

EXPLORE!

BEST SELLER

Highlights of Albania
11 days

Albania - Trip code AB



Highlights of Albania

Still emerging from isolation, Albania is a country that is off the main tourist trail, but offers a diverse range of unique attractions that are waiting to be discovered. Experience its stunning natural scenery on the journey from the Adriatic Coast across the White Mountains to the peaceful shores of Lake Ohrid. Along the way are villages where time appears to have stood still and the rural lifestyle has gone unchanged for generations. There's also a wealth of historic sites left behind by past civilisations, such as the Illyrian tribes, ancient Greeks, Romans and the Ottoman Empire. Whatever your interest there is something for everyone to discover in Albania.

Trip highlights

- ★ **Tirana** - Explore Albania's colourful capital on foot
- ★ **Lake Ohrid** - Spend time in Pogradec overlooking the famous lake
- ★ **Benja** - Enjoy a picturesque walk through the mountain scenery and a glass of raki with local villagers
- ★ **Butrint** - Discover one of the great archaeological sites in the Balkans
- ★ **Llogora National Park** - Explore one of the most unspoilt areas in the Adriatic
- ★ **Gjirokastra** - Stroll through the cobbled streets of this UNESCO-listed historic town and visit its hilltop castle

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.

TRIP PACE:

Full on

Full on paced trips are for travellers who like their holidays packed with activities and experiences, moving on quickly from place to place with lots of early starts and long, busy days. Some may find them tiring, but others get a buzz from packing their precious holiday-time as chock-a-block full of new experiences as possible!

GROUP SIZE:

12 - 18

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 - Join trip in Tirana

Our trip begins in Albania's capital city, Tirana. After checking in to our hotel and meeting the group, the rest of the day is free for you to explore this colourful city at your own pace. With a blend of communist architecture and a backdrop of beautiful mountains, Tirana is a mix of new and old.

Whilst in Albania we'll have the opportunity to sample the delicious cuisine, which is a real mix of Turkish, Greek and Italian influences, like Byrek - a spinach and feta stuffed filo pie, and in the more rural mountainous areas barbequed lamb and 'earthy' vegetables such as griddled aubergines and mushrooms are particularly popular. Along the coast there will of course be the chance to enjoy fresh seafood. Albanian red wine is especially good and also local beers, such as Birra Korca.



Accommodation: Hotel Vila Tafaj (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: None

DAY 2 - Visit to Petrela Fortress and walking tour of Tirana

This morning we take a short drive to Petrela Fortress stopping en route at the Bektashi World Centre. The Bektashi Order is an Islamic dervish sect who blends elements of both Shia and Sufi beliefs. We'll have a brief stop to see their ornately decorated tekke (place of worship) with its marble mosaics. Petrela Fortress dates back to 5th century and is one of the oldest structures in Albania. On a clear day, you can see all the way to Kruja, where we end our journey through Albania.

On arriving back to Tirana, we will have a guided walking tour of the city to see main sights including the government buildings, Skanderbeg Square, the old bazaar and Et'Hem Bey Mosque.



Accommodation: Hotel Vila Tafaj (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 3 - See Elbasan Fortress and drive to Lake Ohrid

This morning before leaving Tirana we will visit the National Museum of History, with its easily recognisable mosaic frontage.

We then drive to Elbasan to visit the historic fortress before continuing on to the picturesque fisherman's village of Lin where we will have free time for lunch before we drive to Pogradec, on the shores of Lake Ohrid. The lake is one of the oldest in the world and is a spot renowned for its natural beauty.



Accommodation: Enkelana Hotel (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 4 - Drive to Korca via the medieval town of Voskopoja

Today we make the journey to Voskopoja - formally known as Moskopoje. Founded in the 16th century, the town was once a major urban settlement and was famous for its churches which were adorned with many beautiful frescoes. After exploring the churches here, time for lunch and to sample fresh watermelon (when in season) we continue to Korca, sitting at the foot of Moravia Mountain, where we will spend the night.

On arrival we take a city tour including the Resurrection Cathedral, which is the main Orthodox Church, and Medieval Museum which houses a wide selection of stone sculptures, carved wood artefacts and textiles.



Accommodation: Hotel Grand Palace, Korca (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 5 - Scenic drive to Permeti and walk through the Benja countryside

Our journey today takes us through the southern highlands to Permeti. Travelling along one of the most scenic routes in Albania, we will reach the Barmash Pass (1040 metres) where we can enjoy sweeping views of the Nemercka Mountains, which are snow covered for most of the year and form the border with Greece. En route, we will walk through the Benja countryside and have the opportunity to see the stunning view of the Ottoman stone bridge over the river with the mountains in the distance. We'll then stop for a typical Albanian drink of raki with the locals before heading to a nearby village restaurant to enjoy a barbequed lamb lunch.

En route to Permeti we visit the Kamenica Tumulus archaeological site where we can see a Bronze Age burial complex. Permeti is located on the Vjose River in the heart of the White Mountains.



Accommodation: Hotel Alvero (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast & Lunch

DAY 6 - Drive through the mountains to old Balkan town of Gjirokastra

Our day starts with a walk up to the village of Leusa where there will be time to visit the church which features some stunning frescoes, particularly on the ceiling.

Our route to Gjirokastra takes us through the White Mountains via Kelcyra Gorge, carved by the Vjose River on its way to the Adriatic Sea. The scenery in the mountains is breathtaking with rolling valleys covered in spring with some of the most exuberant wildflowers you are likely to see anywhere in Albania. As we travel, look out for eagles soaring above us. On the way to Kelcyra, we stop at Dhkosat village, where we have the chance for a traditional lunch.

Later, we arrive in Gjirokastra where we take a walking tour through the cobbled streets of its UNESCO listed historic centre and visit Gjirokastra Castle and the Ethnographic Museum. The castle sits at a height of 336 metres and is one of the most magnificent structures in the city with views over the hilly countryside, river valley and city. There have been extensive renovations to the building since it was constructed in the 12th century and it now possesses five towers, a church, a cistern, and houses the Weapons Museum. The museum exhibits captured artillery and memorabilia of the Communist resistance against German occupation, as well as a captured US Air Force plane to commemorate the Communist regime's struggle against the 'imperialist' western powers.

The Ethnographical Museum is in the historic district of Palorto and stands on the site where the dictator Enver Hoxha was born. Set over four floors it offers us an insight into the traditional affluent Albanian lifestyle of the town with numerous household items, folk costumes and cultural artefacts on display.



Accommodation: Hotel Cajupi (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 7 - Explore Butrint, one of the greatest archaeological sites in the Balkans

Leaving Gjirokastra behind us, we drive to Saranda. Along the way, we will stop at the karstic spring, known as 'The Blue Eye' where we can marvel at the blue clear waters.

This afternoon we visit UNESCO listed Butrint, which is one of the great archaeological sites in the Balkans. With a long and colourful history dating back to the early Neolithic age, Butrint has been occupied and fought over until the Ottoman period when it lay abandoned. More recently, excavations have taken place and all periods of Butrint's history have been revealed including its Roman theatre, Roman house and thermal baths as well as a fine baptistery with fabulous mosaic floors. The setting is idyllic with the ruins nestling in the bend of the Vivari River. After spending time exploring this fascinating site, we return to the shores of the Mediterranean and Saranda for the night.



Accommodation: Hotel Brilanti (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 8 - Visit Ali Pasha's Fortress; stay in Llogora National Park

As we leave Saranda, we can look forward to another scenic coastal drive along the Albanian Riviera, before winding over the 1000 metre high pass at Llogora as we travel to the national park, which goes by the same name. Along our route we pass terraces planted with citrus groves and olive trees and enjoy breath taking views over the mountains, sea and forest. We stop at Ali Pasha Fortress, a castle on a small peninsula within Palermo Bay with stunning views over the turquoise waters back along the coastline. Although small, the walls of the triangular fort are well preserved along with some cannons found here. We'll also stop to take a brief stroll along the beach at Himara.

Upon reaching Llogora National Park, we will have time for a three to four hour hike covering seven kilometres in the mountains with many attractive views along the way. The route we follow is along a combination of well trodden footpaths, goat trails and a military road. We classify this walk as moderate in difficulty.

Tonight we'll stay at hotel nestled amongst the pine trees of this tranquil national park.



Accommodation: Hotel Alpin (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 9 - Visit ancient Apollonia and Vlora en route to Berat

This morning en route to Apollonia we stop at Vlora where we will visit Flag Square and the Muradi Mosque. From here we continue our drive to Apollonia. Founded in 585 BC and dedicated to the god Apollo, the city achieved fame and wealth before being incorporated into the Roman Empire to become Caesar's stronghold during the civil war with Pompey. The most impressive feature of the site is the bouleuterion - a facade with six Corinthian columns which are thought to date back to the 2nd century AD. Although much of the ancient site is yet to be excavated, with so few other visitors, it is possible to imagine a time when the site supported 55,000 men and Octavian (later to become Emperor Augustus) was one of its students. We continue our drive to Berat where we spend the night.



Accommodation: Hotel Mangalemi (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 10 - Walking tour of Berat and Durrresi

Situated over a gorge next to the Osumi River and in the shadow of Mount Tomori, Berat's white buildings sprawl up the hillside towards the fortress. New construction is strictly regulated in order to maintain the city's unique character in its UNESCO listed historical centre.

Exploring on foot this morning, we head up to the fortress and see the painted icons and frescoes in the Church of Saint Mary, one of the seven churches within the citadel walls. We will also visit the oldest mosque in Albania, the Red Mosque, and the Onufri Icon Museum.

We drive on to Durrresi which is one of Albania's main ports. Originally founded in 627 BC by the Greeks and then called Epidamnos, the city was later plundered and conquered by the Illyrians, Romans, Normans, Venetians and Serbs, which resulted in the many reminders we can see as we wander around the city today of its long and varied history. For example, we will stop off at the Roman Amphitheatre, which is not far from the modern city's main square. We will also visit the Archaeological Museum before we depart and drive to Kruja where we spend the last night of our trip.



Accommodation: Hotel Panorama (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 11 - Trip ends in Kruja

Our trip ends today after breakfast. Depending on the time of your flight, you may have some time today to explore Kruja, perhaps to visit the fortress, which is a place of pilgrimage and inspiration for Albanians, the nearby bazaar or the Ethnographic Museum.



Meals Provided: Breakfast



Why book this trip

Discover the emerging nation of Albania and its wealth of secrets. From the colourful capital of Tirana to the stunning Lake Ohrid, archaeological sites to beautiful national parks and mountains, this trip unveils some of the treats whilst experiencing natural beauty and rural life.

What's included?



Included meals

Breakfast: 10
Lunch: 1



Transport

Bus



Trip staff

Explore Tour Leader
Driver(s)



Accommodation

10 nights standard hotel

Trip information

Country information

Albania

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 cool, especially at night, so bring a warmer jacket or fleece. A raincoat is essential at all times of year in case of the odd shower. You should dress with respect in the rural villages so bring some long trousers and ensure your shoulders are covered when entering churches. Don't forget your swimming costume and a towel for taking a dip in the sea or hot springs.

Footwear

There are a number of included walks on this trip, so we recommend taking lightweight walking or trail boots and comfortable shoes or sandals for visiting the sites and towns.

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 portering isn't normally available in the hotels.

Equipment

Take a water bottle, sun hat, sun glasses and sun cream. A torch will be useful for the evenings as some areas are not well lit and also for viewing the frescoes in dimly lit churches. You may also wish to take walking poles, as some of the walks are over uneven terrain and cobble stones can be slippery underfoot. Most importantly don't forget your camera.

Tipping

Explore leader

At your discretion you might also consider tipping your Explore 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 approximately €20 for tipping.

In order to make things easier for you, the Explore Leader may organise a group's tips kitty and if this is the case, they will account for it throughout the trip.

Country Information

Albania

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.

On day 8 of our trip we will be staying in a small hotel within the Llogara National Park. It has a restaurant and bar with outdoor terrace where you can enjoy the traditional Albanian cuisine and great views over the surrounding forested mountain slopes. The en suite rooms are simply decorated and most have balconies.

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.

Price Guarantee

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 and Passport Information

Albania Visas are not required by UK, Australian, New Zealand, US and Canadian citizens.

Macedonia: Visas are not required by UK, Australian, New Zealand, US and Canadian citizens.

Other nationalities should consult their local embassy or consular office.

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.

It is your responsibility to ensure that you are in possession of a full passport, with the correct validity for your chosen destination.

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, Polar, 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. The cost of many of our Polar Voyages will exceed the capped amount covered by standard insurance premiums and you will be required to pay an additional premium to cover the full value of your trip. Please ensure that you are covered for the full amount of your holiday cost, as insufficient cover could invalidate a claim under the policy. 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.

Non refundable permits

Albania

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. Please check the 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 [Explore Travel Health](#) and from your local healthcare provider. Visa and vaccination requirements are subject to change and should be confirmed by you before travelling.
