

# EXPLORE!

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NEW

## Highlights of Albania - Private Tour

ALBANIA - TRIP CODE PTAB

DISCOVERY

### Why book this trip?

Still emerging from isolation, Albania's wealth of historic sites, charming rural villages and the colourful capital, Tirana, are all waiting to be discovered. En route, explore the Adriatic Coast, the White Mountains and the peaceful shores of Lake Ohrid. Travelling with a local guide throughout the trip makes this itinerary flexible to suit your interests.

- **Butrint** - Discover one of the greatest archaeological sites in the Balkans
- **Llogara National Park** - Explore one of the most unspoilt places in the Adriatic
- **Gjirokastra** - Stroll along the cobbled streets of this UNESCO-Listed town and visit its hilltop castle



**INCLUDED MEALS**  
Breakfast: 10  
Lunch: 1



**TRIP STAFF**  
Driver(s)  
Local Guide(s)



**TRANSPORT**  
Car



**ACCOMMODATION**  
10 nights  
comfortable hotel



**TRIP PACE:**  
Moderate

## Itinerary

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

### DAY 1 - Trip starts in Tirana

Arrive in Tirana, Albania's colourful capital city. With a blend of communist architecture and a backdrop of rugged mountains, Tirana is a mix of new and old.

You will be met on arrival at Tirana International Airport (TIA) by a local guide, and driven to your centrally-located hotel, which is around 30 minutes from the airport. There are no activities planned today, so feel free to arrive in Tirana at any time. For those booking their own flights, you will just need to let us know your flight details no later than three weeks prior to departure, in order to be met on arrival.

Your guide will be with you throughout the trip, so you have the opportunity today to ask any questions you wish about the itinerary. The luxury of having the same guide throughout is that you can make this itinerary flexible if you want to - if you want more time at a particular site, for example, or conversely if you want to skip a city tour and do some solo exploration that's fine too.



**ACCOMMODATION:**  
Hotel Vila Tafaj (or similar)

**Grade: Comfortable Hotel**



**SINGLE ROOM AVAILABLE**





MEALS PROVIDED: NONE

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## DAY 2 - Take a walking tour of Tirana

Take a guided walking tour of the city today, seeing the main sights including the government buildings, Skanderbeg Square, the old bazaar and Et'Hem Bey Mosque. Tirana is a curious mix of brutalist architecture, run-down ex-communist areas and a thriving youth culture that gives the city a lively nighttime scene, particularly in the Blloku district which is full of coffee shops, bars and nightclubs. The rest of the afternoon is free to explore this diverse city. You might want to immerse yourself in Albanian history at the National History Museum, the largest museum in the country with a recognisable mosaic frontage. Alternatively, visit one of the incredible art museums - BunkArt or BunkArt two, both set in former Cold War anti-nuclear bunkers. The former is the larger of the two, and is slightly on the outskirts of the city. The second is right in the centre of town.

If museums aren't for you, take a walk through the Grand Park of Tirana - a large green space that houses a zoo, botanical gardens and a massive artificial lake that is a favourite spot for locals during the summer months.

Take the opportunity this evening to sample the delicious Albanian cuisine, which is a real mix of Turkish, Greek and Italian influences, like byrek - a spinach and feta stuffed filo pie. In the more rural, mountainous areas during this trip you'll find that barbecued lamb and 'earthy' vegetables such as griddled aubergines and mushrooms are particularly popular. Along the coast there will of course be the chance to sample fresh seafood. Albanian red wine is especially good and also local beers, such as Birra Korca.



ACCOMMODATION:

Hotel Vila Tafaj (or similar)



Grade: Comfortable Hotel



SINGLE ROOM AVAILABLE



MEALS PROVIDED: BREAKFAST

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## DAY 3 - Drive to Lake Ohrid, with an optional stop at the Elbasan Fortress

Drive to the picturesque fisherman's village of Lin this morning. If you wish, you can stop en route at the historic fortress of Elbasan - during this trip there will often be chance to make little visits en route to our next destination, which means that the itinerary can be quite flexible depending on your interests. After some free time for lunch at Lin, drive on 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. Swimming is possible in the lake,

and in fact there is actually a local beach in the city, just a short walk away from the hotel. If you have time this afternoon, you might want to take the 20 minute uphill hike to 'Pogradec Castle'. There isn't really a castle up here - it's the old walls of an ancient Illyrian site - but most people come up for the incredible views over the city and Lake Ohrid.



ACCOMMODATION:  
Hotel Perla (or similar)



Grade: Comfortable Hotel



SINGLE ROOM AVAILABLE



SWIMMING POOL AVAILABLE



MEALS PROVIDED: BREAKFAST

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

Drive to Voskopoja this morning. 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, it's time for lunch and to sample fresh watermelon (when in season), before continuing to Korca, sitting at the foot of Moravia Mountain.

Korca is a small town with a rich cultural value for Albania - the largest Orthodox Church in the country is here, and just behind this is the old town with its cobbled streets, ancient French-style houses and picturesque street corners. You'll explore Korca on foot with your guide on arrival. If you wish, you'll have the option to go inside the Resurrection Cathedral, (the name for the largest Orthodox Church), and the Medieval Museum which houses a wide selection of stone sculptures, carved wood artefacts and textiles. The National Educational Museum is another fascinating spot for those interested in learning more about Albania's ancient language and culture. We haven't included any entrances into your trip cost, to give you the option to decide how to spend your afternoon.



ACCOMMODATION:  
Hani Pazarit Boutique Hotel (or similar)



Grade: Comfortable Hotel





SINGLE ROOM AVAILABLE



MEALS PROVIDED: BREAKFAST

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### **DAY 5 - Scenic drive through the mountains to Gjirokastra; eat a typical lunch en route**

Today's four-hour journey takes you through the sweeping mountain scenery of the southern highlands and the White Mountains. Reach the Barmash Pass (1,040 metres) where there are panoramic views of the Nemercka Mountains, which are snow covered for most of the year and form the border with Greece. Then continue into 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, that in spring are covered with some of the most exuberant wildflowers you are likely to see anywhere in Albania. As you travel, look out for eagles soaring above. On the way to Kelcyra, stop at Dhkosat village for a traditional homemade lunch.

Arrive in Gjirokastra in the late afternoon.



ACCOMMODATION:

Hotel Gjirokastra (or similar)



**Grade: Comfortable Hotel**



SINGLE ROOM AVAILABLE



MEALS PROVIDED: BREAKFAST

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### **DAY 6 - Walking tour of Gjirokastra and the castle; afternoon free**

This morning, take a guided walking tour through the cobbled streets of its UNESCO-listed historic centre. Visit Gjirokastra Castle (the entrance is included) - one of the most magnificent structures in the city, sitting at a height of 336 metres 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 afternoon is free. Perhaps visit the Ethnographical Museum, which 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 an



insight into the traditional affluent Albanian lifestyle of the town with numerous household items, folk costumes and cultural artefacts on display.



ACCOMMODATION:  
Hotel Gjirokastra (or similar)

Grade: Comfortable Hotel



SINGLE ROOM AVAILABLE



MEALS PROVIDED: BREAKFAST & LUNCH

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

Leaving Gjirokastra behind, drive to Saranda. Along the way, stop at the karstic spring, known as 'The Blue Eye' for it's toothpaste-blue clear waters.

This afternoon, 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, return to the shores of the Mediterranean and Saranda for the night.



ACCOMMODATION:  
Hotel Brilanti (or similar)

Grade: Comfortable Hotel



SINGLE ROOM AVAILABLE



MEALS PROVIDED: BREAKFAST

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## DAY 8 - Stay in Llogora National Park

Look forward to another scenic coastal drive today, along the Albanian Riviera, before winding over the 1,000 metre high pass at Llogora as you 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 the views over the mountains, sea and forest. If you wish, you can stop en route at Ali Pasha Fortress, a castle on a small peninsula within Palermo Bay with stunning views over the turquoise coastal waters. Although small, the walls of the triangular fort are well preserved, along with some cannons found here. You may also stop to take a brief stroll along the beach at Himara.

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

Tonight, stay at hotel nestled amongst the pine trees of this tranquil national park.



ACCOMMODATION:  
Hotel Alpin (or similar)



Grade: Comfortable Hotel



SINGLE ROOM AVAILABLE



MEALS PROVIDED: BREAKFAST

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## DAY 9 - Drive to Berat with the chance to visit ancient Apollonia

This morning en route to Berat, stop at Vlora and visit Flag Square and the Muradi Mosque. From here, continue and take the opportunity to visit the ancient site of 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. If you'd like to visit, this will take approximately two hours before continuing the drive.

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.



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ACCOMMODATION:  
Hotel Mangalemi (or similar)

Grade: Comfortable Hotel



SINGLE ROOM AVAILABLE



MEALS PROVIDED: BREAKFAST

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### DAY 10 - Walking tour of Berat and Durrresi

Exploring on foot this morning, there are several options depending on your interests. 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. Alternatively, visit the oldest mosque in Albania, the Red Mosque, and the Onufri Icon Museum.

After some time in Berat, drive on to Durrresi, one of Albania's main port towns. 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 visible remainders of the city's its long and varied history. You'll have some free time to discover some of the highlights - for example, stop off at the Roman Amphitheatre, which is not far from the modern city's main square. You may also have time to visit the Archaeological Museum before departing to Kruja for the last night of the trip.



ACCOMMODATION:  
Hotel Panorama (or similar)

Grade: Comfortable Hotel



SINGLE ROOM AVAILABLE



MEALS PROVIDED: BREAKFAST

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### DAY 11 - Trip ends in Kruja

Your trip ends today, and you will be taken to the airport to meet your international flight. There are no activities planned today, so you are free to depart from Tirana International Airport (TIA), approximately



a 40 minute drive, at any time. If your flight is departing later in the day, luggage storage facilities are available at our hotel.

Depending on the time of your flight or if you are extending your stay by a night then you may have some free 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

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## Trip information

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### Climate and 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 with seasonal weather patterns in the mountains that 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

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### 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.

During this trip there is the possibility to make some visits to certain sites of interest both in the cities that you're staying in, and en route during the drives. While we have included some of the key locations, we want to make this trip flexible for you to suit your own interests. Some of the costs for these visits are below, given in order to help you budget for your trip:

Tirana:  
Elbasan Fortress - 2 euros

En route to Llogora:  
Ali Pasha Fortress - 2 euros

En route to Berat:  
Apollonia - 5 euros

Berat:  
Iconographic Museum - 3 euros  
Berat Castle - 2.50 euros

Durrresi:  
Roman Amphitheatre: 3 euros

Kruje  
National Museum - 4 euros  
Ethnographical Museum Kruje - 4 euros

## **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. For departures in early spring and autumn it can be colder in the mountains, so bring a warm jacket and pack layers.

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.

## **Footwear**

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, insect repellent, sun hat, sun glasses and sun cream. If you are travelling in the early

spring or autumn then you might want to bring gloves, a scarf and a hat for when you are in the mountains. 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. Most importantly don't forget your camera.

## Tipping

### Explore leader

On this private journey, you will be accompanied by a driver-guide throughout the trip, who fills very much the same role as the Explore Tour Leader on our group tours. Tipping isn't compulsory, and we work hard to ensure that our guides receive a fair wage. You may however, want to recognise a guide that has done a great job or really added to your trip, by giving them a tip. We're often asked about the recommended amount. It is a tricky one, and down to personal preference, but we would recommend £25 to £30 per person per week as a guideline.

### Local crew

In Albania, tipping is a recognised part of life. If you feel the service warrants it then it is useful to keep some small denomination notes for tipping and small purchases.

With that in mind, we can suggest the following amounts as a guideline, which are, of course, discretionary:

For your driver-guide who will be with you throughout the trip, we recommend approximately 20-25 Euros per person.

In restaurants its usual to tip 5-10%, dependent on the service.

## 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	Dinner price	Beer price	Water price
£4.00	£10.00	£1.50	£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.

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## **Transport, Accommodation & Meals**

### **Transport Information**

Car

### **Accommodation notes**

During this trip we use a range of comfortable hotels with perfect locations to discover Albania's historic cities and natural locations.

Two of the highlights may be the hotel in Gjirokaster, with its perfect central location, sun terrace, WiFi, Restaurant and bar. Or the boutique hotel in Korca, which right in the historic district of the city with a garden, and decorated in a traditional Albanian style but with modern amenities such as TV and WiFi.

On day eight of the trip we use 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.

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## **Essential Information**

### **Government Travel Safety 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, Commonwealth & Development 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**

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 be able to apply through Explore's recommended visa service in the UK, Travcour. See [www.travcour.com](http://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 receive a Free Transfer, provided you arrive and depart on the tour only itinerary start and end dates. The complimentary transfers will be arranged from the Explore designated airport or train station to your trips joining point, and then back from the ending point to the designated airport or train station. Generally the airport or station that Explore have selected will be the one that is closest to the town or city where the trip starts, or the one nearest to the joining point. It will be either an airport or train station but not both.

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.

## **Included activities**

In Llogora National Park there is an included walk which involves some hilly sections and can be muddy and uneven under foot, depending on the season, so we therefore recommend taking comfortable walking boots with good grip and ankle support, spare walking socks, a water bottle and snacks, sun screen, insect repellent, sun hat and layered clothing (including waterproofs) with you. Pack walking poles if you would normally use them.

If you don't wish to do this walk then the itinerary can be flexible depending on what your interests are.

Exploration of the towns and cities visited on this trip will also mostly be done on foot, so that you can get a proper feel for all the fascinating places that are visited.

## **Ability to swim**

No

## **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.

## Additional Information



## Tour Staff

Your trip will be led by one of our experienced driver-guides who is passionate about Albania and bursting with first-hand local knowledge which they love to share. All the planning and organisation throughout your journey will be taken care of by your guide, and their dynamic approach will make this trip fun and inspiring, bringing the destination to life whether you're travelling alone or with others.

## 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.

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## Reviews

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**AWARD WINNING  
EXPLORE LEADERS**



**PRICE GUARANTEE  
PROMISE**



**AIRPORT  
TRANSFERS**