

EXPLORE!

TRIP NOTES



Walking Albania (ALW 2017)



TRIPDURATION
8
DAYS



Tour Style: Classic
Accommodation
Grade: Standard

Tour Type: Small Groups
Trek Grade: Moderate

Trip Code: ALW

Trip Highlights - Walking Albania

- ✓ Koman Lake - boat ride across the lake taking in the stunning natural beauty surrounding it.
- ✓ Albanian Alps - some of the most spectacular landscapes in the country. Explore The Accursed Mountains
- ✓ Traditional Villages - spend time with the locals in Theth village and enjoy a traditionally cooked lunch

Trip Essentials

Accommodation: 5 nights Standard Hotel
2 nights Simple Hut

Included Meals: 7 breakfasts, 4 lunches, 5 dinners

Start Point: Join trip: Tirana
End Point: Trip ends: Tirana

Maximum Altitude on Trek (m): 1800

Transport: Bus

Countries: Albania



Walking Albania

Explore the beauty of northern Albania's national parks on this scenic walking holiday. The highlights of the trip, Valbona and Theth national parks, are in the little visited, stunning, Albanian Alps region. This will be a chance to see rural Albania at its best, encountering a traditional way of life in the villages that we visit and taking the opportunity to meet and eat with the local people who live there. Albania has some outstanding and breathtaking natural beauty much of which you will get the chance to explore on foot during this week's walking.

Suitability

We've given each of our tours a comfort rating and a tour pace, walking or cycling grade to give you a general idea about the level of activity on each tour and the standard of accommodation you will be staying in at the end of your day's adventure.

Often you'll stay in different styles of accommodation during your tour; so we make an average rating across the entire tour. For more information on where you'll stay each night, please refer to the day by day tour itinerary.

Accommodation Grade: Standard

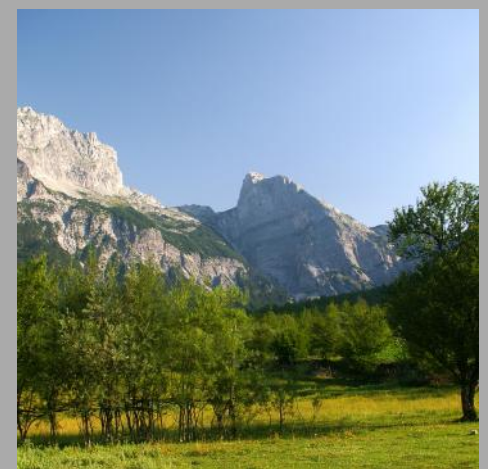
Our mid-range accommodation offers a good level of service often with other amenities such as a restaurant, bar, garden or swimming pool. Generally rooms will be comfortable with en-suite facilities.

Tour Style: Classic

Packed with adventure, these tours offer inspiring destinations and authentic travel experiences at a reasonable price. Using all kinds of transport and accommodation, we'll take you off the beaten track to discover the true heart of the people and places you visit.

Trek Grade: Moderate

For those who are fit and active, these moderate walks are normally on good paths and tracks at low altitude. Days may include some fairly demanding ascents and descents, so previous experience is preferable but not essential.



Your trip itinerary

Tour itinerary notes

While our intention is to adhere to the day-by-day itinerary as printed below, a degree of flexibility is built in. Overnight stops may vary from those suggested.

Your Tour Leader

A Tour Leader is an integral part of any Explore tour and your tour will be led by one of our experienced tour leaders who have been handpicked and expertly trained. We believe that our Tour Leaders are the key to the success of our tours; they are passionate travellers who are bursting with first-hand local knowledge which they love to share. Your tour Leader will also take care of all the planning and organization throughout your journey. Their passionate approach will make this tour fun and inspiring, bringing the destination to life whether you're travelling alone or with others.

DAY 1 Arrive Tirana, transfer to Shkodra

Join trip at Tirana airport and transfer by bus to Shkodra for your first nights' stay. Known as the 'Capital of North Albania', Shkodra is one of the oldest cities of the country. Founded in the 4th century B.C. the city is rich in cultural heritage and boasts a large number of artists, musicians, poets and writers. Time permitting we will visit the imposing Rozafa Castle that rises up on a rocky hill to the west of the city's entrance and, after dinner, take a walk around the city's pedestrian area, 'pjaca', with low elegant buildings from the Venetian period.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** None

DAY 2 Drive to Koman Lake, boat ride across the lake. Drive to Valbona via riverside walk

This morning we drive from Shkodra to the docks at Lake Koman, before boarding our ferry. Described in the Bradt guides as 'one of the great boat trips of the world' our two hour journey takes us on glassy blue waters through twists and turns of narrow waterways beneath stunning mountain peaks. A truly beautiful introduction to the amazing scenery that Northern Albania has to offer. Once at the other side we drive to Valbona and dive into an alpine landscape, stopping on route for a beautiful riverside walk that will stretch out our legs and prepare us for the weeks' walking ahead. Today's walking consists of 6km approx 3hrs with 215m ascent.


Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast, Dinner

DAY 3 Hiking in Valbona National Park

We spend the next two days hiking in Valbona National Park. Valbona is based in the Tropoja district of Northern Albania which, along with two adjoining districts, encompasses a region called The Malesi, roughly translated this means The Highlands. A wild and high mountainous region inhabited by fiercely independent and strong people who have never really been conquered or subdued by the various invasions in the last 2000 years! The full name of the mountains around Valbona are the Malësi e Gjakovës and this name is most often translated in English as 'The Accursed Mountains.' A short drive after breakfast brings us to the beginning of our trail near to Drogobia village. We start a moderate climb, crossing meadows and patches of beechwood, climbing higher until we reach the elevated pastures known as 'Gjarpri i Dragobis' - the Drogobia Snake. It is the perfect spot to have a picnic lunch under the shade of a couple of isolated trees and to taste dairy products from the local shepherds that graze their herds here throughout the summer. We will loop the pastures, enjoying the spectacular views of the Dragobia Gorge on the opposite side of the valley, sided by numerous peaks, before descending to the bottom of the valley and taking a short drive back to our hotel in Valbona. Today's walking consists of 11km approx 5hrs with 712m of ascent and descent.


Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 4 Hiking in Valbona National Park and lunch with the locals

Today we will walk straight from our hotel to the mountain slopes in front of us that create the massif of Paplluga. The trail winds through woods of beech and fir, crossing occasionally an old road used during the regime years for timber, until we reach the plateau known as 'Rrethri i Jubanit' and continue towards a panoramic spot where we'll have a picnic lunch. In front of us tower the magnificent vertical peaks of Grykat e Hapta, that create an impressive amphitheatre of limestone stretching till the end of the valley in the south west, where the Valbona Pass awaits for us to cross it in the coming day. After lunch we will continue to stay high on the plateau before starting the descent in the east facing slopes of 'Rrethri' to reach the hamlet of Kukaj where we will taste a cup of herbal mountain tea on the terrace of a local family's home. Refreshed, we will then descend to the bottom of the valley under the soft late afternoon light. Today's walking consists of 7km approx 5hrs with 463m ascent and 519m descent.


Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 5 Drive to trailhead and Hike the Valbona Pass to Thethi National Park

A morning transfer will bring us from the hotel to the top of the valley in Rrogam where the road ends. Here our luggage is loaded onto horses and we start walking uphill to reach the Valbona Springs via a steep and winding forest trail. Later the walk continues into wide alpine pastures with large glacier erratic rocks, scattered here and there. The path then continues to steepen into a narrow trail that leads to the Valbona Pass. On clear days the views from this location at the heart of the Accursed Massif are truly breath taking. From here we follow a trail that winds through fir and beech forest and descends into the Thethi valley, also surrounded by a number of 2500m high sheer rocky domes, such as the Radohima and the Harapit. Today's walking consists of 9km approx 7hrs with 1051m ascent and 1305m descent.

Overnight: **Simple Hut**

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 6 Exploring the Thethi Valley

Thethi is an iconic Northern Albanian 'malesore' (highlands) village. Enclosed in the full remoteness of the Accursed Mountains it stayed protected from the multiple invasions that afflicted the more accessible parts of the Alps and life was organised following the

detailed rules of the 'Kanun' - the Unwritten Code of the Mountains. These aspects were well pictured by the Victorian traveller Ms Edith Durham in the book, High Albania, written on her journey into the area at the beginning of the 20th Century. We will spend the day discovering the village on foot in a succession of attractions such as the stone built catholic church, Kulla e Ngujimit - the blood feud lock in tower, the waterfall and then along the Grunas Canyon's ancient terraces towards the hamlet of Nderlysa; here we will have a tasty lunch prepared by one of the local families. In the afternoon, after some free time to relax by the natural pools of Nderlysa - created by the clear and icy water of the Kaprea Creek - a short transfer of around 20 minutes will bring us back to Thethi for dinner and overnight. Today's walking consists of 7km approx 4hrs with 419m ascent and 664m descent.

Overnight: **Simple Hut**



Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 7 Walk to Thore Pass; transfer to Tirana, explore the city on foot

This morning we leave our hotel on foot, passing through the village and crossing meadows and woods in a gradual climb in the direction of Thore Pass. Walking on the unsealed village road we will reach the memorial of Edith Durham, known by the highlanders as 'Krajilica e Malsis' - the Queen of the Highlands - in respect of her support of the Albanian cause after World War One. This spot offers fantastic views on the Thethi Valley with the imposing big wall of Mt Harapit in full sight. From here we start driving into the scenic valley of Boga, slowly leaving behind the silhouette of the Albanian Alps and heading towards the Shkodra plain. In the afternoon our drive ends in the colourful Albanian capital of Tirana, where we stay in a hotel near the city centre. A city walk gives us the opportunity to learn more about the developments of Tirana throughout the various periods of influence, and have a taste of its cosmopolitan atmosphere. Today's walking consists of 6km approx 3hrs with 951m ascent and 170m descent.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**

Single Room Available



Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 8 Trip ends Tirana

The trip ends after breakfast.



Included Meals: Breakfast

Accommodation and Meals

Accommodation Notes

Due to the size of the accommodation in the National Park areas a single room is only available on the first and last nights on this trip.

Food & Drink

Included meals: 7 breakfasts, 4 lunches, 5 dinners included in the price of this trip. Please be prepared to pay for non-included meals. Please note that costs for drinks and meals can vary depending on location.

Budgeting for your Trip

You will need some extra money to cover meals and drinks not included in the trip price, any optional sightseeing, souvenirs and items of a personal nature such as laundry.

Food

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.

Albania

Lunch £: 4.00

Dinner £: 10.00

Drink

The prices for drinks can vary greatly depending upon location and the prices detailed below are an average guide. In general you would expect that drinks purchased in a supermarket or local bar to be less expensive, whilst drinks in an upmarket bar or restaurant may be more expensive.

Albania

Bottle of Beer £: 1.50

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Water £: 0.50

Tipping - Tour Leader

At your discretion you might also consider tipping your Tour Leader in appreciation of the efficiency and service you receive.

Tipping - Local Crew

Although entirely voluntary, tipping is a recognised part of life in this region of the world. Some local staff will look to members of the group for personal recognition of particular services provided. Accordingly, you should allow approx. €20 for tipping.

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

Foreign Exchange

Albania

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.

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.

Joining your Trip

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 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 on our website at www.explore.co.uk, in the tour specific dates and prices section.

You may also be eligible for the Free Explore Transfer. For more information please refer to <https://www.explore.co.uk/transfers>.

Joining Tour Abroad

Customers booked on the 'Land Only' arrangements will now receive a Free Transfer, provided you arrive and depart on the tour only itinerary start and end dates. The transfers will be from the Explore designated airport or train station to the joining point of your tour, and then back from the ending point to the designated airport or train station. The exception to this rule is customers who are booked on a tour where the joining and ending point is at the designated airport or train station.

Free transfers are not available for Self-Guided, 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 please refer to <https://www.explore.co.uk/transfers>.

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.

Important Information

Travel 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. Medical and repatriation insurance cover is not mandatory for UK residents who are travelling on trips within the United Kingdom.

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DIRECT TRAVEL INSURANCE



Travel Insurance is essential. If you have not already arranged cover, please contact our recommended Travel Insurance providers www.campbellirvinedirect.com/Explore who offer Travel Insurance specifically designed to cover travel with Explore or call **Campbell Irvine Direct** on Tel: 020 7938 1734

Explore Worldwide is an Introducer Appointed Representative of Campbell Irvine Ltd who are authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority.

Travel Aware

We strongly recommend that you check your government's travel advisory for up-to-date information and advice about your destination: safety and security, entry requirements, health, local laws and customs. For UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office Advice follow the link at www.explore.co.uk/travel-safety

We strongly advise that you register with the FCO to receive updates to the travel advice for your chosen destination. A hard copy of the current FCO Travel Advice for your chosen destination is available by contacting cr@explore.co.uk or 01252 379438.

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.

Visa Information

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

Other nationalities should consult their local embassy or consular office. You should confirm all visa related questions with the relevant Embassy prior to departure.

If you do require assistance in obtaining a visa then you may consider applying through Explore's recommended visa service in the UK, Travcour. See www.travcour.com to download the relevant visa application for your trip, if applicable (UK citizens only), along with details of how to apply for your visa through Travcour. The Team at Travcour will be happy to answer specific questions relating to visa applications, please call them directly on **0208 5431846**.

Vaccinations & Protection

Albania

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. Check 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 <http://www.explore.co.uk/Travelhealth/> and from your local healthcare provider. Visa and vaccination requirements are subject to change and should be confirmed before departure.

Preparing for your Trip

DAILY DISTANCES

Day 2	6km	3hrs
Day 3	11km	5hrs
Day 4	7km	5hrs
Day 5	9km	7hrs
Day 6	7km 3km	4/2hrs
Day 7	6km	3hrs

 Optional Walks

Maximum Altitude on Trek (m)

1800

Trekking Details

We walk for 6 days for 3 to 7 hours each day. Most walks are on well-defined footpaths, mountain tracks and some dirt tracks. We have graded this tour as easy to moderate.

Climate

Albania

Albania has a mediterranean climate with hot, dry summers (ranging from 9 - 11 hours of sunshine a day in Tirana). Temperatures can reach up to 40°C in July. October to April is much cooler and can be wet. Albania is a mountainous country and the high peaks are snow-capped all year. Additional information and climate charts can be accessed at <http://www.explore.co.uk/weather>. Seasonal weather patterns can be unpredictable.

Clothing

Weather is changeable in the mountains and it can be cold, especially at night, so bring a warmer jacket/fleece. Bring layers to enable you to be comfortable no matter what the temperature as this could easily fluctuate throughout the day. A waterproof jacket is essential at all times in case of rain, you may wish to bring waterproof trousers as well. You should dress with respect in the rural villages so bring some long trousers. Don't forget your swimming costume.

Equipment

Take a water bottle, a sun hat and suncream. A torch is useful in case of powercuts/emergencies. If you usually trek with poles it would be advisable to bring them with you.

Footwear

Good walking boots or sturdy trail shoes are essential for this trip due to the nature of the terrain.

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 no portorage in the hotels.

Luggage allowance on trip: 20kg

General Information

Country details

Albania

Population: 4,000,000

Size of Country: 28,748 sq km

Major Language: Albanian, Greek, Vlach, Romani, Slavic dialects

Religion: Muslim, Albanian Orthodox, Roman Catholic

Time Difference to GMT: +1

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Electric Supply & Plugs

Albania

2 Pin Round

Why Choose Explore

We've been creating award-winning pioneering adventure holidays for over 30 years, earning the trust of thousands of delighted customers, who feel safe in our hands. Our tour leaders have expert local knowledge and our tours are designed to take you off the beaten track to see the most exotic, inspiring and dramatic places in the world.

- With over 30 years' experience, we are passionate about what we do.
- Pioneering small group adventures, self-guided, private journeys & tailor-made holidays.
- Award-winning tour leaders who you can trust.
- Responsible travel is and always has been one of the driving principles of Explore.

Our adventure holidays are full of exciting things to see and do, exploring in small groups travelling by bus, boat, plane, rickshaw, camel, or any number of unusual forms of transport. Often you will stay in family-run hotels and village houses and enjoy authentic local cuisine. In this way, it's easy to discover the true heart of the people and the place you travel to – and make some new friends along the way. Each tour is uniquely different, so please feel free to browse through our tours to see what may whet your appetite.

Cool Earth

Explore are proud to support Cool Earth in their effort to reduce global carbon dioxide levels through the prevention of deforestation in the South America rainforest. Cool Earth focus on areas in immediate danger of deforestation, supporting local communities to be forest guardians. To date 350,000 acres of rainforest has been protected. Saving rainforest also protects rare animals and plants, allows local forest communities to maintain their way of life, and protects a major source of oxygen and fresh water. When you travel on an Explore holiday we make a donation to Cool Earth that exceeds the impact of our customers flights each year.

Earth Matters

We are passionate about sustainable travel and work hard to create tours where your holiday delivers real benefits to the local communities. We minimise our impact by travelling in small groups, respecting local cultures, reducing waste and offsetting 100% of the CO2 from our flights.

When you travel with Explore, you are directly contributing to local economies and helping empower the people you meet. We currently support a range of charities and good causes, including: Toilet Twinning (helping to flush away poverty), Lone Buffalo Foundation (a community project based in Laos providing creative skills for young people) and have recently supported women's cooperatives in Borneo and Morocco. We are a member of Tourism Concern's Ethical Tour Operator Group (www.tourismconcern.org.uk) and support their campaign for fair and ethical tourism. We also care passionately about the world's wildlife and actively support and promote the Born Free Organisation and Mahouts Elephant Foundation.

Booking Your Holiday

Peace of mind - book with confidence

You can book your Explore holiday with confidence, as all monies paid to us for your trip are fully protected. Explore is a fully bonded tour operator licensed by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) and by ABTOT.

The air holiday packages (Tours including flights) that we advertise are ATOL protected, since we hold an Air Travel Organiser's Licence granted by the Civil Aviation Authority. Our ATOL number is ATOL 2595. In addition, As a member of the Association of Bonded Travel Organisers Trust Limited (ABTOT), Explore has provided a bond to meet the requirements of the Package Travel, Package Holidays and Package Tours Regulations 1992. Please note that packages booked outside the UK are only protected when purchased directly with Explore.

Reserving your place

To reserve your place on this tour you will need to check availability on the Explore website or through our dedicated call centre based in the UK where you can. Our tours can fill up quickly so you are advised to book as early as possible. If your chosen date is 'Available' or 'Guaranteed' we will be able to provisionally hold you a space for up to 48 hours.

For Self-Guided holidays and Private Journeys simply choose your date of travel and let us know so we can confirm all ground services.

The easiest way to confirm your booking is through our website. When you are ready to book, we normally require a 10% non-refundable deposit, but for some holidays this may be more to cover such items as permit fees, internal flights or other non-refundable services. If your travel starts within 60 days of booking, full payment will be required at the time of booking

100% No Surcharge Guarantee

The price paid for our holidays is no longer subject to change. Once booked and confirmed we will guarantee the price you pay will not increase, whatever the circumstances. You will not be approached to pay fuel surcharges unlike the vast majority of other adventure tour operators. The price guarantee applies to all new bookings departing between 1st January 2016 and 31st December 2017.

Trip Itinerary Versions

Itinerary details may vary depending on departure date and alternative itineraries for this tour may exist. Please refer to the dates and prices page on our website to check which itinerary operates on each departure date.

Please ensure that you have an up-to-date copy of these tour notes immediately before you travel, as from time to time our itineraries may be amended, either for operational reasons or in response to feedback from customers. You will be informed of any major changes to your tour but small changes may just be added to these tour notes.

Please note: 2017 itinerary versions are applicable to tours departing in 2017. 2018/19 itinerary versions are applicable to tours departing from 1st January to 31st December 2018.

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