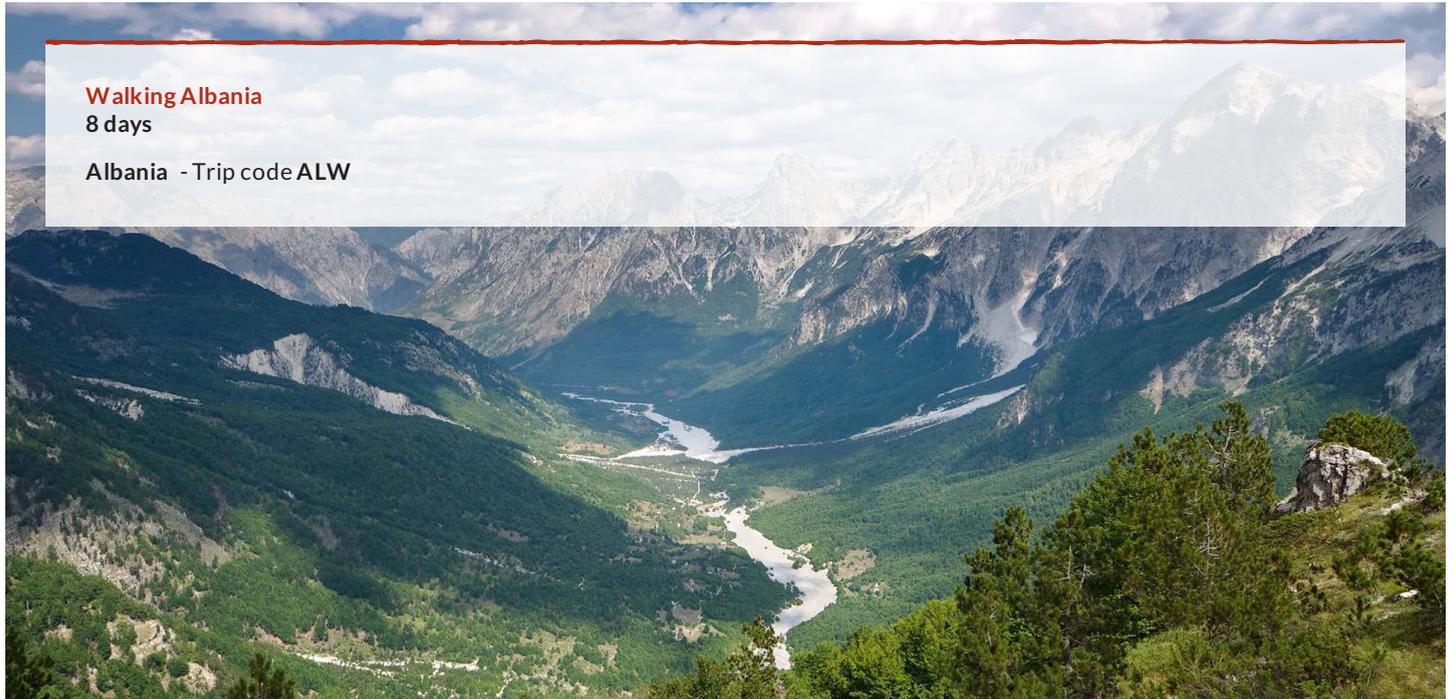


EXPLORE!

Walking Albania

8 days

Albania - Trip code ALW



Walking Albania

Explore the beauty of northern Albania's national parks on this scenic walking holiday. The highlights of the trip, Valbona and Theth national parks, are in the little-visited, Albanian Alps region. This will be a chance to see rural Albania at its best, encountering a traditional way of life in the villages that we visit and taking the opportunity to meet and eat with the people who live there. Albania has some outstanding and breathtaking natural beauty much of which you explore on foot during this week's walks.

Trip highlights

- ★ **Koman Lake** - boat ride across the lake taking in the stunning natural beauty surrounding it.
- ★ **Albanian Alps** - some of the most spectacular landscapes in the country. Explore The Accursed Mountains
- ★ **Traditional Villages** - spend time with the locals in Theth village and enjoy a traditionally cooked lunch

ACCOMMODATION GRADE:

Standard

Our standard, mid-range accommodation offers a good level of service, often with other amenities such as a restaurant, bar, garden or swimming pool. Generally rooms will be comfortable with en suite facilities.

WALKING GRADE:

Moderate

For those who are fit and active, these moderate walks are normally on good paths and tracks at low altitude. Days may include some fairly demanding ascents and descents, so previous experience is preferable but not essential.

GROUP SIZE:

10 - 16

Maximum group size ranges from between 6 to 20 people, depending on the type of trip, the transport and accommodation used and activities included. We rarely have groups that are smaller than five or six people and the average is 12 people plus an Explore leader.

Itinerary

Itineraries on some departure dates may differ, please select the itinerary that you wish to explore.

DAY 1 - Arrive Tirana, transfer to Shkodra

Join trip at Tirana airport and transfer by bus to Shkodra for your first nights' stay. Known as the 'Capital of North Albania', Shkodra is one of the oldest cities of the country. Founded in the 4th century B.C. the city is rich in cultural heritage and boasts a large number of artists, musicians, poets and writers. Time permitting we will visit the imposing Rozafa Castle that rises up on a rocky hill to the west of the city's entrance and, after dinner, take a walk around the city's pedestrian area, 'pjaca', with low elegant buildings from the Venetian period.



Accommodation: Hotel Argenti (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: None

DAY 2 - Drive to Koman Lake, boat ride across the lake. Drive to Valbona via riverside walk

This morning we drive from Shkodra to the docks at Lake Koman, before boarding our ferry. Described in the Bradt guides as 'one of the great boat trips of the world' our two hour journey takes us on glassy blue waters through twists and turns of narrow waterways beneath stunning mountain peaks. A truly beautiful introduction to the amazing scenery that Northern Albania has to offer. Once at the other side we drive to Valbona and dive into an alpine landscape, stopping on route for a beautiful riverside walk that will stretch out our legs and prepare us for the weeks' walking ahead. Today's walking consists of 6km approx 3hrs with 215m ascent.



Accommodation: Hotel Margjeka (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast & Dinner

DAY 3 - Hiking in Valbona National Park

We spend the next two days hiking in Valbona National Park. Valbona is based in the Tropoja district of Northern Albania which, along with two adjoining districts, encompasses a region called The Malesi, roughly translated this means The Highlands. A wild and high mountainous region inhabited by fiercely independent and strong people who have never really been conquered or subdued by the various invasions in the last 2000 years! The full name of the mountains around Valbona are the Malësi e Gjakovës and this name is most often translated in English as 'The Accursed Mountains.' A short drive after breakfast brings us to the beginning of our trail near to Drogobia village. We start a moderate climb, crossing meadows and patches of beechwood, climbing higher until we reach the elevated pastures known as 'Gjarpri i Dragobis' - the Drogobia Snake. It is the perfect spot to have a picnic lunch under the shade of a couple of isolated trees and to taste dairy products from the local shepherds that graze their herds here throughout the summer. We will loop the pastures, enjoying the spectacular views of the Dragobia Gorge on the opposite side of the valley, sided by numerous peaks, before descending to the bottom of the valley and taking a short drive back to our hotel in Valbona. Today's walking consists of 11km approx 5hrs with 712m of ascent and descent.



Accommodation: Hotel Margjeka (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast, Lunch & Dinner

DAY 4 - Hiking in Valbona National Park and lunch with the locals

Today we will walk straight from our hotel to the mountain slopes in front of us that create the massif of Paplluga. The trail winds through woods of beech and fir, crossing occasionally an old road used during the regime years for timber, until we reach the plateau known as 'Rrethri i Jubanit' and continue towards a panoramic spot where we'll have a picnic lunch. In front of us tower the magnificent vertical peaks of Grykat e Hapta, that create an impressive amphitheatre of limestone stretching till the end of the valley in the south west, where the Valbona Pass awaits for us to cross it in the coming day. After lunch we will continue to stay high on the plateau before starting the descent in the east facing slopes of 'Rrethri' to reach the hamlet of Kukaj where we will taste a cup of herbal mountain tea on the terrace of a local family's home. Refreshed, we will then descend to the bottom of the valley under the soft late afternoon light. Today's walking consists of 7km approx 5hrs with 463m ascent and 519m descent.



Accommodation: Hotel Margjeka (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast, Lunch & Dinner

DAY 5 - Drive to trailhead and Hike the Valbona Pass to Thethi National Park

A morning transfer will bring us from the hotel to the top of the valley in Rrogam where the road ends. Here our luggage is loaded onto horses and we start walking uphill to reach the Valbona Springs via a steep and winding forest trail. Later the walk continues into wide alpine pastures with large glacier erratic rocks, scattered here and there. The path then continues to steepen into a narrow trail that leads to the Valbona Pass. On clear days the views from this location at the heart of the Accursed Massif are truly breath taking. From here we follow a trail that winds through fir and beech forest and descends into the Thethi valley, also surrounded by a number of 2500m high sheer rocky domes, such as the Radohima and the Harapit. Today's walking consists of 9km approx 7hrs with 1051m ascent and 1305m descent.



Accommodation: Pisha Villa (or similar)



Simple Hut



Meals Provided: Breakfast, Lunch & Dinner

DAY 6 - Exploring the Thethi Valley

Thethi is an iconic Northern Albanian 'malesore' (highlands) village. Enclosed in the full remoteness of the Accursed Mountains it stayed protected from the multiple invasions that afflicted the more accessible parts of the Alps and life was organised following the detailed rules of the 'Kanun' - the Unwritten Code of the Mountains. These aspects were well pictured by the Victorian traveller Ms Edith Durham in the book, High Albania, written on her journey into the area at the beginning of the 20th Century. We will spend the day discovering the village on foot in a succession of attractions such as the stone built catholic church, Kulla e Ngujimit - the blood feud lock in tower, the waterfall and then along the Grunas Canyon's ancient terraces towards the hamlet of Nderlysa; here we will have a tasty lunch prepared by one of the local families. In the afternoon, after some free time to relax by the natural pools of Nderlysa - created by the clear and icy water of the Kaprea Creek - a short transfer of around 20 minutes will bring us back to Thethi for dinner and overnight. Today's walking consists of 7km approx 4hrs with 419m ascent and 664m descent.



Accommodation: Pisha Villa (or similar)



Simple Hut



Meals Provided: Breakfast, Lunch & Dinner

DAY 7 - Walk to Thore Pass; transfer to Tirana, explore the city on foot

This morning we leave our hotel on foot, passing through the village and crossing meadows and woods in a gradual climb in the direction of Thore Pass. Walking on the unsealed village road we will reach the memorial of Edith Durham, known by the highlanders as 'Krajilica e Malsis' - the Queen of the Highlands - in respect of her support of the Albanian cause after World War One. This spot offers fantastic views on the Thethi Valley with the imposing big wall of Mt Harapit in full sight. From here we start driving into the scenic valley of Boga, slowly leaving behind the silhouette of the Albanian Alps and heading towards the Shkodra plain. In the afternoon our drive ends in the colourful Albanian capital of Tirana, where we stay in a hotel near the city centre. A city walk gives us the opportunity to learn more about the developments of Tirana throughout the various periods of influence, and have a taste of its cosmopolitan atmosphere. Today's walking consists of 6km approx 3hrs with 951m ascent and 170m descent.



Accommodation: Vila Alba (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 8 - Trip ends Tirana

The trip ends after breakfast.



Meals Provided: Breakfast

Walking and Trekking information

DAILY DISTANCE



Optional Walks

Walking grade

Moderate

Trek details

We walk for 6 days for 3 to 7 hours each day. Most walks are on well-defined footpaths, mountain tracks and some dirt tracks. We have graded this tour as easy to moderate.

Max walking altitude (m)

1800



What's included?



Included meals

Breakfast: 7
Lunch: 4
Dinner: 5



Transport

Bus



Trip staff

Explore Tour Leader
Driver(s)
Local Guide(s)



Accommodation

5 nights standard hotel
2 nights simple hut

Trip information

Country information

Albania Trips

Climate

Albania has a mediterranean climate with hot, dry summers (ranging from 9 - 11 hours of sunshine a day in Tirana). Temperatures can reach up to 40°C in July. October to April is much cooler and can be wet. Albania is a mountainous country and the high peaks are snow-capped all year. Additional information and climate charts can be accessed at <http://www.explore.co.uk/weather>. Seasonal weather patterns can be unpredictable.

Time difference to GMT

+1

Plugs

2 Pin Round

Religion

Islam, Albanian Orthodox, Roman Catholic

Language

Albanian, Greek, Vlach, Romani, Slavic dialects

Budgeting and packing

Clothing

Weather is changeable in the mountains and it can be cold, especially at night, so bring a warmer jacket/fleece. Bring layers to enable you to be comfortable no matter what the temperature as this could easily fluctuate throughout the day. A waterproof jacket is essential at all times in case of rain, you may wish to bring waterproof trousers as well. You should dress with respect in the rural villages so bring some long trousers. Don't forget your swimming costume.

Footwear

We recommend you bring walking boots with ankle support- leather or fabric are both fine. Make sure that your boots are worn-in and comfortable before the start of the trip. Also trainers or sandals for relaxing and general wear. We suggest that on international

flights you either carry your walking boots in your hand luggage or wear them - should your luggage be lost or delayed, your own boots are the one thing that will be irreplaceable.

Luggage

20kg

Luggage: On tour

One main piece of baggage and a daypack. Remember you are expected to carry your own luggage so don't overload yourself. Please bear in mind there are lots of stairs in Albania and no portage in the hotels.

Equipment

Take a water bottle, a sun hat and suncream. A torch is useful in case of powercuts/emergencies. If you usually trek with poles it would be advisable to bring them with you.

Tipping

Explore leader

At your discretion you might also consider tipping your Tour Leader in appreciation of the efficiency and service you receive.

Local crew

Although entirely voluntary, tipping is a recognised part of life in this region of the world. Some local staff will look to members of the group for personal recognition of particular services provided. Accordingly, you should allow approx. €20 for tipping. In order to make things easier for you, the Tour Leaders may organise a group's tips kitty and if this is the case, they will account for it throughout the tour.

Country Information

Albania Trips

Food and drink

The costs for meals may vary depending upon location, type of restaurant and number of courses eaten and so the prices given are an average guide. Local restaurants located off the beaten track may be less expensive, whereas an upmarket restaurant located in the centre of a major city may charge more.

Lunch price

£4.00

Dinner price

£10.00

Beer price

£1.50

Water price

£0.50

Foreign Exchange

Local currency

Albanian Lek.

Recommended Currency For Exchange

Sterling, US Dollars and Euros cash is widely accepted in bureaux de change in major towns and cities. Most transactions in Albania are done on a strictly cash only basis using the Lek.

Where To Exchange

Bureau de change in major towns and cities.

ATM Availability

Most larger towns.

Credit Card Acceptance

Credit cards are not widely accepted in Albania.

Travellers Cheques

Travellers Cheques are not widely accepted in Albania, though you should take some as a back-up in case of emergencies.

Transport, Accommodation & Meals

Transport Information

Bus

Accommodation notes

Booking a Single Room

All of our group tours are planned and operated on a twin-share basis, meaning that the standard cost is based either on individual travellers sharing accommodation with another group member of the same sex, or people who book together sharing accommodation. Please refer to the tour notes where the single room option availability is detailed on a night by night basis for this tour, and the price for the available nights is detailed on the dates & prices tab by departure date. For Self-Guided trips the Single Room supplement offers the option of a single room each and is charged per person. The Single Room supplement also applies to the third person in a party of three that will be accommodated in a single room.

Due to the size of the accommodation in the National Park areas a single room is only available on the first and last nights on this trip. On days five and six we stay at Pisha Villa which has simple, comfortable rooms. There are modern bathroom facilities with showers, but not en-suite, towels will be provided.

Essential information

FCO Advice

We strongly recommend that you check your government's travel advisory for up-to-date information and advice about your destination: safety and security, entry requirements, health, local laws and customs. For UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office advice [click here](#).

For more information from Explore about travel advice, [click here](#)

Under 18 immigration guidance

Please note that some countries require proof of parental consent when travelling overseas with under 18s. Please check requirements with the relevant embassy or consular office well in advance of travel if this applies to your party.

Essential Information

Once your booking has been confirmed we guarantee the price will not increase, whatever the circumstances. Before booking please ensure you have read our important tour pricing information. [Booking Conditions](#)

Visa Information

Albania: Visas are not required by UK, Australian, New Zealand, US and Canadian citizens. Other nationalities should consult their local embassy or consular office. You should confirm all visa related questions with the relevant Embassy prior to departure.

If you do require assistance in obtaining a visa then you may consider applying through Explore's recommended visa service in the UK, Travcour. See www.travcour.com to download the relevant visa application for your trip, if applicable (UK citizens only), along with details of how to apply for your visa through Travcour. The Team at Travcour will be happy to answer specific questions relating to visa applications, please call them directly on 0208 5431846.

Booking conditions

Before booking your Explore trip, please ensure that you read both our [Essential Information](#) and [Booking Conditions](#).

Transfers

[Find out more about Trip Transfer Terms and Conditions before you book.](#)

Booking a land only package with Explore

Customers who have chosen to book on the 'Land Only' arrangements of our tour, please ensure that you have checked your tour specific 'Joining Instructions' prior to booking your own travel arrangements. Your joining instructions can be found below in the dates and prices information.

You may also be eligible for the Free Explore Transfer.

Joining Tour Abroad

Customers booked on the 'Land Only' arrangements will now receive a Free Transfer, provided you arrive and depart on the tour only itinerary start and end dates. The transfers will be from the Explore designated airport or train station to the joining point of your tour, and then back from the ending point to the designated airport or train station. The exception to this rule is customers who are booked on a tour where the joining and ending point is at the designated airport or train station.

Free transfers are not available for Self-Guided, Tailormade or Tours for Churches customers.

If you are not eligible for the Free Transfer then you will need to make your own way through to the joining and ending point. On a majority of our tours Explore will be able to provide a private transfer at an additional cost. Please ask for a quote at the time of booking.

For more information regarding the Explore Free Transfer click [here](#)

Insurance

It is a condition of booking with Explore that you have adequate valid travel insurance. It is your responsibility to arrange appropriate travel insurance and ensure you have read and understood the full terms and conditions of your travel insurance policy to ensure that you are covered for all activities you intend to undertake whilst on the tour, including all optional activities. Your Insurance Policy must fully cover you for medical expenses and emergency repatriation to your home country. Please ensure your policy includes medical emergency helicopter evacuation in the event of illness or injury and covers the entire duration of your holiday. If you are trekking at altitude please ensure that there is no upper altitude limit which may limit or exclude cover for your trip. Medical and repatriation insurance cover is not mandatory for UK residents who are travelling on trips within the United Kingdom.

Read more information about what travel insurance is required.

Flight information

Explore offers a wide range of flexible flying options to make joining and leaving our trips easy. [Read more about them here.](#)

Flight Information

You are able to book this tour on a 'land only' basis or as a 'flight inclusive' package. Your flight inclusive package will be fully protected by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) ATOL protection scheme.

Booking a flight inclusive package with Explore

We have a good selection of flights not only from London but from many regional airports around the UK allowing us to compare fares between scheduled carriers as well as low cost and charter airlines. Our dedicated flights team will match the best flight options to your arrival and departure airport.

On our website we display a UK flight inclusive package guide price which is generally based on a London departure. To avoid paying supplements or to secure your preferred flight option, we recommend booking as early as possible, especially for peak travel dates.

Maximum altitude (m)

1800

Albania Trips

Vaccinations

We recommend protection against hepatitis A, typhoid, polio and tetanus. Rabies vaccination is recommended by the Foreign & Commonwealth Office due to the large number of stray dogs in Albania. You should seek further advice from your travel clinic. Tick-borne encephalitis is recommended by some medical sources if travelling in certain areas of Eastern Europe, at specific times of the year. Check latest requirements with your travel clinic or doctor prior to departure. The above is not an exhaustive list. Further information regarding vaccinations and travel health advice can be found by following the NHS and NaTHNaC links at <http://www.explore.co.uk/Travelhealth/> and from your local healthcare provider. Visa and vaccination requirements are subject to change and should be confirmed before departure.