

EXPLORE!

TRIP NOTES



Highlights of Albania (AB 2017)



TRIPDURATION

11
DAYS



Tour Style: Classic

Tour Pace: Full On

Tour Type: Small Groups

Accommodation

Grade: Standard

Trip Code: AB

Trip Highlights - Highlights of Albania

- ✓ Tirana - Explore Albania's colourful capital on foot
- ✓ Lake Ohrid - Spend time in Pogradec overlooking the famous lake
- ✓ Benja - Enjoy a picturesque walk through the mountain scenery and a glass of raki and traditional barbeque
- ✓ Butrint - Discover one of the great archaeological sites in the Balkans
- ✓ Llogora National Park - Explore one of the most unspoilt areas in the Adriatic

Trip Essentials

Accommodation: 10 nights Standard Hotel

Included Meals: 10 breakfasts, 1 lunch, 0 dinners

Start Point: Join trip: Tirana

End Point: Trip ends: Kruja

Transport: Bus

Countries: Albania

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Highlights of Albania

Still emerging from isolation, Albania is overflowing with well-kept secrets waiting to be discovered. On this trip, we uncover the remains of past civilisations, from Illyrian tribes and ancient Greeks to the Romans and Ottomans. As we travel from the Adriatic Coast across the White Mountains to Lake Ohrid, we experience unspoilt natural beauty and a traditional rural lifestyle.

Why Book this trip

Discover the emerging nation of Albania and its wealth of secrets. From the colourful capital of Tirana to the stunning Lake Ohrid, archaeological sites to beautiful national parks and mountains, this trip unveils some of the treats whilst experiencing natural beauty and rural life.

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.

Tour Pace: Full On

These fast paced tours move on quickly from place to place and with lots of early starts and long busy days, they're packed with experiences.

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

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

DAY 1 Join trip in Tirana

Our trip begins in Albania's capital city, Tirana. After checking in to our hotel and meeting the group, the rest of the day is free for you to explore this colourful city at your own pace. With a blend of communist architecture and a backdrop of beautiful mountains, Tirana is a mix of new and old.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available



AB_2017_Map



 **Included Meals:** None

DAY 2 Visit to Petrela Fortress and walking tour of Tirana

After a morning briefing with our Explore Leader, we take a short drive to Petrela Fortress. Dating back to 5th century, the fortress is one of the oldest structures in Albania. On a clear day, you can see all the way to Kruja, where we end our journey through Albania. On arriving back to Tirana, we will have a guided walking tour of the city including the government buildings and the mosque. We will also have time to visit the National Museum of History, with its easily recognisable mosaic frontage. There may be occasions where it is not possible to visit the National History Museum due to local events taking place. If this is the case, we will visit Kamenica Tumulus archaeological site on day 5 instead.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY 3 See Elbasan Fortress and drive to Lake Ohrid

This morning we drive to Elbasan to visit the historic fortress before continuing on to the picturesque fisherman's village of Lin where we will have free time for lunch before we drive to Pogradec, on the shores of Lake Ohrid. The lake is one of the oldest in the world and is a spot renowned for its natural beauty.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY 4 Drive to Korca via the Medieval town of Voskopoja

Today we make the journey to Voskopoja - formally known as Moskopoje. Founded in the 16th century, the town was once a major urban settlement and was famous for its churches which were adorned with many beautiful frescoes. After time for lunch, we continue to Korca, sitting at the foot of Moravia Mountain, where we will spend the night. On arrival we take a city tour including the Resurrection Cathedral, which is the main orthodox church, and Medieval Museum which houses a wide selection of stone sculptures, carved wood artefacts and textiles.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY 5 Scenic drive to Permeti and traditional barbeque lunch

Our journey today takes us through the southern highlands to Permeti. Travelling along one of the most scenic routes in Albania, we will reach the Barmash Pass (1040 metres) where we can enjoy sweeping views of the Nemercka Mountains, which are snow covered for most of the year and form the border with Greece. En route, we will walk through the Benja countryside and you'll have the opportunity to see the stunning view of the Ottoman stone bridge over the river with the mountains in the distance. We'll then stop for a typical Albanian drink of raki with the locals before heading to a nearby village restaurant to enjoy a traditional shepherd's lunch of barbequed lamb. We continue our drive to Permeti, located on the Vjose River in the heart of the White Mountains.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast, Lunch

DAY 6 Drive through the mountains to old Balkan town of Gjirokastra

Our day starts with a walk up to the village of Leusa where there will be time to visit the church which features some stunning frescoes, particularly on the ceiling. Our route to Gjirokastra takes us through the White Mountains via Kelcyra Gorge, carved by the Vjose River on its way to the Adriatic Sea. The scenery in the mountains is breathtaking with rolling valleys covered in spring with some of the most exuberant wildflowers you are likely to see anywhere in Albania. As we travel, look out for eagles soaring above us. Later, we arrive in Gjirokastra where we take a walking tour through the cobbled streets of its UNESCO listed historic centre and visit Gjirokastra Castle and the Ethnographic Museum. The castle sits at a height of 336 metres and is one of the most magnificent structures in the city with views over the hilly countryside, river valley and city. There have been extensive renovations to the building since it was constructed in the 12th century and it now possesses five towers, a church, a cistern, and houses the Weapons Museum. The museum exhibits captured artillery and memorabilia of the Communist resistance against German occupation, as well as a captured US Air Force plane to commemorate the Communist regime's struggle against the 'imperialist' western powers. The Ethnographical Museum is in the historic district of Palorto and stands on the site where the dictator Enver Hoxha was born. Set over four floors it offers us an

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

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

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

Leaving Gjirokastra behind us, we drive to Saranda. Along the way, we will stop at the karstic spring, known as 'The Blue Eye' where we can marvel at the blue clear waters. This afternoon we visit UNESCO listed Butrint, which is one of the great archaeological sites in the Balkans. With a long and colourful history dating back to the early Neolithic age, Butrint has been occupied and fought over until the Ottoman period when it lay abandoned. More recently, excavations have taken place and all periods of Butrint's history have been revealed including its Roman theatre, Roman house and thermal baths as well as a fine baptistery with fabulous mosaic floors. The setting is idyllic with the ruins nestling in the bend of the Vivari River. After spending time exploring this fascinating site, we return to the shores of the Mediterranean and Saranda for the night.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY 8 Visit Ali Pasha's Fortress; stay in Llogora National Park

As we leave Saranda, we can look forward to another scenic coastal drive along the Albanian Riviera, before winding over the 1000 metre high pass at Llogora as we travel to the national park, which goes by the same name. Along our route we pass terraces planted with citrus groves and olive trees and enjoy breath taking views over the mountains, sea and forest. We stop at Ali Pasha Fortress, a castle on a small peninsula within Palermo Bay with stunning views over the turquoise waters back along the coastline. Although small, the walls of the triangular fort are well preserved along with some cannons found here. We'll also stop to take a brief stroll along the beach at Himara. Upon reaching Llogora National Park, we will have time for a three to four hour hike covering seven kilometres in the mountains with many attractive views along the way. The route we follow is along a combination of well trodden footpaths, goat trails and a military road. We classify this walk as moderate in difficulty. Tonight we'll stay at hotel nestled amongst the pine trees of this tranquil national park.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY 9 Visit ancient Apollonia and Vlora en route to Berat

This morning en route to Apollonia we stop at Vlora where we will visit the Independence Museum, Flag Square and the Muradi Mosque. From here we continue our drive to Apollonia. Founded in 585 BC and dedicated to the god Apollo, the city achieved fame and wealth before being incorporated into the Roman Empire to become Caesar's stronghold during the civil war with Pompey. The most impressive feature of the site is the bouleuterion - a facade with six Corinthian columns which are thought to date back to the 2nd century AD. Although much of the ancient site is yet to be excavated, with so few other visitors, it is possible to imagine a time when the site supported 55,000 men and Octavian (later to become Emperor Augustus) was one of its students. We continue our drive to Berat where we spend the night.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY 10 Walking tour of Berat and Durrresi

Situated over a gorge next to the Osumi River and in the shadow of Mount Tomori, Berat's white buildings sprawl up the hillside towards the fortress. New construction is strictly regulated in order to maintain the city's unique character in its UNESCO listed historical centre. Exploring on foot this morning, we head up to the fortress and see the painted icons and frescoes in the Church of Saint Mary, one of the seven churches within the citadel walls. We will also visit the oldest mosque in Albania, the Red Mosque, and the Onufri Icon Museum. We drive on to Durrresi which is one of Albania's main ports. Originally founded in 627 BC by the Greeks and then called Epidamnos, the city was later plundered and conquered by the Illyrians, Romans, Normans, Venetians and Serbs, which resulted in the many reminders we can see as we wander around the city today of its long and varied history. For example, we will stop off at the Roman Amphitheatre, which is not far from the modern city's main square. We will also visit the Archaeological Museum before we depart and drive to Kruja where we spend the last night of our trip.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY **11** Trip ends in Kruja

Our trip ends today after breakfast. Depending on the time of your flight, you may have some time today to explore Kruja, perhaps to visit the fortress, which is a place of pilgrimage and inspiration for Albanians, the nearby bazaar or the Ethnographic Museum.

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

Accommodation and Meals

Accommodation Notes

On day 8 of our trip we will be staying in a small hotel within the Llogara National Park. It has a restaurant and bar with outdoor terrace where you can enjoy the traditional Albanian cuisine and great views over the surrounding forested mountain slopes. The en suite rooms are simply decorated and most have balconies.

Food & Drink

Included meals: 10 breakfasts, 1 lunch, 0 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

Water £: 0.50

Tipping - Tour Leader

At your discretion you might also consider tipping your Explore 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 approximately €20 for tipping.

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

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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CAMPBELL IRVINE
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 Introducing 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.

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

Other nationalities should consult their local embassy or consular office.

If you do require assistance in obtaining a visa then you may 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

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 cool, especially at night, so bring a warmer jacket or fleece. A raincoat is essential at all times of year in case of the odd shower. You should dress with respect in the rural villages so bring some long trousers and ensure your shoulders are covered when entering churches. Don't forget your swimming costume and a towel.

Equipment

Take a water bottle, sun hat and sun cream. A torch is useful in case of power cuts/emergencies. Most importantly don't forget your camera.

Footwear

We recommend taking lightweight walking or trail boots for the included walks and comfortable shoes or sandals for visiting the sites and towns

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 portage isn't normally available 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

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.

These trip notes were printed on 28/06/2017 22:43:16

