

EXPLORE!



Cycle Albania

8 days

Albania - Trip code CAB

Cycle Albania

Discover the highlights of this fascinating, little visited destination from the saddle. Cycle along the shores of Lake Ohrid into the heart of the Gramos Mountains and the tranquil Gërmenj valley. Descending through the spectacular Vjosa gorge we reach the Ionian Sea and start our exploration of the turquoise Albanian Riviera. Along the way we visit the UNESCO listed sites of Gjirokaster, Butrint and Berat and explore Albania's rich cultural heritage through its archaeological ruins and local traditions.

Trip highlights

- ★ **Cycle Albania** - Stunning scenery, peaceful, traffic-free roads and great local food
- ★ **Albanian Riviera** - Picturesque trails and villages
- ★ **Gjirokaster** - Discover this historic UNESCO listed town
- ★ **Butrint** - Visit the beautifully situated roman city
- ★ **Lake Ohrid** - Mountainous setting and access point to remote town of Gërmenj
- ★ **Llogora National Park** - Pine forests, mountain and sea scenery

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.

CYCLING GRADE:

Moderate To Challenging

Combining moderate grade rides with some challenging days in the saddle, this grade is ideal for reasonably fit cyclists who want to challenge themselves.

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 - Join trip at Tirana Airport. Drive to Pogradec on Lake Ohrid

We meet at Tirana Airport and drive for approximately 3 1/2 hours to our hotel in Pogradec, located on the shores of Lake Ohrid.



Accommodation: Enkelana Hotel (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: None

DAY 2 - Cycle from Lake Ohrid to Korça

Once equipped and fitted with our bikes we start cycling from lake Ohrid, climbing to an elevated plateau with some great views over the blue waters of this splendid lake surrounded by mountains. The road then continues towards Korça pedaling alongside vast fields and past small farms. We check into our hotel upon arrival into Korça.

Our total cycling distance today is approximately 50 kilometres (Total 382 metres ascent and 217 meters descent)



Accommodation: Hotel Grand Palace, Korca (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available

DAY 3 - Climb into the heart of the Gramos Mountains to Gergenj

This morning when we retake to our bikes we leave behind the agricultural plateau of Korça, climbing steadily into the border mountains through a landscape of barren rock interspersed with wild flowers. Numerous cols and valleys lie ahead, climbing into the heart of the Gramos Mountains and over the Barmash Pass (1159m) to Gergenj lying in its own tranquil valley. We spend the night in wooden bungalows with shared bathrooms 'Ferma Sotir' in Gergenj and enjoy a traditional home cooked dinner.

Our total cycling distance today is approximately 72 kilometres (Total 1160 metres ascent and 1041 meters descent)



Accommodation: Sotira Farm Guesethouse (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast & Dinner

DAY 4 - Ride through Vjosa Valley; drive onto Gjirokaster

We climb out from Gergenj on our bikes to a high grassy plateau surrounded by soaring peaks before reaching the source of the River Vjosa and descending through its spectacular gorge to Leskovik. The route continues with a 15km descent to Çarshove before following the cornice route high above the river to Permet situated on a bluff above the river. A short but dramatic drive of about one and a half hours will bring us to the historic town of Gjirokastër, another UNESCO Heritage site that is home to some truly stunning Ottoman architecture. Gjirokastër is magnificently set between the towering Gjerë Mountains and the Drino River, providing us with a beautifully scenic arrival by vehicle from Permet as we pass through the Drino Valley and the Kelcyra Gorge. After checking in to our hotel, we have a chance to explore its historic heart, taking in its beautiful 18th and 19th century buildings and the dominating presence of its Ottoman citadel, believed to be the second largest in the Balkans. If you are travelling in October, we may visit a traditional house instead of inside the citadel as it operates shorter opening hours at the end of the season. Our total cycling distance today is approximately 58 kilometres (Total 691 metres ascent and 1431 meters descent)



Accommodation: Hotel Cajupi (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast & Dinner

DAY 5 - Cycle to Saranda via Butrint archaeological treasure

A short drive after breakfast will bring us to the beginning of the cycling section that starts with a downhill ride from Muzina Pass to the Blue Eye, source of the river Bistrica. The ride then encircles the lagoon of Butrint National Park where we will visit the archaeological site. A UNESCO World Heritage Site, Butrint is one of the county's most important archaeological treasures, tracing

its origins back to the Greeks and the Romans. In the afternoon we continue our ride onto Saranda and spend the evening at the waterfront. The gateway to southern Albania, Saranda lies along the Ionian coast, sandwiched between the high mountains and the sea and close to the ancient remains of Butrint.

Our total cycling distance today is approximately 67 kilometres (Total 560 metres ascent and 1089 meters descent)



Accommodation: Hotel Butrinti (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 6 - Ride the Albanian Riviera to Qeparo

A roller coaster of a ride awaits us this morning as we make our way along the Albanian Riviera passing through the small villages of Pigeras and Lukova en route to Qeparo. Leaving as the mist is burnt off by the sun, climbing steeply out of Saranda to a rocky plateau. From here we pedal over cols into bays and around headlands, always with the stunning mountain scenery to the right and sea to the left before descending to the long beach and bay of Qeparo where we spend the night in the seaside village of Qeparo on the Albanian Riviera. The afternoon is left free to enjoy the beach and relax.

Our total cycling distance today is approximately 40 kilometres (Total 965 metres ascent and 918 meters descent)



Accommodation: Pension Riviera, Qeparo (or similar)



Standard Guesthouse



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 7 - Cycle to Dhermi then drive to Berat

We continue our route into the valley heading north before climbing two short but steep cols, through woodlands, little gorges, forests and around hairpin bends. Along the way we pass the old fortress of Ali Pasha of Tepelena, Palermo Bay, the Monastery of St. Theodore and Gjipe Bay and the coastal town of Himara. Our cycling adventure ends with a descent to the picturesque village of Dhermi, nestling amongst the rocky slopes of the Ceraunian Mountains. After lunch we drive 120 km (about 2 and a half hours) to Berat, enjoying the great mountain and sea views of Llogora National Park enroute. Home to black pine, Eurasian otter and golden eagles, the park is a scenic expanse of protected woodland that encompasses the forests on the northern side of the Llogora Pass. Berat is perhaps the most beautiful town in Albania. Explore the cobbled alleys between the white walled houses and visit the citadel high above. Staying in a traditional hotel in the historic neighbourhood of Mangalemi, we should have some time to explore this World Heritage site before dinner. Time permitting, there is an optional visit to the Onufri Iconographic Museum, located in the sanctuary of St Mary's Church in the inhabited quarter of Berat Castle. Home to a remarkable collection of religious paintings, the museum is named after a famous 16th century icon painter whose works were characterised by post-Byzantine and Venetian influences.

Our total cycling distance today is approximately 33 kilometres (Total 809 metres ascent and 812 meters descent)



Accommodation: Hotel Belgrade Mangalemi, Berat (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast & Dinner

DAY 8 - Trip ends Tirana Airport

We make our way by bus to Tirana Airport which takes about 2 hours, located about 200 km from Berat, where our trip ends.



Meals Provided: Breakfast

Cycling information

DAILY DISTANCE



General cycling information

On this trip we cycle 320 km over six days (an average of 53 km per day). We mainly use quiet, undulating roads although there will be several steeper sections on tarmac. A support vehicle accompanies the rides throughout the trip. We have graded the route as moderate to challenging.

Bike included

24 gear Specialized CrossTrail or Ariel hybrid bikes with lockable front suspension

Bike information

Your included bike is a 24 gear Specialized CrossTrail or Ariel hybrid bike with front suspension and will be the correct frame size for your height. A water bottle holder is included as well as the facility to fit your own pedals or saddle if you wish to bring them. A support vehicle accompanies the rides throughout the trip. We provide spare parts and take care of the day to day maintenance. All you need to bring is your own helmet.

Cycling grade

ModerateToChallenging



Why book this trip

Unlike many other operators, we include the hire of your bike in the overall cost of the holiday: you don't need to bring your own or pay extra to hire one locally. We also provide a support vehicle, spare parts and take care of day to day bike maintenance. All you need bring is your own helmet.

What's included?



Included meals

Breakfast: 7
Dinner: 3



Transport

Bus
Bicycle



Trip staff

Explore Tour Leader / Cycle guide
Driver(s)
Local Guide(s)



Accommodation

1 nights standard guesthouse
6 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

Optional activities

The following excursions and/or activities are usually available and may be arranged locally. Estimated costs are provided below for guidance only, are on a per person basis unless shown otherwise, and may depend on the number of participants. Prices quoted are correct as of the date these tour notes were originally issued but may change at any time due to currency fluctuations. Please note: These activities are booked and paid for direct with the supplier and do not form part of your Explore holiday contract.

Onufri Iconographic Museum, Berat - 200 Lek (approx 1.20 GBP)

Clothing

Pack for hot conditions. Bring cycle shorts, gloves and quick drying cycle tops. Weather is changeable in the mountains and it can be cool, especially at night, so bring a warmer jacket/fleece. A raincoat is essential at all times in case of the odd shower. You should dress with respect in the rural villages so bring some long trousers. Don't forget your swimming costume.

Footwear

If you are not bringing cycle shoes then try to bring stiff-soled shoes as these are better for cycling - transmitting your energy into the pedals more efficiently. This becomes more relevant and recommended the more demanding the grade and distances to cover. SPD cycle shoes are not well suited to trips that combine sightseeing with cycling. Comfortable shoes, trainers, sandals or flip flops are useful when not on the bike.

Luggage

20kg

Luggage: On tour

We recommend you bring a daypack and one main piece of luggage (total allowance: 44lb/20kg) which will be transported between hotels while you cycle. Check the bike details section to see if a pannier or handlebar bag is provided on the bike. 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 portarage in the hotels.

Equipment

On all Explore cycle holidays we strongly recommend you bring along and wear your cycle helmet. In case of an accident resulting in personal injury, certain insurance policies are invalidated in cases where a helmet was not being worn. Cycle glasses to protect against dust, pollen and the sun, padded cycle gloves and a water bottle or water delivery system (e.g. camelback or platypus) are also useful. You may choose to bring your own gel seat cover for added comfort. A pannier is not provided so you may like to bring a small rucksack to wear while cycling. Other items to consider bringing are a sunhat and sun cream, torch, earplugs and insect repellent. Please carry some or all of your cycling equipment e.g. helmet as part of your hand luggage.

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 recognized 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. In order to make things easier for you, the Explore Leaders may organise a group's tips kitty and if this is the case, they will account for it throughout the trip. Accordingly, you should allow approx. 20 Euros for tipping.

International Departure Taxes

N/A

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, Bicycle

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.

Standard - Our 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.

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.

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.

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.

Altitude information

N/A

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.
