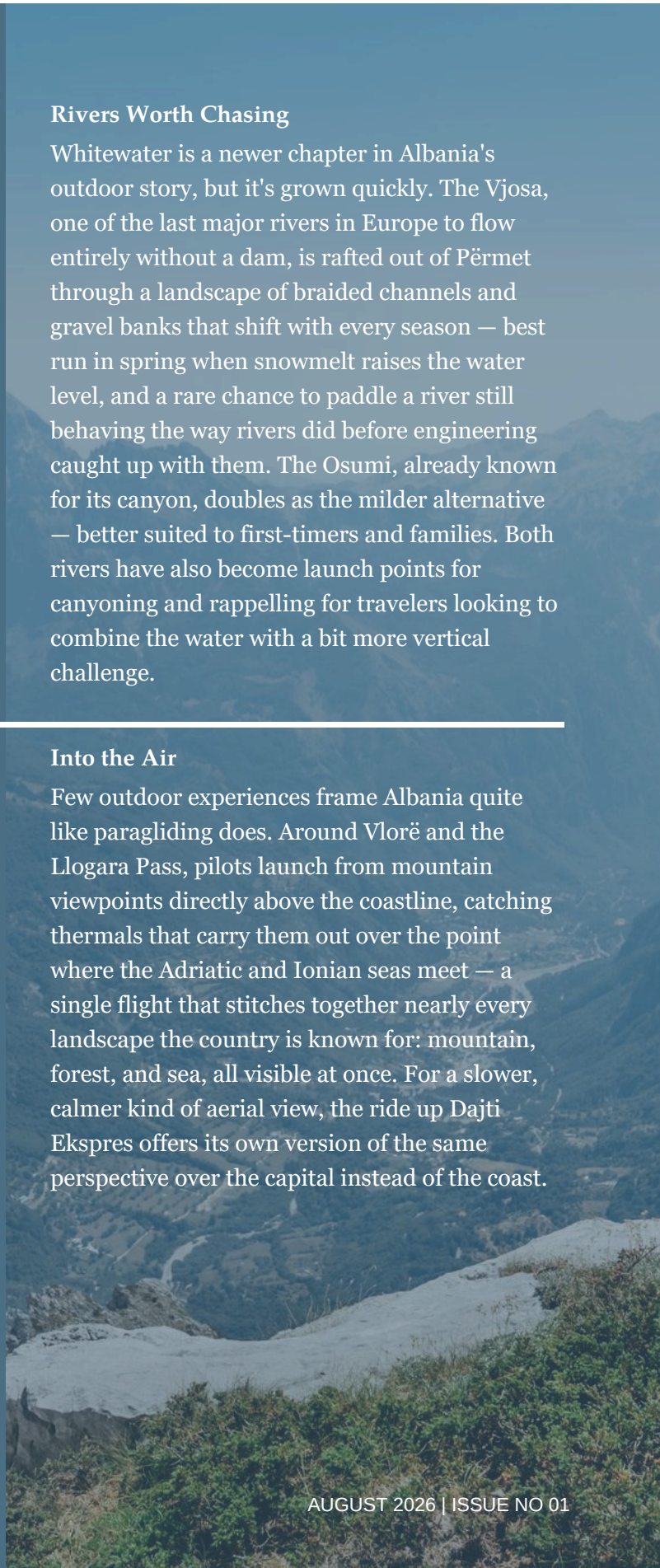
Whitewater is a newer chapter in Albania's outdoor story, but it's grown quickly. The Vjosa, one of the last major rivers in Europe to flow entirely without a dam, is rafted out of Përmet through a landscape of braided channels and gravel banks that shift with every season — best run in spring when snowmelt raises the water level, and a rare chance to paddle a river still behaving the way rivers did before engineering caught up with them. The Osumi, already known for its canyon, doubles as the milder alternative — better suited to first-timers and families. Both rivers have also become launch points for canyoning and rappelling for travelers looking to combine the water with a bit more vertical challenge.

### On the Water, Along the Coast

The coastline turns almost every stretch of the Riviera into a potential outdoor base. Kayaking is the quiet favorite here — gliding into the sea caves of the Karaburun peninsula, tracing the cliffs around Porto Palermo, or paddling the short, forested channel toward the Blue Eye spring near Sarandë. Boats take over where kayaks can't reach: full-day trips around Sazan Island and the Karaburun marine park, or shorter runs to secluded coves like Kakome and Krorëz near Himarë, where the water turns a shade of blue that photographs better than it can be described. Underneath the surface, the same coastline hides wrecks, caves, and untouched reef around Sarandë, drawing divers and snorkelers into some of the clearest water in the Adriatic and Ionian alike. And for climbers, the cliffs above Gjipe Beach have quietly become one of the country's best-kept secrets — dozens of bolted routes rising straight out of one of the Riviera's most isolated stretches of sand.

### Into the Air

Few outdoor experiences frame Albania quite like paragliding does. Around Vlorë and the Llogara Pass, pilots launch from mountain viewpoints directly above the coastline, catching thermals that carry them out over the point where the Adriatic and Ionian seas meet — a single flight that stitches together nearly every landscape the country is known for: mountain, forest, and sea, all visible at once. For a slower, calmer kind of aerial view, the ride up Dajti Ekspres offers its own version of the same perspective over the capital instead of the coast.



## Wine Tasting and Rural Tourism

Berat's countryside has emerged as the unofficial capital of Albanian wine tourism, with a cluster of family-run wineries — among them Çobo, Alpeta, Pupa, and Nurellari — welcoming visitors for guided tastings that typically pair three or four local wines with a taste of raki and a spread of cheese, olives, and cured meats. Many of these estates grow Pulës, a native white grape unique to the region, alongside international varieties like Merlot and Cabernet grown in the surrounding hills; nearby, the village of Malinat has become known specifically as "the village of vineyards," and several tours end with a home-style lunch served directly at the winery, looking out over the vines.





## Culinary Tourism and Cooking Classes

Hands-on cooking experiences have become a natural extension of Albania's wine and rural tourism scene, with small-group classes in Tirana, Berat, and Gjirokastra teaching visitors to prepare byrek, qifqi, or tavë kosi from scratch — often built around a market visit first, followed by a shared meal at the end, turning a single afternoon into both a cooking lesson and a home-style dinner with the family or chef who hosted it.

## A Slower Kind of North

Not every outdoor experience here runs on adrenaline. Cycling and horseback riding are steadily finding their footing in the countryside around Korça and the northern highlands, following old shepherd and trade routes at a pace that leaves room to actually meet the people living along them. In winter, the same northern mountains that host summer trekkers turn into modest, uncrowded terrain for ski touring — a small scene, but a genuine one, drawing skiers willing to earn their turns rather than queue for a lift.

Taken as a whole, it's a country that doesn't so much offer activities as it offers terrain — and leaves the rest, mostly, up to how far you're willing to go.

# THE TRADITIONS THAT SHAPE ALBANIA

Long before Albania became a destination on anyone's map, its identity was already being written into everyday behavior — a set of unwritten rules and inherited customs that still quietly govern how Albanians treat each other, and especially how they treat guests.



## Besa and the Kanun

At the root of it all sits the **Kanun**, a body of customary law traced back to Illyrian tribal tradition and later codified most famously by Lekë Dukagjini in the north — twelve sections and over a thousand articles covering everything from family honor to hospitality to conflict resolution. Its core principle, **BESA**, is essentially a sacred word of honor: a promise that, once given, cannot be broken. It's the same code that is widely credited with a remarkable historical fact — that during the Second World War, Albanian families sheltered thousands of Jewish refugees under besa, and the country ended the war with a larger Jewish population than it started with. While the Kanun's formal authority has faded, especially outside rural northern communities, besa itself still lives on as the informal engine behind Albania's hospitality: offer a guest food and drink the moment they enter your home, and refusing it would be considered awkward, if not outright rude.



## Weddings, Dance, and Traditional Dress

Albanian weddings remain multi-day affairs built around music, dance, and ritual. The **krushqit** — a festive procession of relatives and friends — escorts the bride to her new home, accompanied by the daulle drum and fyell flute, while guests dance the **valle**, a circle or line dance that varies distinctly from region to region: the **Vallja e Kukësit** from the north has become a near-universal wedding dance nationwide, while the **Pogonishte**, originally from the south, has spread just as widely in the other direction. Traditional dress still appears at these celebrations even when daily life has moved on from it: the **qeleshe**, a white felt cap, for men; and, depending on the region, the **fustanella** in the south or the now UNESCO-listed **xhubleta** in the north — a heavily pleated, bell-shaped felt garment that can take months to hand-make and weigh up to fifteen pounds, now recognized as a craft tradition in urgent need of safeguarding.

## Faith Living Side by Side



Few countries wear religious diversity as comfortably as Albania does. Muslims, Orthodox and Catholic Christians, and the Bektashi Sufi order have coexisted here for centuries, often celebrating each other's holidays alongside their own — Bajram and Christmas both draw shared family gatherings regardless of which household is fasting or feasting that particular year. It's a coexistence with real historical weight behind it, the same social fabric that made besa-driven wartime sheltering possible in the first place.

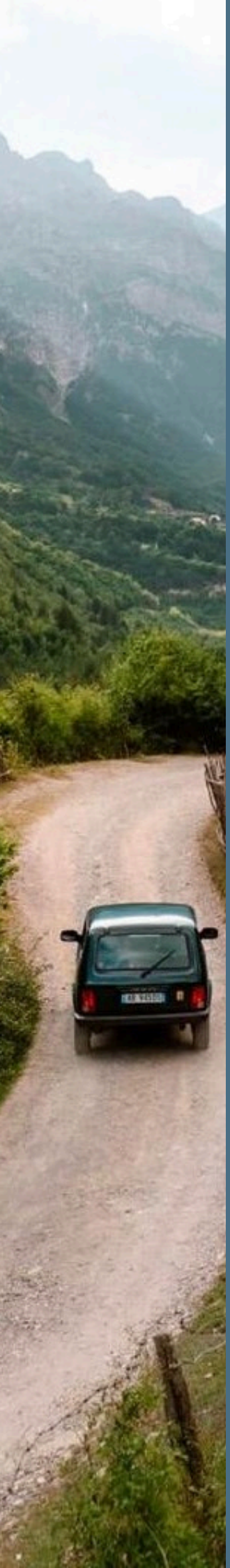
## Dita e Verës — Summer Day



Albania's most distinctive national holiday has nothing to do with religion or politics. Celebrated every March 14th, Dita e Verës is a pagan spring festival predating both Christianity and Islam, marking the end of winter and the rebirth of nature — inscribed on UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage list in 2018. The celebration centers on Elbasan, where the biggest festivities take place, streets fill with music and open-air gatherings, and people eat ballokume, a dense, buttery cookie made specifically for the occasion. Many also tie on a verore — a red-and-white bracelet worn from March 14th onward until the wearer spots the first real sign of spring, at which point it's traditionally tied to a blossoming tree.

## The Small Rituals of Daily Life

Beyond the festivals and ceremonies, Albania's traditions show up in quieter, daily forms. The xhiro — an evening stroll through town, usually along a main boulevard or square — remains a genuine social institution in cities and villages alike, less about getting somewhere and more about being seen, greeted, and caught up with. Music carries the same continuity: instruments like the çifteli, a two-stringed lute, and the lahuta accompany folk songs at gatherings large and small, keeping oral tradition — and, in the south, the UNESCO-recognized iso-polyphony singing style — genuinely alive rather than performed for tourists alone.



# The Perfect Road Trip

A single journey that runs from the glacial peaks of the Accursed Mountains to the turquoise coves of the Ionian Sea. North to south, the route moves through alpine villages, Ottoman-era stone towns, and ancient ruins before ending on the sun-drenched Riviera — a compact country that somehow holds an entire continent's worth of scenery.

**Tirana — Arrival in Tirana**

Arrival in Tirana and city exploration. Afternoon walk through Skanderbeg Square, the Et'hem Bey Mosque, and the Tirana Pyramid.
Optional ride the Dajti Mountain cable car for panoramic views.

**Shkodër — Rozafa Castle & Lake Sunset Cruise**

Travel north to Shkodër, one of Albania's oldest cities. Walk the Old Town, stop in the lakeside village of Shiroka, then take a private sunset boat ride on Lake Shkodra. End the day with a traditional home-garden dinner.

**Komani Lake — The "Albanian Fjords" & Shala River**

Cruise between the dramatic cliffs of Lake Koman toward the Shala River, ideal for swimming, kayaking, or a zip-line over the water.

**Theth — Albanian Alps & the Blue Eye Spring**

A stop at Qafë Thore Pass for panoramic photos, then a moderate hike to the Blue Eye of Theth — a turquoise pool fed by underground springs. The day continues with visits to Theth's church and its historic lock-in tower before the return to Shkodër.

**Krujë & Durrës — Skanderbeg's Resistance & the Roman Amphitheatre**

Krujë Castle and the Skanderbeg Museum tell the story of Albania's resistance against the Ottoman Empire, followed by a stroll through the Old Bazaar. In the afternoon, the Durrës Amphitheatre — one of the largest in the Balkans — closes the day on the Adriatic coast.

**Berat & Apollonia — City of a Thousand Windows & Ancient Civilization**

Berat, the "city of a thousand windows," unfolds through its inhabited hilltop castle, the Mangalem and Gorica quarters, and the Gorica Bridge. In the afternoon, Apollonia Archaeological Park reveals 6th-century-BC Greek ruins before the journey continues to Vlorë.

**The Riviera — Llogara Pass to Sarandë**

One of the Balkans' most scenic drives: the Llogara Pass climbs above 1,000 meters, followed by a stop in Himarë and a visit to Porto Palermo Castle, linked to the history of Ali Pasha of Tepelena. The day ends in Sarandë, facing the island of Corfu.

**Butrint — UNESCO Heritage & the Blue Eye of Sarandë**

Butrint National Park preserves layers of Greek, Roman, Byzantine, and Venetian history — an ancient theatre, Roman baths, and the Lion Gate. In the afternoon, the Blue Eye spring invites a moment of stillness in a deep, crystal-clear forest pool.

**Grama Bay — 5 Hours by Boat Among Hidden Beaches**

A five-hour boat tour departing from Himarë stops at untouched beaches and caves — Jale, Couples Bay, Pirates' Cave — culminating at Grama Bay, known for its turquoise waters and ancient rock inscriptions.

**Gjirokastër — The Stone City & Return to Tirana**

The "stone city" reveals itself through cobbled lanes, stone tower houses, and Gjirokastër Castle, overlooking the Drino Valley. In the afternoon, the journey returns to Tirana for a final free evening.

**End of tour!**

# Essential tips *and* practical information for your journey

## 01. Currency and payments

The local currency is the Albanian Lek (ALL), though Euros are widely accepted in hotels, restaurants, and tour bookings in tourist areas. Cash is still preferred in smaller towns and mountain villages, so it's worth carrying some Lek for local markets, family-run guesthouses, and rural stops where card machines aren't reliable.

## 02. Best time to visit

The ideal travel season runs from May to October. July and August bring the hottest weather and the busiest coastline, especially along the Riviera, while May, June, September, and October offer milder temperatures, thinner crowds, and more comfortable conditions for hiking in the northern Alps.

## 03. What to pack

Mountain regions like Theth and the Albanian Alps call for sturdy, comfortable footwear and layered clothing, since temperatures can shift quickly at altitude even in summer. A swimsuit and light clothing are essential for the coastal legs of the trip, and a light rain jacket is worth packing regardless of season.

## 04. Visa and entry requirements

Entry requirements vary by nationality, so it's important to check visa rules well before departure. Many travelers from the EU, US, UK, and several other countries can enter visa-free for short stays, but requirements change, so confirming current rules with the relevant embassy or consulate is recommended.

## 05. Travel insurance

Travel insurance isn't mandatory but is strongly advised, particularly for trips that include hiking, boat excursions, or remote mountain areas where medical access can be limited.

# Essential tips *and* practical information for your journey

## 06. Permits and boat transfers

Some natural attractions, such as certain lake crossings and remote hiking routes, involve boat transfers or local permits arranged through tour operators. Booking these in advance, especially in peak season, helps avoid delays or sold-out slots.

## 07. Physical preparation

A moderate level of fitness is recommended for itineraries that include hiking, walking tours over uneven terrain, or full days of outdoor activity. Days combining a castle visit with a mountain hike, for instance, can add up to several hours of walking.

## 08. Booking in advance

Accommodation, boat tours, and guided excursions can fill up quickly during the high season, particularly along the coast and in Theth. Early booking is recommended to secure preferred dates and avoid last-minute availability issues.

# ABOUT CO-TRAVEL ALBANIA

*INSPIRING LIVES THROUGH COUNTLESS EXPERIENCES.*

Co-Travel began the way most good ideas do — with two friends noticing that something wasn't working. After more than a decade shepherding travelers through Albania, the founders kept running into the same problem: itineraries that felt copied, paced too fast, and stripped of anything personal, so in 2024, based out of Shkodër, they set out to build something else entirely — not package tours, but journeys designed with intention. Albania resists easy categorization; it's a place of dramatic contrasts, glacial peaks and warm coastline, UNESCO towns and villages where the pace of life hasn't caught up with the century, and Co-Travel's philosophy starts with a simple question — how do you want to feel here? Inspired, connected, adventurous, at peace — the answer shapes the route before a single stop is chosen. Behind every seamless trip is a quieter kind of work: a network of local guides, boutique stays, licensed activity providers, and drivers who share the same standard for what a good day on the road should feel like, and it's this groundwork — patient, local, and personal — that lets travelers hike into Theth, share a meal in a family-run guesthouse, or wander Gjirokastër's backstreets without ever feeling like tourists on a schedule. Because no two travelers arrive with the same curiosity, no two itineraries leave the same way, and that's the point — Co-Travel isn't in the business of selling Albania, it's in the business of helping people feel it: its wildness, its welcome, its long memory carved into stone and mountain trail alike.

## ALBANIA, SEEN DIFFERENTLY

# *Albania* AS IT REALLY WAS

No filters, no staged angles — just the Albania that was here long before anyone photographed it. Illyrian ruins, Ottoman stone towns, castles still lived in, not preserved behind glass. This is the country as it actually is: old, unpolished, and real.
















THE
UNEDITED
FACE OF AN
OLD
COUNTRY



# CONNECT WITH US!

Every journey deserves a beginning, and yours starts with a conversation. Whether you already know the route you want to take or are still dreaming up what Albania could feel like for you, our team in Shkodër is ready to help you shape it — from the first question to the last mile of the trip.

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## Plan with us
Tell us how you want to feel in Albania, and we'll build the journey around it.