



Travel & Discover

Itineraries

All Over

Albania

## *A walk along Albanian territory.*

Running from north to south, the visitor may experience so many things inside a small country, as Albania is.

If you are looking for an active holiday, you will find plenty of things to do. Through this pocket brochure we offer you 10 suggested itineraries to choose from. There are a different attraction including mountains treks, deep valleys, national parks, lakes, archaeological sites, museum cities, castles, coastline and much more. A visit in our country means that you'll return home relaxed and energized at the same time.











*Welcome and enjoy your stay!*

# Travel & Discover

Itineraries all over Albania



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Saranda - Butrinti 18km  
Saranda - Gjirokastra 56km  
Gjirokastra - Antigonea 12km

Saranda - Finiqi 10km  
Saranda - Ksamili 15km

## Saranda

Saranda, or “the south Albanian seaport” is located on a natural shelf facing the island of Corfu. There are daily ships that depart, connecting Saranda with this Greek island. Saranda’s name originates from an old Christian monastery of “the Forty Saints” (Saranda means “forty” in Greek). The ruins of the monastery lay in *Qafa e Gjashtës*, near the city entrance. Prior to Byzantine

rule, Saranda was called by its ancient Greek name, “*Onchamos*”, which was the name of the father of the Trojan prince Aeneas, who was born at the Mount Ida by the Greek Goddess Aphrodite. The city lies at the southern tip of Albania’s Ionian coastline and has a very pleasant avenue, full of palms and pebbled beaches. In the center of the city stands the ruins of the ancient city of Onhezmi, destroyed in the fifth



century A.D. by barbarian invasions. In 2002, a synagogue was uncovered in the same area. Just 2 km south of Saranda, on the top of a dominating hill, is the **Castle of Lëkurs**. The castle was built by the Sultan Suleiman during his military campaign against Corfu. Today a restaurant sits in the fortress, offering a rich cuisine and breathtaking views of the deep blue of the Ionian Sea. Heading south, the coastline

changes its appearance. Four small islands emerge in the Ksamili area, covered by Mediterranean vegetation and surrounded by wonderful marine flora and fauna. A salt lake, which is a lagoon of tectonic origin near Butrint lies inland. In antiquity it was known by name **Pelodes** and it connects with the sea through the channel of Vivar, 3.6 km in length. A large number of sea birds nest there.



## Butrinti

South of Burtint Lake, 18 km from Saranda, sits the ancient city of Butrint, the most important archaeological site in Albania, and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The name of Butrint has been wellknown since the seventh century B.C. as the most important city of Epirus. According to Dionysius of Halicarnassus, the building of Butrint was linked to the

presence of the Trojan prince Aeneas during his travel to the temple of Dodona. He paid tribute to the oracle of Dodona by sacrificing a bull (Buthros in Greek) in the place where the city of Butrint began to rise. The Roman poet Virgil also mentions the visit of Aeneas to Butrint in his poem "The Aeneid".

There are many destinations to visit within Butrint.





### *The Archaeological Park of Butrinti*

The most interesting ones are the Temple of Asclepius, a second century B.C. God of good health; a 1,500-seat theatre from the third century B.C. (which now hosts the International Theatre Festival every September); the Baptismal, a paleocristian monument; as well as the nymphs, the baths, the stoa (covered walkway), the Lake Gate, the Lion Gate,

the Venetian fortress of Ali Pasha, and many others. Besides its historical value, Butrint is renowned for its marvelous ecological system. The ruins and the buildings of the city stand amidst an amazing subtropical jungle, with lots of laurel and other high woods.



## Gjirokastra

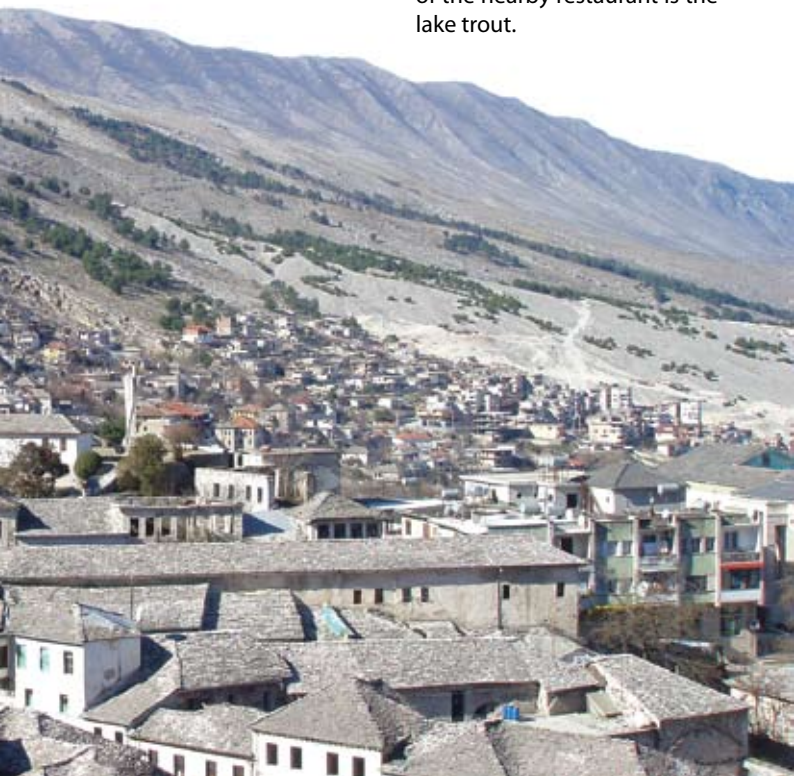
As you leave Saranda, the national highway will lead you to the unique city of Gjirokastra, only 56 km away. On the way,

just 10 km away from Saranda, you will find **Finiqi**, the capital of the Kingdom of Epirus (and named Foinike at the time), which was founded in the third and second centuries



B.C. in the territory of Kaonia. The historian Polybus called it “the most rich and fortified city of Epirus”. Southwest of Finiq in the hilltop village of **Mesopotam**, you can also visit the Church of Shën Kolli, built

during the Byzantine period. One of the most pleasant surprises along this journey is **Syri i Kaltër** (the “Blue Eye”), a powerful natural spring that has created a small lake of crystal-clear water that looks like a giant human eye. The specialty of the nearby restaurant is the lake trout.



Past **Qafa e Muzinë**s runs the national Gjirokaštër-Kakavijë highway. As you leave the villages of **Dropulli** on your left, the museum-city of Gjirokastra unfolds in front of you, built at the eastern slope of **Mali i Gjerë**. Due to its architecture, Gjirokastra is also known as the “City of Stone” or “City of a Thousand Stairs”. It is an ancient city with early inhabitants, above which was later constructed a fortress that served as the center of the city. What most attract visitors to Gjirokastra are the traditional tall houses made of

stone, which resemble small fortresses that form a complex of architectural monuments. Due to its architectural value, Gjirokastra is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

The main object is the city fortress, called Fortress of Argjiro. (The renowned story of the famous princess Argjiro gave rise to the name “Argjirokastro” given to the city in 1336.) The Weapons Museum located inside of the fortress displays weapons from the Paleolithic period up until the Second World War. During your stay in Gjirokastra you also can visit



the Ethnographic Museum. Gjirokastra is famous for its food specialties such as shapkat, laropit, different kinds of pies (byrek), and several dairy products known all over Albania.

There are some more interesting objects and places you might visit, the Theatre of **Sofratika**, the ancient city of **Antigonea**, the **Tekke of Melan**, and the village of **Sotira**. The Theatre of Sofratika, belonging to the Roman city Adrianopoli from the second century A.D., held 4,000 spectators in 27 tiers. Antigonea is nowadays an archaeological park situated in the **Lunxhëri** area, east of Gjirokastra, close to the village of **Saraqinisht**. Antigonea is an ancient city of the second century B.C. It is thought that the city was founded by King Pyrrhus of Epirus who named the city after his wife Antigonea. The city was 35 hectares in size; its ruins are located on a hill at 600 m above sea level. Tourists can visit the remains and fragments of the surrounding wall, the agora

(market), and the stoa of the city, which are 59 m long and 9 m wide. It's worth mentioning that in the area archaeologists discovered a seven-inch bronze statue representing Poseidon, God of the sea, and the Sphinx of Antigonea. Both objects are displayed in the National History Museum in Tirana.

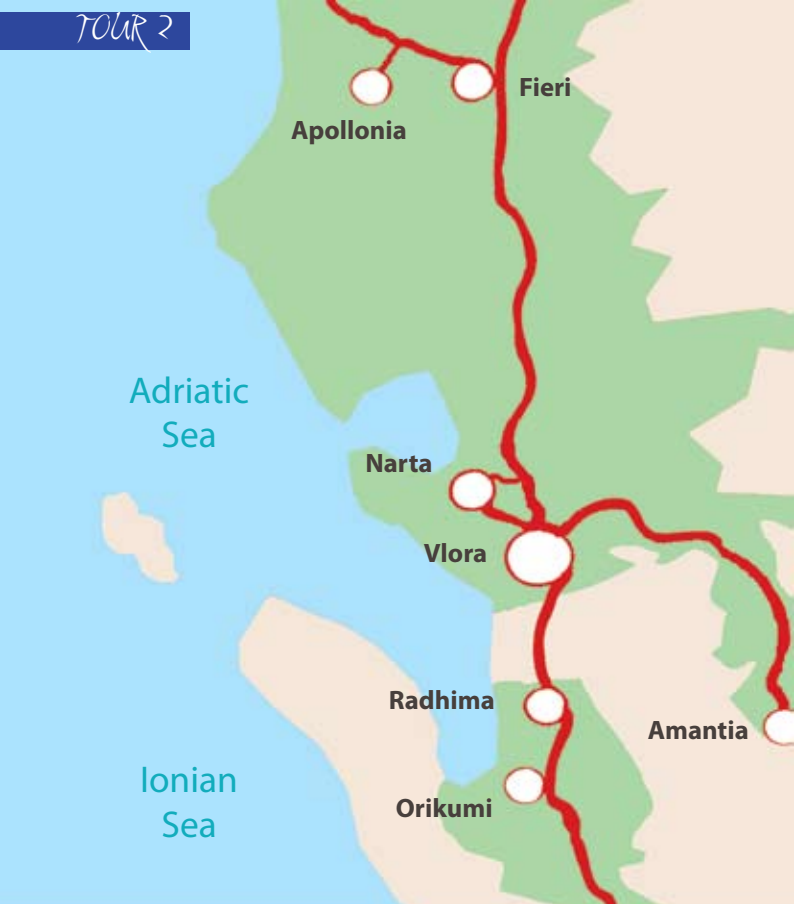
Only 4 km south of small city of **Libovoha**, the Tekke of Melan is to be found. This religious object of the *Bektashi* sect is open to everyone and guests are welcome and treated with a special hospitality.

The village of Sotira is located in the region of Dropulli, populated by a Greek minority. It is a mountain village of a rare beauty with little stone houses surrounded by the fir forest of Sotira and lots of water springs. The region of Dropull, is known all over Albania for its fine women's' folk costumes and their elegance dances.

### *The Iso-polyphonic group of Gjirokastra*







**Vlorë - Radhima 22km**  
**Vlorë - Apollonia 42km**  
**Vlorë - Amantia 20km**

**Vlorë - Narta 5km**  
**Vlorë - Orikumi 33km**

## Vlora

Vlora is one of the largest, most populous cities in Albania. It is 130 km from the capital, 120 km from Mother Teresa International Airport and is home to the second largest port in Albania.

Vlora is rich with history and antiquity. This historic city dates back to the sixth century B.C., when it was known as *Aulona*. Fragments of the massive wall surrounding Aulona have been found in the center of the city, close to *Sheshi i Flamurit* ("Flag Square"). In 1081, the city fell under Norman dominion. In the 14th century it was part of the "Kingdom of Arbëria" ruled by the Balshaj, Albanian princes, until 1417 when the city was invaded by the Ottomans. In 1812, the city came under the control of Ali Pashë Tepelena, and one century later, on November 28, 1912, it became the first capital of an independent Albania, ruled by the government of Ismail Qemali. The most interesting sights in Vlora include the Independence Museum

(in the headquarters building of the first government), the History Museum, and the Ethnographic Museum.

Among the religious objects in Vlora, one of the most important is the Mosque of Muradie, built in 1542 by the chief architect of the Ottoman Empire, Mimar Sinani, who was originally from the region. He is the constructor of the famous Suleymanye Mosque in Istanbul and also in other cities in Turkey such as Edirne (Selymie Mosque), Erzurum and others. Also, a prominent hill above the city is home to the Bektashi *Tekke of Kuzum Babai*. The site offers an amazing view of the city of Vlora, the peninsula of *Karaburun*, the island of *Sazan* and the lagoon of *Narta*. There are also several interesting clubs and restaurants in the city of Vlora.





## Narta

North of the city of Vlora is the lagoon of Narta, the second biggest lagoon in Albania. There are 195 species of waterfowl living in the area, and Mediterranean woods cover the tract of land dividing the lagoon from the sea. It's a good place to observe the seabirds or to fish. The water is full of different kinds of fish, especially eels and bass.

The village of Narta stands south of the lagoon on the water's edge, and is surrounded by low hills covered with vineyards that are used to make one of the best artisanal wines in Albania. The lagoon also of-

fers the picturesque view of the village of **Zvërneci** and of the nearby island, which hosts the Byzantine-style Church and the Monastery of Saint Mary. The lagoon ends with the Cape of **Treporti**, which joins the forest-covered hill to form a beautiful natural ensemble.

## Radhima

Continuing the journey southward, you will be able to see and enjoy the panoramic view of this part of the Gulf of Vlora. After passing through the tunnel in the area known as **Uji i Ftohtë** ("Cold Water", named after a nearby mountain



stream that flows into the sea), you will see the tourist area of Jonufër, with its small rocky beaches well known for their crystal-clear waters. Beyond **Jonufri** lies Rradhima, which continues for several kilometers up to the **Dukati** stream, near the small city of **Orikumi**. The beaches in Rradhima have beautiful colors, with vivid contrasts between the deep blue of the sea and the green hills, with their Mediterranean olive and citrus plantations. The Gulf of Vlora is also the perfect place to go diving. There are several sunken ships like "PO", the Italian ship that sank in 1941 during the Ital-



ian-Greek war. You might also want to dive into the waters of Zhiron to observe the green and black algae.



## Orikumi

The small city of Orikum lies on the southern end of the Gulf of Vlora, near a marina that can berth 650 yachts. Orikum was one of the most important cities in the ancient world; the settlers from the island of Euboea founded it during their retreat from the Trojan War. Orikum's strategic position turned it into the main port of the Illyrian Amant clan and it played an important role in the civil wars between Caesar and Pompey. During the Byzantine period, the small port

of Orikum took the holy name "Jerico". This is because of the presence of a Jewish community in the bay of Vlora. During the Ottoman occupation, Orikum took the name of "Pasha Liman".

The most important archaeological object is the antique theater of Orikum, with 400-500 seats. Another notable local site is the **Church of Marmiroi**, from the Byzantine period.

Orikum is a good start point if you want to explore the peninsula of Karaburun, which



encloses the western part of the Gulf of Vlora. The western shore of Karaburun is spectacular, with small gulfs and isolated beaches with deep and clear water. The marine **Cave of Haxhi Alia** (a 17th century sailor from Ulqin) lies north of the peninsula. Antique writings have been found in the steep slopes close to the beach of **Grame** (the name derives from the Greek word Gramata). In this place was supposed to be the ancient temple of Ledea, a Pelasgian princess.



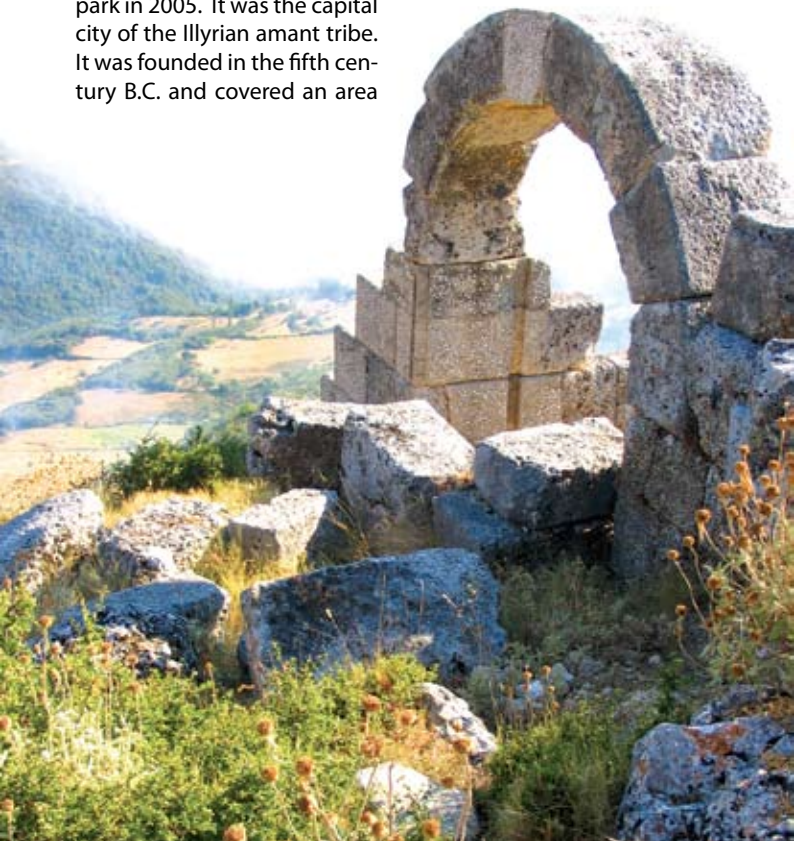
*The Marmiroi church*



## Amantia

The ruins of the antique city of Amantia stand south-east of the Vlora District, close to the village of **Ploçë**. Amantia was declared an archaeological park in 2005. It was the capital city of the Illyrian amant tribe. It was founded in the fifth century B.C. and covered an area

of 13 hectares. The most interesting objects for visitors are the antique Stadium of Amantia, 60 m long and 12.5 m wide, and the fortifications.



## Apollonia

Fier is 34 km from Vlora, and Apollonia is 12 km from Fier. The city of Apollonia, named for the Greek God Apollo, was founded in the beginning of the seventh century B.C. by Corinthian settlers. The first documentation of the settlers' presence dates back to 588 B.C.

The city, located in proximity to the **Aoos (Vjosa) River**, had 60000 inhabitants, a large city for its time. Among 24 cities in the ancient Mediterranean world with the same name, Illyrian Apollonia was the most

important, as it served as a middleman for trade between the Illyrians and the Hellenes (Greeks). The city remained equally prominent during the Roman period; Octavian Augustus studied oratory here.

The vast area covered by monuments, the wonderful view of the plain of **Myzeqe** and the Adriatic sea, its proximity to big cities and the southern beaches, make Apollonia Archaeological Park a very important site for cultural tourism and easily reachable for visitors.

### *The Monastery of St. Mary*







**Vlora - Llogara 37km**  
**Palasa - Himara 15km**  
**Borshi - Lukova 16km**

**Llogara - Palasa 13km**  
**Himara - Qeparoi 13km**

## Llogara

The Llogara National Park lies approximately 40 km south of the city of Vlorë. It is situated on the slopes of the **Llogara Mountain** and covers a surface area of 810 hectares, with elevations ranging from 470 to 2018 m above sea level. The park combines the beauties of a mountain with a seaside climate. You can enjoy part of its magical beauty while traveling along the Vlorë-Sarandë National Highway at **Qafa e Llogarasë**, 1025 m above sea level. Here, medicinal and decorative plants are interspersed within a forest of pine trees.



The park is also home to several animal species.

After 20 minutes of driving along the National Highway, you will enter the Albanian Riviera. Here, you can stay overnight in the park and enjoy the restaurants, contemporary clubs, activities and excursions. It is also a great place to enjoy aerial sports as it is known for international aerial sports events like parachuting and hang-gliding.

## Palasa

After passing Qafa e Llogarasë on a road that dates back to the time of Pompey, you descend into the Albanian Riviera. This warm Mediterranean zone has nearly 300 sunny days a year, and the average temperature in July is 25°C (77° Fahrenheit). The list of places to visit begins with the beach of **Dhrraleo** (Palasë) known for its clear waters. Pompey and his army stopped at this beach in ancient times, when it was known as **Palestra**.



## Dhërmiu

Dhërmiu is famous for its crystal-clear waters, and small, intimate pebble beaches like **Jaliksari**, **Shkambo**, and **Gjipea**. Situated at the foot of a 70 m cliff, Gjipea is a rare beauty. Close to Dhërmiu is the legendary **Cavern of the Pirates**. Dhërmiu is a picturesque village thought to have first been inhabited in 49-48 B.C. The village is home to the **Monastery of Shën Maria**, the

**Church of Shën Todhri**, the **Church of the Ipapandia** and the **Church of Shën Mitri** with its frescos from the 12th -14th centuries.

The main entertainment options in Dhërmiu are swimming, water sports, and diving. There are many hotels, restaurants, pubs, discotheques. The restaurants combine traditional and foreign cuisines, and serve many seafood specialties.



## Vunoi

Eight km south of Dhërmiu is the village of Vunoi, well known for its traditions and patriotism. From here, follow the road to the wonderful beach of **Jala**, whose gulf is distinctive from those in the rest of the Riviera. Vunoi is built on a hill facing the sea.

Here you can visit old churches like the **Church of Shën Spiridhoni**, built in 1778, and the **Church of Mesodhia** with paintings from 1783. There are also several architectural landmarks such as the ruins of the **House of Odise Kasneci** and the tower like **House of Shane Kote**.



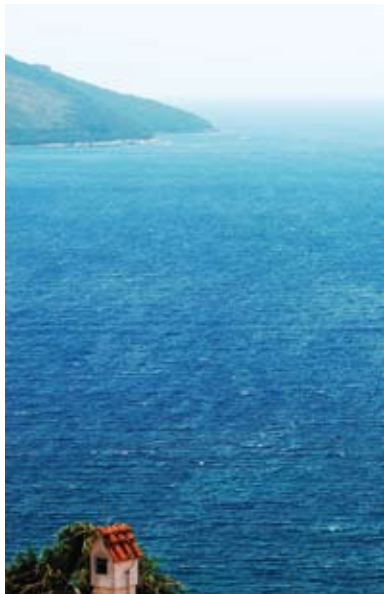
## Himara

Continuing your tour towards the south, you will come across the small city of Himara, which has two neighborhoods: **Old Himara** built on the hill, and **New Himara** in the gulf of Spille. Himara has four beaches: **Filikuri**, **Spille**, **Llamani**, **Potami** and **Livadhet**. They are all gravel beaches with deep, clear waters. The city comes to life during the summer tourist season, when visitors take up residence in the hotels or in rented houses.

Himara is the ancient residence and city of the Illyrian Kaon clan. It was settled in the fifth century B.C. and its name is of Pellazgë (pre-Illyrian) origin. There are several religious sites to visit such as the **Church of Shën Maria e Athalit**, the **Church of Cassiopeia**, the **Church of All Saints**, and the **House of Lilo Llazari**, which has been turned into a cultural monument.

Another site to visit is the **Castle of Ali Pashë Tepelena**, built on a small peninsula in the tectonic gulf of **Porto**

**Palermo**. The castle was built in the shape of a triangle and has 20 m high walls. Ali Pasha dedicated this castle to his wife, Vasiliqia. It is said that it was built on top of the ruins of an ancient castle. Himara is particularly noted for its traditional Albanian iso-polyphonic songs (part of UNESCO oral art patrimony).



*The  
castle  
of  
Ali  
Pasha  
in  
Porto  
Palermo  
Himara*



## Qeparoi

The village of Qeparoi is located close to the gulf of Porto Palermo and has its own distinctive beach. **Old Qeparoi**, built on the hillside, has several historical sights including the three-story **Towers of Ali Pasha**, the **Monastery of Shën Dhimitri**, and the **House of Minella Gjika**.



*The Saint Mary Church,  
Qeparo*

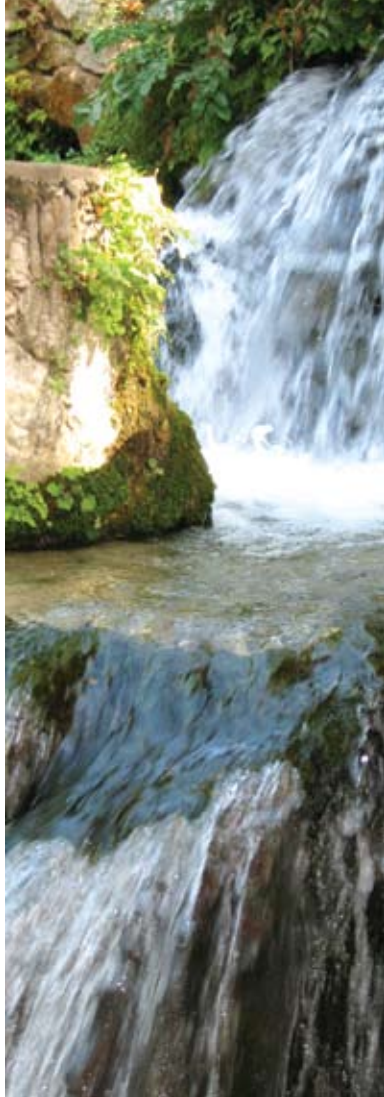


## **Borshi**

The village of Borshi is situated a few hundred meters away from the shore, about 20 minutes from Himara. It is the largest beach of the Albanian Riviera and its clear water stretches for almost 6 km. Several hotels, clubs, discotheques, and restaurants are built along the length of the beach. The hospitality of the villagers and the traditional dish of grilled lamb are distinctive features found in Borshi.



*The Sopoti castle, Borshi*



## Lukova

The last seaside village on the Albanian Riviera is the village of Lukova, which is well known for its terraces of citrus and olives. Two km further you will find the popular **Buneci Beach** whose crystal-clear stream

flows directly into the Ionian Sea. South of Lukova towards the **Gulf of Kakome** are several kilometers of coastline characterized by its gleaming white flint stones. You also can find a number of underwater caves in this area.



## TOUR 4



**Shkodra - Zogaj 10km**  
**Shkodra - Lezha 41km**  
**Lezha - Kune Vaini 5km**

**Shkodra - Velipoja 22km**  
**Lezha - Shëngjini 7km**

## Shkodra

Shkodra is one of the oldest cities in Albania, founded in the fourth century B.C. as the center of the Labeat tribe of Illyrians. Throughout history Shkodra has been occupied several times: first by the Romans (168 B.C.), then Serbians (1040), the Venetians (1396), and finally the Ottomans (1479). The city returned to Albanian control as the feudal principality of the Balshaj during the 14th century and

served as the municipal center of the Bushatllinj Pashallëk from 1757 to 1831. Shkodra is rich with cultural Heritage, the city itself as well as the people bear the pride that the large number of artists, musicians, painters, photographers, poets and writers born here strove to create.

Shkodra's main tourist attraction is **Rozafa Castle**. Rising majestically upon a rocky hill west of the city, the outcroppings and battlements paint



a blazing picture against the setting sun. It is surrounded by the waters of three rivers; the **Drini, Buna, and Kiri**. Much like the town it protected, the castle has Illyrian origins. According to the historian Tit Liri *"it was the strongest area of the Labeats"*. Like all ancient works, the castle comes with a popular local legend. Rozafa was the name of the bride of the youngest of three brothers who originally built the castle. The three men worked

tirelessly by day laying mortar and stone but the walls always crumbled overnight. Consulting a wise man they learned that to expel the evil tearing at their daily work and protect their friends and family with a strong castle that would last through the ages, one of their wives needed to be entombed within the walls. The brothers made a heart wrenching pact not to alert their wives to this danger, and whoever brought her husband his noon meal the



following day, she would be sacrificed. The elder brothers broke their word however, and it was Rozafa alone who came with food. When she heard the proclamation, she wept for her newborn son and husband, but allowed herself to become a living part of the walls so that the castle could be built. According to both legend and local folklore, the calcareous

water flowing at the entrance of the castle is the milk flowing from one of her breasts, which she requested be left exposed so that she could feed her baby. She also pleaded for one foot and one arm to be left free, in order to rock her son's cradle at night and sooth him during the day.

Historians tell us a less enchanting and more scientific background of the castle's characteristics. It reflects the dominion of the *Balshaj family*, but passed through enough other ruling periods that each left their own signs and markings on the grounds, including a distinct Venetian flare, some Ottoman architecture from the 16th and 17th centuries, and even a few modifications from the Bushatllinj family during the 18th and 19th centuries. Within the castle walls is a museum that a discerning lover of antiquities could spend a comfortable afternoon reading more of the history, and a restaurant has been added to showcase local food and traditional dress.





In addition to the castle, you might also want to visit other notable landmarks, such as the city's History Museum, near the stadium and the renowned Marubi Fototekë.

*The Historic Museum  
(The former house  
of Oso Kuka)*



*The Mesi Bridge*



Close to the city lies the **Lake Shkodra**, the biggest lake in all the Balkans with its surface area of 368 km<sup>2</sup> (149 of which are Albanian waters). The lake is notable for its different banks: the southern bank is high and rocky while the northern one is low and marshy. For a leisurely cyclist or driver, two main tourist centers are the towns of **Shiroka** and **Zogaj** located

on the shoreline. Famous for their fishing skills, each village hosts restaurants serving the most popular local dish, baked carp. Every 15th of August the Catholic pilgrimage of **Shën Rrok**, or Saint Rocco, is observed in Shiroka to celebrate the historic protector of the town. Tradition holds that after this date it is ill advised to swim in the lake's waters.



The Lake Shkodra enjoys warm temperatures, absorbing sunlight most days during the year. Swimming, sunbathing and rowing are popular for both tourists and locals. Besides these amusements the lake constitutes a very important natural ecosystem with 281 species of birds and 45 species of fish including carp, eel and *shtojza*.



*The Shkodra Lake*



The beach of **Velipoja** is only 22 km away from the city of Shkodra. The long shoreline is famous for its therapeutic sand. Possessing unusually high iodine content, many people have taken to burying themselves in it to relieve bodily aches and pains. Besides swimming and fishing, the surrounding scenery offers many interesting natural objects worth seeing, such as the small island of **Franc Joseph** positioned at the mouth of the **Buna River**, close to the Montenegro border.



## Lezha

47 kilometers south of Shkodra the city of Lezha is to be found. Another of Albania's ancient cities, it was first mentioned in historical documents by the name Lissus. In 1398, after the construction of its castle, the city was under direct control of the feudal **family of Lekë Dukagjini**, but was eventually conquered by soldiers from Venice. One of the most important historical events for Lezha, and indeed for all of Albania, was the famed "Assembly of Lezha" on March 2nd, 1444 where under the leadership of national hero Skanderbeg the Albanian princedoms united against the Ottomans.

**The Memorial Grave of Skan-**

**derbeg** is here, the ex-Cathedral of Shën Kolli, where he was buried in 1468. The Castle of Lezha, another Illyrian monument, sits on a hilltop overlooking the city below. Inside the castle, ruins of an Ottoman mosque, a Roman Arch, and an Illyrian Tower all rest together for the ages.

Only a few minutes from the city there is the sandy beach of Shëngjini at the foot of Mount Renci. The sunny beach community of **Shëngjini** boasts a long and colorful history, known as both "Caesarian" and "Nympeum" in past centuries. It was here that the Roman general Marcus Aurelius embarked with his fleet in order to chase Pompey, during the civil war he and Julius Caesarius engaged in. The mouth of the Drini River is located nearby, providing an amazing Ecosystem becoming more and more of a key attraction for international Ecco-tourism.



*The Monumental Tomb  
of National Hero,  
Gjergj Kastrioti - Scanderbeg*



Also in the neighborhood is the **Kune-Vain** National Park. With approximately 70 species of birds, 22 species of reptiles, 6 species of amphibians, and 13 species of mammals, it is a wide and diverse protected habitat. One of the most pleasant surprises is the sandy is-

land of Kune, which turns into a peninsula depending on the water level. With 227 different kinds of plants growing on the island, Kune's dense vegetation provides nesting grounds for many birds, and consequently, many bird-watchers.





Kosova

Montenegro

Valbona

Dragobi

Shoshan

Rrogami

Bajram Curri

Fierza

Bajram Curri - Shoshan 3km

Shoshan - Dragobi 9km

Dragobi - Valbona 10km

Valbona - Rrogami 10km

## Valbona

The **Valbona River Valley** lies in the eastern part of the **Albanian Alps**. A national park of 8,000 hectares, it is one of the most beautiful natural areas in Albania. The park lies about 22 km from the alpine city of

**Bajram Curri**. Before entering the valley you will find the spring (vrellen) of **Shoshan**. It is located only 3 km away from Bajram Curri. This spring rushes through limestone fissures on its way to the Valbona River creating an attractive canyon



2-3 m wide and 50 m deep. After entering the valley, you will pass several picturesque villages. The first, with alpine style houses, is called **Dragobia**, and it is where the valley narrows. Past Dragobia, at the foot of a the mountain where



the **Cerrema** stream joins the Valbona River, is the famous cave where the national hero Bajram Curri was besieged and killed. The city then took his name. Valbona (or **Selimaj**) is located 25 km away from the city of Bajram Curri and is the most important inhabited center of the valley. It is full of traditional houses that create a picturesque view in symmetry with the natural wonders of the valley, which widens again at this point.



In **Selimaj**, there is a comfortable and traditional hotel, or you may have the opportunity to stay at a village home, for the inhabitants' generosity and hospitality are well known. The zone is also known for its characteristic regional cooking, with specialties such as *mazja*, *flija*, (a many layered pancake-like dish cooked outdoors over open coals and steamed, often

served with local honey), and *pitja*.

Beyond Selimaj, the road continues through the valley among marvelous views of nature with rich colors of both springtime and of the snow that covers the peaks of the craggy mountains. The final village before you arrive at the source of the Valbona River is **Rrogam**.



Rrogam is a remote village surrounded by virgin and intact nature. The whole valley has such rare colors and beauty that one may think a divine hand made it. On one side, you see the crystal-clear waters of the Valbona, and on the other the sharp but verdant mountain edges. Up until May you can enjoy the contrast of the clean white snow on the treetops against the blue sky. The flora of the national park includes a variety of plants and trees, the most wide-spread groves of which are the *Hormoq* tree. The rest consists of beech woods, *arnen*, walnuts, chestnuts, and wild apple trees. There are also many forest fruits such as blueberries and strawberries. The animals in the park include bears, wolves, wild cats, and even herds of wild goats climbing on the rocks. Down in the river there is the “**marble trout**”, a rare fish found in the crystal-clear waters of the Valbona with an special and exquisite taste.



The valley, the park, and all the surroundings are known for heavy snowfall, which starts in early November and lasts almost until May. The average amount of snow in this region during the year is 100 cm. There are lots of outdoor activities in the national park, such as skiing, mountain climbing,

fishing, excursions and trekking throughout the valley and streams (**Cerremi, Kukaj**), and canoeing along certain parts of the river. Valbona may also serve as a starting point if you wish to climb the **Jezerca Mountain**, the second highest mountain in Albania.





Shkodra - Razma 41km  
Boga - Thethi 17km

Razma - Boga 33km  
Shkodra - Vermoshi 95km

## Razma

An alpine tour of Albania isn't complete without a stop in the famed Western Alps, or *Alpet Perëndimore*. Here you will enjoy something unique: walk, breath, sleep and eat amidst the legends dating from Homer and through modern



tales of our majestic mystery and intrigue. This tour gives you the rare chance to enjoy the heart of the Albanian Alps, *Gropa e Thethit*.

The journey begins from the cultural capital of Shkodra and wanders 41 km away to the village of **Razma**. Situated on a blackberry hill at the feet of the **Veleçik Mountain**, Razma stands amid lush forests of pine and birch trees. Meadows and amazing alpine pastures abound, drenching any visitor with a keen eye in the beauty of the Balkans. Even in the depths of winter when the snow drifts to its highest level of the season, adventure tourists visit Razma. Several hotels already exist and others are being completed. Common activities on the excursions are mountain climbing, skiing, and weather permitting, camping.



## Boga

The road turns from Razma to the village of **Dedaj** and then onto **Boga**, a village surrounded by the Alps and described by Edith Durham in her book "The Burden of the Balkans". It is here that the wealthy families of Shkodra, before the Second World War built their houses and villas to rest and escape the city. Boga is the perfect place for mountain climbing, skiing, and cave spelunking. Among the most

famous caves, visitors often delve into the **Cave of Mulliri** ("Mill"), **Akullore** ("Ice Cream"), and **Njerëzve të lagun** ("Wet People"). The **Cave of Puci** is one of the most attractive, situated 1,087 m above sea level, 5 km deep and rich in stalactites, stalagmites, and wall veils, this cave branches into many different levels, five alone are at the center. Passing through its curved galleries you can walk into with the next **Cave of Husi**.



## Thethi

After Boga, you can find one of the most popular tourist spot of the entire area, **Thethi**. Located 70 km. from Shkodra you must pass **Qafa e Tërthores** at 2,000 m. above sea level before descending to **Gropa e Thethit** by crossing a stream bearing the same name. It is a journey camera

ready, full of long views from the mountains, with water battling down craggily hill-sides and trees struggling for sunlight on rocky slopes.

The area is rich in attractive sights like the waterfall of **Grunas**, 30 m high, the amazing cold-water sources of **Okol** and the caves of "**Birrat me rrahë**" ("Round Holes") and **Arapi**. In the park people often amuse themselves by hiking, mountain climbing, skiing (especially on the eastern slope),



fishing, even mountain biking and spelunking. Almost 90 percent of the park area is covered by beech trees, providing shade for many different types of flowers such as the *Wulfenian Baldacci* discovered by the Italian botanist Baldacci. Fascinatingly, this flower is found only in Theth. The fauna is just as rich as the flora, distinguished by the famed **Golden Eagle** and *rriqebulli* (lynx lynx). In the waters of the **Stream of**

**Theth** marble trout make their home. While in Theth you can stay in local hostels designed to display traditional alpine architecture. The characteristic dish of the area is *fërliku* (baked meat) or sample one of a large varieties of local trout. If time permits, many travelers enjoy a short excursion to the valley of the **Shalë River** which brings them close to the heart of the Alps.







## Vermoshi

Another interesting spot of the Western Alps is Vermosh, part of the northern-most mountains of the country located 95 km from Shkodra in the region of **Kelmendi** (named from the Roman word "*Clemens*", meaning gentle, simple, and good). The first thing to catch the eye along the journey is **Qafa e Rrapshit** where you can see the crystal-clear waters of the

**Cemi River** create a beautiful contrast with the surrounding landscape. During summer the ponds of the river are perfect for sunbathing and many visitors stop to lounge in the sun and enjoy themselves.

*Wulfenia Baldacci*



**Vermoshi** stands in an alpine field 1,100 m above sea level surrounded by high slopes. You can entertain yourself by trekking, mountain climbing, skiing, or fishing for mountain trout. The locals pride themselves that their cuisine is only truly enjoyable for visitors when accented by their own dairy prod-

ucts, so be sure to indulge. The full journey among the people of this Albanian region will give you not only the chance to live between a mythical atmosphere and the contemporary world, but will also let you enjoy the renowned hospitality mentioned by almost every foreigner who has been fortunate enough to visit.



**TOUR 7**



**Lini - Pogradeci 25km**  
**Korça - Voskopoja 24km**  
**Korça - Vithkuqi 27km**

**Pogradeci - Korça 41km**  
**Korça - Dardha 20km**

## Pogradeci

You enter the region of Pogradeci via the national highway where the road from Macedonia crosses *Qafa e Thanës*. This crossroad offers picturesque views of **Lake Ohrid**, a true pearl “shelled” between *Mali i Thatë* (“Dry Mountain”) in the east and the Mokra highland in the west. A little ways down, you might stop at the **Lini** peninsula and in the like named village, 25 km outside of Pogradeci. It is said that in ancient times, this was the favorite holiday destination of the Roman emperor Justinian’s parents. In addition to the enchanting views are the mosaics of the *Bazilika e Linit*, dating back to the 7th-6th centuries B.C. This ancient

artwork exhibits an amazing ensemble of zoomorphic, floral, and geometric decorations resembling those of ancient Durrësi.

The road to Pogradeci passes along the shore of the tectonic Lake Ohrid, the deepest lake in the Balkans (285 m). This 2-4 million-year-old lake (under UNESCO protection due to its unique value) houses 17 species of aquatic animal, 70% of which are native and 30% migrant. The sponge of Ohrid is found only here and in Lake Baikal.

By the lake side you will find an array of restaurants, clubs and comfortable hotels. You must not miss a taste of the traditional fish dishes, especially the baked speckled trout



(*Koran* in Albanian), as well as the famous pickles and *kollofacet*. You might also sample the various wines on offer, but don't miss the traditional unique wine of Buti, or the famous *Perla* and *Moskat raki* of Pogradec.

The city of Pogradec was settled in the Neolithic period, and it later became home to the Illyrian *Enkelejdë* and *Desaretë* clans, who built the **Castle of Pogradeci** on a hill at 870 m above sea level. The city, with its mild climate, lends it-



*The Basilica of Lini*



Before leaving Pogradeci don't miss **Driloni** and **Tushemishti**, just 4-5 km south of the city. The Driloni source waters form a small lake, surrounded by beautiful greenery that makes the area and the nearby village of Tushemishti a unique oasis of beauty and tranquility. The region of Pogradeci is rich in striking and distinctive natural and historical monuments. You might visit the natural monument of "**Stone of Kamje**", which is located in the commune of **Dardhas** (on the way from Pogradeci



to Korça, near the village of **Osnati**). It is 70 meters high and suddenly rises out of the surrounding terrain like a “ship sailing in a sea of green.” The archaeological site and **Monumental Graves of Selca** lies 30 km away from Pogradeci. The monuments here date back to the 4th century BC and the five rocky monumental graves are rarely found elsewhere in the Balkans.



*The Monumental Graves of Selca e Poshtëme*



*The water sources of Driloni*



## Korça

The next surprise after the exceptional city of Pogradeci is the city of Korça, one of the biggest urban centers in Albania. During springtime the soft fragrance of sturgeon flowers fills the main avenue, while during winter you can enjoy a quiet stroll under the snow-dusted trees.

In 1887, the first Albanian school opened in Korça. During the First World War, the French invaded the city and it became the "Autonomous Region of Korça." In 1917 the French Lyceum (one of the most notable schools in Albania) opened. Besides its history, Korça's traditional architecture with its villa-like houses encircled by banisters





and flowery gardens attract attention. The zone between Republika and Shën Gjergji boulevards is very interesting: here, housed in two traditional Korça buildings are the Medieval Art Museum and the Prehistoric Museum, displaying nearly 1200 artifacts from the Prehistoric, Hellenic, Roman and early-Byzantine eras. Another object of interest is the Museum-house of the master artist Vangjush Mio,

and the Museum of the Bratko Collection, opened in 2003 and displaying art objects from the Far East.

*The house museum  
of the wellknown painter  
Vangjush  
Mio*



You might want to visit also the bazaar (dating from the turn of the 20th century), the Mosque of *Iliaz Bej Mirahori* (the oldest monument in the

City, dating back to 1484), and the Cathedral *Ngjallja e Krishtit* ("Resurrection of Christ"), one of the biggest cathedrals in the Balkans.



The city is known for its characteristic songs called “serenades” which are played by guitars. In the city taverns you can sample local dishes (be sure not to miss *lakrori me qepë dhe domate*, and *tava e korminës*), and don’t forget the Festival of Carnivals, the biggest celebration of its kind in all of Albania.



*The Carnivals of Korça*



## Voskopoja

Voskopoja was historically one of the most important Balkan centers, dating back to 1330. It reached its golden age in 1794, with a population numbering 30,000 and contacts with Leipzig, Budapest, Venice, and Vienna. The city was also home to 27 churches, an academy, a library, and the first printing

house in the Balkans (in 1720). Pay a visit to the **Monastery of Shën Prodhomi**, **Church of Shën Kolli** (1721), **Church of Shën Thanasi**, **Church “Fjetja e Shën Marisë”** and the **Church of Shën Ilia**, which houses pictures of famous Albanian iconographers, such as David Selenicasi and the Zografi brothers from Korça, who also





worked in the Saint Mountain of Athos, in Halkidiki, Greece. In addition to its invigorating climate and pine-filled air, Voskopoja offers comfortable hotels and private houses for family tourism as well as a natural ski-run for skiing enthusiasts.



## Dardha

Another unforgettable mountain spot is the village of Dardha, 20 km southeast of Korça, at 1,350 m above sea level. There is snow during the winter months, the air is crystalline, and the water of the village's many natural fountains is pure and invigorating. Look out for the unique folk wom-

en's costumes dominated by black and red (the colors of the national flag), visit the stone houses that offer hospitality to travelers, and don't miss a taste of the traditional plum raki and the *lakrori në saç* (a traditional pie made with cabbage between two sheets of dough, and baked in a wood-fired oven).





## Vithkuqi

The mountain village of Vithkuqi, birthplace of the Albanian Renaissance pioneer Naim Veqilharxhi, stands 25 km southwest of the city of Korça. It has been a population center and a well-known economic and cultural center since medieval times. During your stay, you absolutely must drink the water of the **Bellovoda** and visit the **Church of Shën Pjetër**

and the **Church of Shën Pavël**. If you have enough time, you also should climb **Rungaja** (1,750 m above sea level) by foot or horse. Don't worry about accommodation, for the local people have a reputation for hospitality and will surely invite you into their comfortable and characteristic homes.



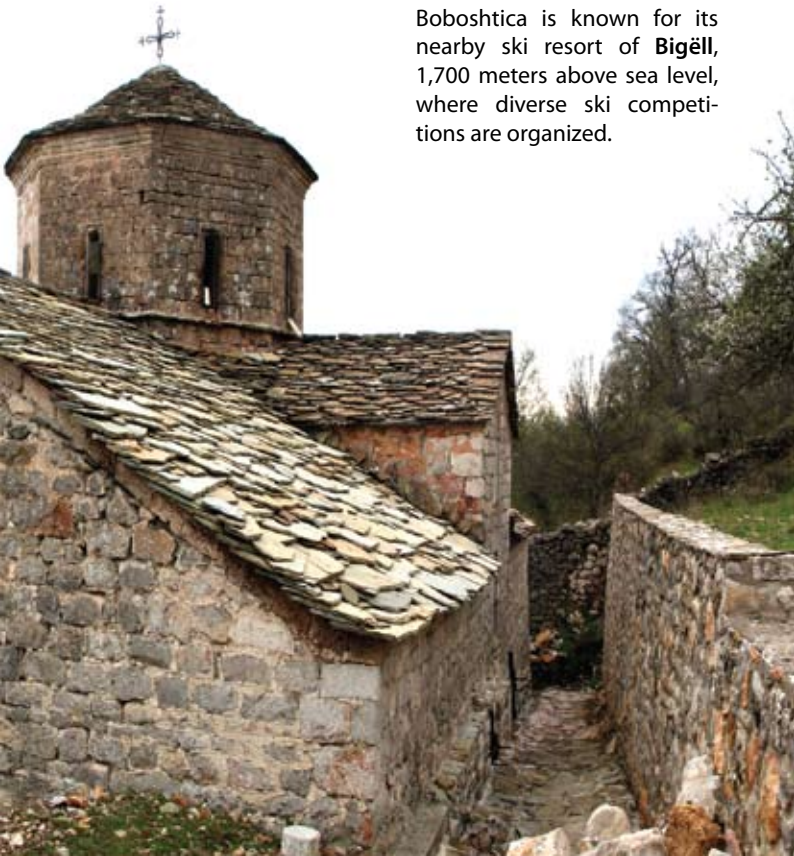
## **Boboshtica.**

It is an attractive village 16 km from Korça. There is a range of rustic restaurants offering traditional regional specialties.

Do not miss the “*raki*” made by mulberry.

You may also visit the old churches of **Saint Demetrio (Shën Mitri)** and **Saint Giovanni (Shën Jovani)**.

Boboshtica is known for its nearby ski resort of **Bigëll**, 1,700 meters above sea level, where diverse ski competitions are organized.







**Këlcyra - Përmeti 20km**  
**Përmeti - Bënja 3km**

**Përmeti - Frashëri 30km**  
**Kosina - Përmeti 10km**

## Këlcyra

As you leave either Gjirokastra or Tepelena, **Gryka e Këlcyrës** will appear in front of you. This natural gate of the Valley of Vjosa will be the first to say “Welcome”, showing its natural beauty, the high colorful mountains and the magnificent **Vjosa River**, a rapid and blue river full of tasty fish and amazing cataracts. You should not continue your journey without eating in the restau-

rants of Gryka e Këlcyrës, set among picturesque views of nature, to taste their lamb and dairy specialties.

Past the small town of Këlcyra, known in antiquity by the name Klistyra, as you travel through the **Valley of Vjosa (Aos, in antiquity)**, you will be able to admire the sight of the mountains **Dhëmbeli, Trebeshina, Kokojka** and on the horizon, **Nemërçka** (“a big, regal woman”) cradling a





valley “embroidered” by the people of this region through their wisdom and hard work.

### **Përmeti**

In Përmeti you will enjoy the relaxing calm and the flowers and greenery without end. You will find hospitality and a touching kindness in the streets, houses, restaurants and hotels. A night in the pleasant and comfortable hotels on the banks of the Vjosa will leave you with the impres-

sion of sleeping amidst the waves of river itself.

Përmeti, a city of flowers, roses, irreplaceable songs, cleanness, and tranquility (its antique name was *Tryfilia*, inhabited by Illyrians), was known as an administrative center since the 15th century. Its several



and rich bazaars were often visited by residents of the surrounding countries. Today, we invite you to see **Gurin e Qytetit** ("City's Stone"), a surprising natural stone monument that makes the city distinct. You should also see the churches, especially the 18th century **Church of Leusa**, famous for its icons and wood engravings, and the 12th century **Church of Shën Maria in Kosina**.

The restaurants of Përmeti and

the surrounding area offer a special cuisine and unforgettable service. Among the city's traditional famous dishes, you can sample *ingjinari* with olive oil, wild meat, mountain partridge *me përshesh*, boar meat, rabbit, and the delicious fish of the Vjosa. You will also taste the famous wine (*Kabërnë*, *Merlot*, etc) and the traditional *raki*, as well as the delicious *gliko* (a kind of jelly) made from all kinds of fruits, and especially from walnuts.





During summer, you will find many beaches in Përmeti that look like pools carved out of the river's edge. The banks of Vjosa are often crowded by fishing amateurs, and during the summer there is an annual canoeing competition that starts from the source of Vjosa, at the feet of the **Pindi Mountains**, and ends with a ceremony in the city of Përmeti. There are two other annual

rituals, the International Multicultural Festival (during June), and **Dita e Verërave** (Wine day) during May. During the same month, the city hosts a national festival dedicated to the famous personalities born in the nearby village of **Frashëri**.



Although it is a small city, Përmeti is the birthplace of many well known politicians, scientists, writers, musicians and figurative artists of the Albanian pantheon. Since we are talking about the Albanian pantheon, you should not miss the chance to visit Frashëri, 30 km away from the city. It is the birthplace of the Frashëri brothers and many other noted personalities that

built the foundations of the Albanian nation and defined what we call “the Albanian gene”. However, this is not the only reason why we direct you to Frashëri. Traveling towards the village you will pass through the *Bredhi i Hotovës* National Park, meaning you will have the chance to see an incredible view with fir-woods, endless pines, and many cold-water sources.





As you leave Përmeti behind, the road heads to the Greek frontier, just 30 km away from the city, towards the city of Leskoviku, famous for its thermal waters in **Vronomero** and the saunas of **Postenani**. But you can not say goodbye to Përmeti without visiting the thermal waters of **Benja** and the **Valley of Lengarinca** just 3 km away from the city. There are six natural outdoor sources

of warm curative water (even in winter!). These waters flow from the beautiful canyons of two bridges built in the time of Ali Pashë Tepelena: ***Ura e Kaikut*** and ***Ura e Dashit***.







**Berati - Tomorri Mountain 40km**

**Berati - Osumi Canions 30km**

**Berati**

This 2407 years old city, the pride of Albanian antiquity and architecture, and under the protection of UNESCO, is

located 120 km from Tirana. The city forms a wonderful combination of eastern and western cultures, costumes, traditions, and outlook. Berati is a treasure-trove of Albanian



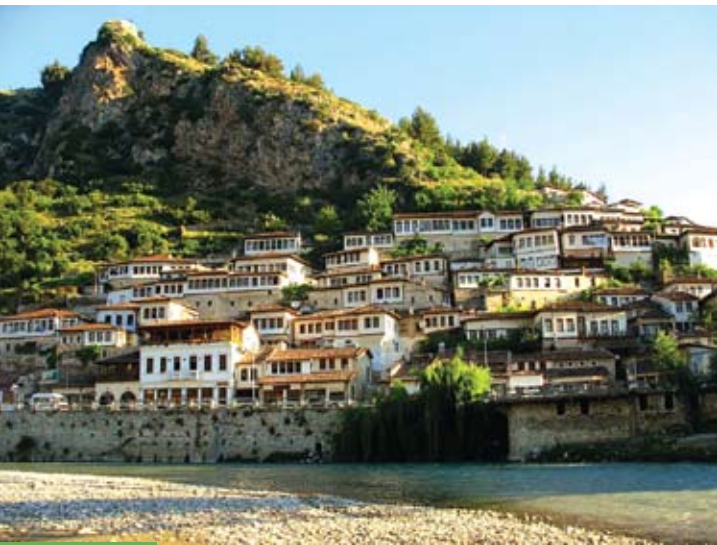
history and culture, and testimony to the country's tradition of religious harmony. The city's life began in the 6th-5th century B.C. as an Illyrian settlement. Later, in the 3rd century B.C., it was turned into a castle city known as **An-**

**tipatrea**. The castle expanded especially during the feudal dominion of the **Muzakaj** family. Inside the castle, they built churches with precious frescos and icons, and a calligraphy school. Today people continue to live inside the castle, a fact that makes it unique.



The three major neighborhoods of the old city are **Mangalemi, Gorica** and **Kala**. The castle itself is in Kala; in Mangalemi, below the castle, you can see the famous view of the façades of the houses, with windows that seem to stand above each other. In general, a traditional house has two floors, where the second is prominent and has many cambered windows

and wood carvings. With its houses built along the steep hill, the view of Mangalemi is the reason that another name for Berati is "*City of the Floating Windows*". Across the **Osumi River** lies the Gorica neighborhood, whose houses face those of Mangalemi. The arched bridge of Gorica, built in 1780, is a beautiful architectural monument constructed to link Gorica to Mangalemi.





The ensemble of the Byzantine churches in the castle of Berati is extraordinary. At the foot of the castle, there is the Byzantine **Church of Shën Mëhilli**, while the 13th century **Church of Shën Maria e Vllahernës**, the **Church of Shën Triadha** (*"The Holy Trinity"*), and the post-Byzantine monumental **Cathedral of Shën Maria** are located within the castle. The Cathedral of Shën Mëria houses a museum of works by the famous iconographers of the

16th century: Onufri, and his son, Nikolla. There are over 100 icons on display and they also include works of other artists such as Joan Çetiri, Onufër Qiprioti and many anonymous painters. You also can visit the **Monastery of Shën Spiridhoni** in Gorica.

*The Saint Mary and Jesus icon painted by Onufri*



In 1417, the Ottomans occupied Berati. This conquest left its mark with the building of monuments to the Islamic faith, such as the *Xhamia e Kuqe* ("Red Mosque", inside the castle), the *Xhamia e Plumbit* (1555), *Xhamia Mbret* (16th century) and the *Xhamia e Beqarëve* (1872).

*The ruins of the Red Mosque*

*The Halveti Tekke*





Other sites worth visiting are the **Ethnographic Museum**, situated inside an 18th century *çardak* building, and the Art Gallery “Edward Lear”, a well-known English painter who painted so much of Berati and Albania. In addition, Berati is known for its culinary and traditional dishes.

It is worth tasting specialties such as *Pula me përrshesh* and

*Çorba e Tomorrit* in the local restaurants.

*The interiors of a traditional room at the Ethnographic Museum of Berati*



## Mount Tomorri

The city of Berati is a good starting point to explore **Mount Tomorri** (also called the Albanian Olympus, or "Gods' Throne"), 30-40 km away from the city. Mount Tomorri is famous for its mystical appearance; it looks like a giant lion lying behind the city. This is one of the highest mountains in Albania, reaching 2,416 m above sea level. The western slope is the most beautiful, covered with mixed vegetation.



The forest is mostly made of beech trees, pines, maples, ash trees, and firs.





Bears, wolves, foxes, weasels and rabbits make up the park's fauna. Mount Tomorri is perfect for mountain climbing, trekking, and other similar activities, and the area surrounding the mountain is an ideal place for camping.

Another interesting spot on the mountain is **Tyrbja e Kulmakut** and the grave of **Abaz Aliu**, the Saint of the *bektashinj* believers, situated at 1,200

m above sea level. This monument is supposed that it was first a pagan temple, later on converted to a Christian monument and in now days in this present monument. During August pilgrims come to his grave and many burnt offerings are made. This is the biggest pilgrimage of the Albanian and foreign *bektashinj*.

## The Canyons of Osumi

The **Cave of Pirrogoshi** lies near the village of **Radeshi**, midway to the valley of **Osumi**, in the **stream of Çorovoda**. Pirrogoshi is the biggest and longest cave in Albania,

stretching almost 1,500 m. The entrance is 5 m wide. The most interesting part of the cave is the giant corridor full of many different Carstic shapes. The cave ends with a deep well full of bat colonies.



**Gradeci Canyon**, the most beautiful and spectacular canyon of the valley of Osumi, stands close to the cave. It is 4 km long, 40 m high, and in different spots, only 1.5 m wide. Its slopes descend rapidly into the river.

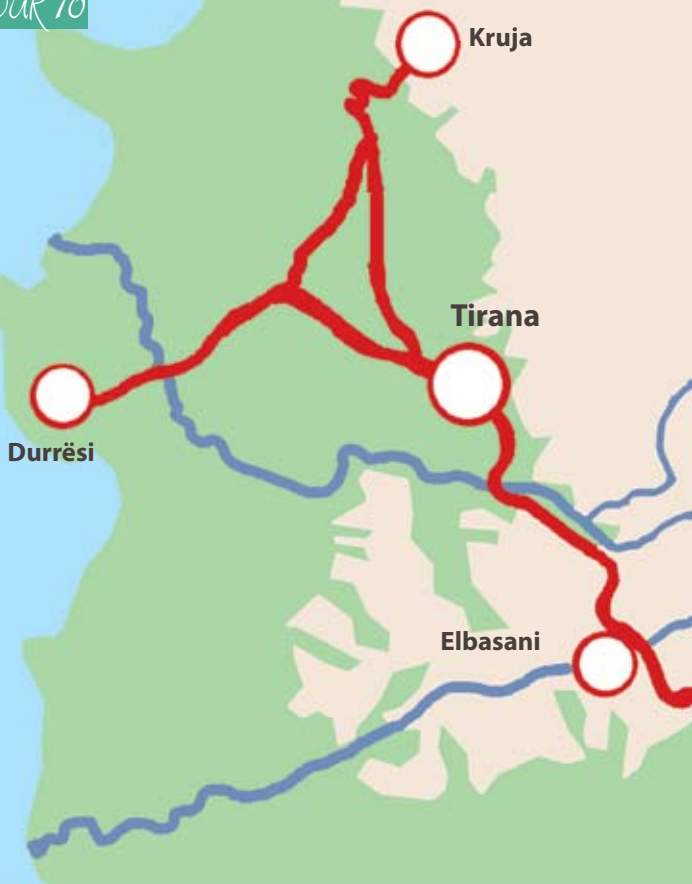
To reach the other canyons of Osumi, you will journey southward. These other canyons are located 3 km south from the town of Çorovoda. They are natural magnificent objects with a total length of 15 km. In this area, you can practice water sports like canoeing and kayaking. There are also several spots that serve as small beaches, such as **Varishta**.

### *The Kaso Bashi bridge*





Adriatic Sea



Tirana - Kruja 45km  
Tirana - Elbasani 50km

Tirana - Durrësi 34km  
Durrësi - Kruja 46km

## Tirana

Tirana, the heart and capital of Albania, like all other European metropolises has a never-ending movement and energy. With its clubs, pubs, cafes and taverns, Tirana is worth discovering by day and night. The value and hospitality shown towards tourists is something that will mark your journey not only in Tirana but also all over the country.

There are different thoughts regarding the origin of the

name of the city. Some think that it relates to *Tyrrenia* (a name of Etruscan origins), while other believe that it relates to the word *Theranda* (harvest), or to the *Tirkan* (a castle at the foot of **Mount Dajti**).

Your own journey might begin by visiting the museums and the key spots such as *Sheshi Skënderbej* where you will be able to see the **Mosque of Et'hem Beut** (built during 1798-1812) and the 35 meter



high ***Kulla e Sahatit*** (the Watch Tower) built in 1822 with a San Marco-style cupola. Next, you can visit the famous **Mosaic** uncovered on the floor of an old Roman lodge. Its center configures the walls of the castle of the Roman emperor Justinian (520 A.D.). The monumental **Tomb of Kapllan Pasha** and the ***Ura e Tabakëve*** (a bridge constructed in the beginning of the 19th century in Bulevardi “Zhan D’Ark” ), are other interesting place to visit.



*Old bridge in Tirana  
(Ura e Tabakëve)*



## TOUR 10

As a capital Tirana has the country's finest museums, theatres and galleries representing the national arts. The visit to the National History Museum, the Archeological Museum, the Natural Science Museum, the private "Mezuraj Museum", and the National Gallery of the Arts will leave wonderful memories. You also can pass a pleasant evening in the National Theatre or the Opera and Ballet Theatre. For dining, Tirana will be glad to offer you both a rich traditional cuisine and a variety of



*Traveling by teleferic to the National Park of Dajti*



foreign fares, from Italian to Chinese, or even Indian. There are also several clubs and restaurants in **Mount Dajti** to discover and enjoy. There is a chance to get there by cable car which is a very special experience. In the region of Tirana you may also visit the castles of Petrela and Preza, as well as some natural attractions, such as **Pëllumbasi Cave, Shkalla e Tujanit, Biza** etc.



## Kruja

The historic city of **Kruja** lies on a panoramic mountain slope 32 km away from Tirana, 600 m above sea level. The city is one of the most beautiful tourist spots due to its natural views and its history. Here *Gjergj Kastrioti (Skanderbeg)* protected Albania and Europe from the Ottomans.

The most important attraction of the city is the **Museum of the National Hero “Gjergj Kastriot Skënderbeu”**, situated in an Illyrian castle, which took its present facade during the 5th-6th century. The castle has nine towers, a few houses, and the *Teqja e Dollmasë*. The *hammam* is on west of the castle. Inside the castle grounds, you can also



visit the **Ethnographic Museum**, a typical house made of *çardak*, which belonged to the illustrious **Toptani** family. The traditional market of Kruja stands near the castle. It is one of Albania's largest handicrafts market. This *bazaar* has operated since the 15th century. On the top of the mountain

over the town of Kruja there is a religious spot called *Sari Salltiku* (*Bektashi* sect). The visitors can find shelter and accommodation if they wish to climb to that spot. From here there is a magnificent view toward the valley and further to the Adriatic Sea.



**Durrësi**

Durrësi, the biggest seaport of the country, is located 34 km away from Tirana. It is the most ancient city in Albania, with almost 3000 years of history. Its foundation dates back to 627 B.C. when the Corinthians and settlers from Corcyra invaded the Illyrian territory of the *Taulants*. The city is home to many ancient archaeological sites and finds.

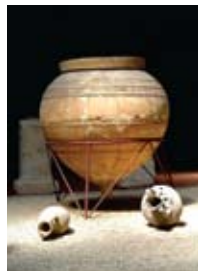
The most notable tourist attraction in Durrës is the amphitheater of the Roman emperor Adrian with 15000 seats, the second biggest amphitheatre in the Balkans. During the 9th Century, a small church with mosaic-covered walls was built nearby. You can also see the bathhouses of the 2nd century A.D. and the nearby Byzantine forum of the 5th-6th century with marble columns.





One-third of the original wall of the city castle is still standing, and you can even walk along the same road that Caesar himself trod! The Archeological Museum is a new building in the avenue Taulantia. It is one of the most important of its kind and is of great interest to visitors. The most renowned archaeological object uncovered in Durrësi is "*Bukuroshja e Durrësit*", a mosaic of the 4th century B.C. Today it is exhibited in the National Historic Museum in Tirana.

In addition to its historical value, Durrësi is also a beautiful place to take a modern vacation, due to its sandy beaches, hotels and metropolitan outlook. You will find excellent restaurants and accommodations all along the sea's edge.



## Elbasani

Located at the **Shkumbini River**, where it crosses the famous **Egnatia Road**, the city of Elbasani – ancient **Scampini** – is just 50 km away from Tirana. In ancient times, Scampini was a typical Roman fortification, but in the 4th century it received a new administrative status and, with its new name **Hiscampis**, it became one of the major cities of the new Epirus, home of the area's only Roman legion.

According to the historian Tit Livi, King Pyrrhus of Epirus was the first to teach others how to put up a camp, which is why the city's fortification is in the form of a square.

In the 6th century, the city broadened beyond the walls of the castle due to its needs as center of the episcopate, with several cathedrals and a large basilica on the hill of **Tepe**, near the castle.

In 1466, the Ottomans took control of the castle of Skam-



pini and reconstructed it almost entirely. They renamed the city Elbasani and it became center of the sanxhak between the 17th and 18th centuries. This was a time of heavy trade, both in and out of the country, which encouraged the significant development of handicrafts. Today tourists can visit the **Church of Saint Mary** and the **King Mosque** (inside the city walls). **The Mosque of Naziresha** (a very rare case because of its

feminine name), the Ethnographic Museum etc.

In the district of Elbasani there are also two very unique churches painted by Onufri, the famous albanian painter of XV century. You should travel to the villages of **Shelcani** and **Valëshi**, in the region of **Shpati**, to visit them.

On the other hand, just 4 km before the entrance of Elbasani, coming from Tirana there is the **Monastery of Shën Gjon Vladimiri**.





*The Shën Kollli Church in Shelcan, painted by Onufri*

*Illyrian Woman,  
archaeological  
object, Elbasani*



It dates back on 1381, constructed by the albanian prince Karl Topia , who buried there the bones of the Saint Gjon Vladimiri. Few kilometers far from Elbasani there are the “Ilixhat”, the hot springs used since the roman times. You can find accommodation and other facilities.





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