



Albanian

Traditional

Cuisine



Albanian Traditional Cuisine



**North
Albania**



**Central
Albania**



**South
Albania**



Introduction

Albanian cuisine offers a truly unique blend of Mediterranean flavors. Representing a rich historical past, the food of modern Albania has been developed over millennia and reflects a variety of influences. East meets west in many discernable ways throughout Albanian culture, but nowhere is it more evident than in the cuisine.



The mild climate is favorable for many agricultural products. Among Albania's most popular are: peppers, eggplants, tomatoes, cucumbers, and an assortment of legumes. The wide variety of fruits and vegetables grown here serves to further enhance the varied fare offered.





Vegetables



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These vegetables are combined with meats in a number of delectable ways to form the basis for many Albanian delights. Most often, these creations are baked in earthenware or sautéed, and take one of the following forms: stew, casserole, stuffed vegetables, or meatballs. Other types of dishes blend many vegetables (with or without meat), and can be traced to Asian origins.



Olives

As in many other Mediterranean countries, olives are a staple in Albania. Although they are most frequently enjoyed on their own, olives are combined with many foods and are an essential ingredient in many signature dishes. Types vary by region. Olives from the Berat region are prized for their unique flavor and low fat content. Olives from Vlora, Borsh, Himara, and Tirana are higher in fat content and are more often used for olive oil production.





Kitchen Herbs



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Albanian cuisine also uses a variety of spices to enhance food flavors. Garlic and hot peppers are popular options for flavoring. Often subtle, the flavors sometimes arise from non-spice ingredients such as lemon, vinegar, and/or yogurt. Albanian chefs rarely mix spices, instead choosing one that harmonizes most closely with the dish's natural aroma. Recipes rarely specify quantities of spices to be used, recognizing that this is a matter to be adjusted based on the other ingredients in the dish.



Milk Products



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Milk and milk products play a large role in Albanian cuisine as well. Yogurt is consumed daily by many Albanians and forms the basis for many sauces and other dishes. Buttermilk is also very popular; both as an ingredient or alone, as a drink. Albanian cheeses are unique and also vary by region. The most popular is a white cheese made from sheep's milk and originating from the south. Similar to feta, it is found in many dishes.



Desserts



Desserts often accompany Albanian dishes, thus completing the meal. Often they are made from a variety of creams and fruit juices, and sometimes use local honey as a sweetener. Baklava, cookies, and puddings are all dessert staples. Another popular option is some variation of sweet or savory dough balls. Boza is a common drink served as part of dessert. It is produced from maize and originates in the north. Particularly refreshing in the summer, it offers a pleasant, non-alcoholic option. The most delicious desert, however, is often the most simple: a variety of seasonal fruits, served plain, can be the perfect ending to a scrumptious meal.





Alcoholic Beverages

Alcoholic beverages are interwoven with Albania's history. The most popular and traditional is raki. It is often made from grapes, but can be distilled from a variety of fruits, including plums. The best raki is made in small batches by artisans who truly take pride in their craft. Regions in the south are noted for their grape raki production, while the colder regions in the north specialize in plum raki.

Cognac is also popular here, and a local brand, "Skanderbeg," has won several international competitions.



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Wine has long been produced in Albania, and represents a centuries-old tradition. Through archeological finds, production has been traced back some 3,000 years to the Illyrians, who established a thriving wine industry. Wine production continued to flourish under the Byzantines. Several unique varieties are enjoyed throughout Albania: Shesh i Zi, Kallmet, Mavrud and Malaga.



The North



Corn is widely produced here and serves as the staple for many varieties of culinary delights. Due to the characteristic cold winters, meat is often dried for preservation. Vegetables are chosen for their heartiness, as well, with potatoes, onions, garlic, and cabbage being among the most popular.





The North

Traditional dishes include baked rice, risotos, fritters, casseroles, pies, and mashes. Fish, of both sea and fresh waters, are plentiful here, and also are an ingredient in many dishes. Some cities boast unique dishes and have woven them into local culture. Shkodra, in particular, has several signature dishes, which are described here:

Jani Meat: beef or lamb is sautéed with onions, garlic, sauce and spices. Traditionally cooked over fire, the sauce is reduced, gradually tenderizing the meat.



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Baked Stuffed Eggplant:

prepare several medium eggplants by removing stems, halving lengthwise, and briefly sautéing. In another pan, prepare the stuffing by combining crumbled cheese, parsley, flour, and egg. Bake the stuffed eggplants and serve with parsley and tomato.



The North

In the Lezhe region there are many lagoons which provide a habitat for a variety of game species. Many restaurants and homes incorporate the ducks, geese, pheasants and hares found here into delicious dishes. These game meats are highly prized for their flavor and versatility.



In the Dibra region, many fruits and nuts are cultivated and incorporated into the local cuisine. Most notable is the plum, which has been used in raki production for centuries. Also popular are cherries, walnuts and apples.





Central Regions



A variety of wild animal species flourish here. From waterfowl and poultry species to mammals such as wild boar, this rich diversity augments local cuisine. Particularly in the Divjaka Forest, on the Adriatic coast, many game species are hunted and incorporated into popular dishes.



Fishing, too, represents an important economic activity and enhances cuisine through the use of these “fruits of the sea.” Sole, bass, eel, and mullet are all popular.





Central Regions



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The land agricultural and climate here support a wide variety of products, as well. Berries and fruits, in particular, are delicious. Grapes, as previously mentioned, serve as the basis for raki production. Popular dishes of this region include plum casserole, Elbasani yogurt, Tirana stew, baked phyllo pie, and baked rice.



Ballokume is a special crumpet-like dessert, and is characteristic of Elbasan. It is masterfully prepared by local homemakers—primarily for the celebration of Summer Day on March 14th. The pastry traditionally combines flour, butter, egg, and sugar to create this scrumptious dessert.



Central Regions

The Berat region is home to some of the largest fig plantations in the Balkans. Often, the figs are prepared as preserves or jam. The figs are renowned for their exceptional quality and are sometimes strung together or ground, formed into shapes, and dried.



The area of Myzeqe is noted for turkey production and a particular dish called turkey with mash. This dish is available throughout the country, but locals say it is most delicious in this area. What follows is a description of this local delicacy:

Clean the turkey. Rub the outside with salt and butter. Bake in a small amount of water and reserve some of this to use in the mash. Crumble the dough (prepared beforehand using maize flour, water, salt and some oil) or the maize bread, and leave it in a pot. Lightly fry a leek or onion, pour in the turkey broth and some water and let it come to a boil. Add the crumbled bread and stir until it thickens. Serve the turkey with the mash.





The South



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Albania has a large livestock and animal husbandry industry. The southern parts of the country are particularly conducive to raising animals, as pastures and feed resources are abundant. Some Albanian producers have started small scale production of organic meats here, and they are gaining popularity. Dairy farms are plentiful here, as well. Gjirokastra, in particular, is home to several large dairies. Large scale milk production (from cows and sheep) results in a variety of delicious yogurts, cheeses, and other milk products. The region makes the famed sheep yogurt - so thick it must be cut with a knife. Some typical entrees served in the regions around Gjirokastra and Saranda are meat and cheese pies, and rich soups featuring lemon and rice, among other things. Desserts include baklava and many other regional specialties.



The South

Olive and citrus trees thrive in the mild climate here. Olives are served as appetizers and are often incorporated into salads and other vegetarian and meat dishes.



Raki made from grapes is a part of most meals here, and serves to enhance the local flavors. Raki and winemaking basins unearthed in the Gjirokastra region date to antiquity and verify that the making of raki in this region is a millennia-old practice.







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In the Pogradec region, the making of wine or raki usually occurs on a small-scale basis in individual households. Often, the recipes used are traditions themselves, and have been handed down through generations. Production takes place in the coolest nooks of the house and enhances the mild flavor of the wine.



Fish dishes are renowned in the Pogradec region, as well. The Koran fish is sautéed and combined with sauces and spices. Several fresh water species, the sardele and cironkat are fried and enjoyed in great quantities. Also common are nut “gliko” dishes.

The South



All along the western part of this region is the Albanian Riviera, where delicious cuisine from the sea can be enjoyed in a truly picturesque and beautiful area. One of the most attractive destinations in the entire country, this area has much to offer and will delight travelers with countless attractions.





Fruits







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