

Albania is surrounded by natural beauties, and when you visit it, you will surely wonder: why are we hearing about this country now?

Albania suffered a long period of closure during the communist regime, until 1991, and for this reason, it was not very popular. But now that that period is long gone, Albania is finally disclosing and displaying what has always been there: forgotten archaeological sites, villages where time seems to



have stopped, historical monuments of the Roman and Ottoman empire, mesmerizing beaches of the southern coast which are often found and featured in some of the most prestigious guides and magazines, like [Lonely Planet](#), [The New York Times](#), etc..

Albania is located in Southeastern Europe, West of the Balkan Peninsula, with an area of 28,748 km², borderline length of 1,094 km, of which [657 km is land border](#), [316 km coastline](#), [48 km demarcation of rivers](#) and [73 km demarcation of lakes](#).

Albania is bordered by Greece to the South and Southeast, Montenegro to the North and Italy to the West, divided by the Adriatic and Ionian Sea, Macedonia to the East and Kosovo to the Northeast, which is the second state in the Balkan region with the largest Albanian population.

Tirana is the heart of Albania, its capital, where hopes and dreams of this little country grow more and more every day, together with welfare and unhindered recreation. The center of this city, characterized by high skyscrapers and old painted buildings; the boulevards adorned with Ottoman ruins and bunkers of the communist regime set back in time, ready to be photographed.

Tirana, *the dynamic capital of the country!*

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 both 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 Bey (built between 1798 and 1812) and the 35 m 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 (A.D. 520). The monumental Tomb of Kapllan Pasha and the Ura e Tabakëve (a bridge constructed in the beginning of the 19th century, located on Bulevardi Zhan D'Ark) are other interesting place to visit.

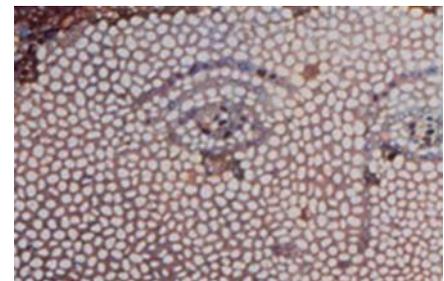
As a capital, Tirana has the country's finest museums, theatres, and galleries representing the national arts. A visit to the National History Museum, the Archeological Museum, the private "Mezuraj Museum," and the National Gallery of the Arts will leave wonderful memories. You can also pass a pleasant 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 foreign fares, from Italian to Chinese. There are also several clubs and restaurants in Mount Dajti to discover and enjoy. There is the possibility to travel 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, and much more. <http://www.akt.gov.al/en/top-destinations/tirana/>

Durrës, as Catullus described "*as the tavern of Adriatic*"!

Durrësi, the biggest seaport of the country, is located 34 km away from Tirana. It is the most ancient city in Albania, with almost 3,000 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 Durrësi is the amphitheater of the Roman Emperor Adrian with 15,000 seats, the second biggest amphitheater 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.

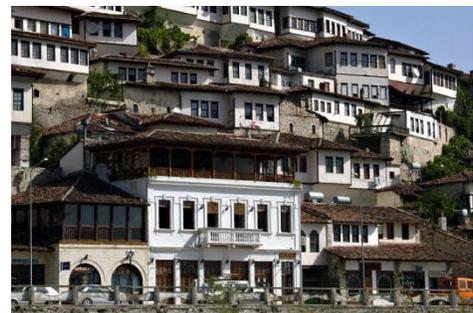
The Archeological Museum is a new building on "Taulantia" Avenue. It is one of the most important of its kind and is of great interest to visitors. It contains both the Hellenic and Roman periods.

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 feel. You will find excellent restaurants and accommodations all along the sea's edge. <http://www.akt.gov.al/en/top-destinations/durres/>



Berat, *UNESCO city of thousand windows!*

This 2,413 years-old city, the pride of Albanian 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. Berat is a treasure-trove of Albanian history and culture, and a testament to the country's tradition of religious harmony.



The city's life began in the VI-Vth century B.C. as an Illyrian settlement. Later, in the III century B.C., it was turned into a castle city known as Antipatrea. The castle expanded east wards, particularly during the feudal dominion of the feudal Muzakaj family. Inside the castle, they built churches with precious frescos and icons, and also a calligraphy school of calligraphy. Today, the castle is made unique by the fact that people continue to live inside of it. The three major neighborhoods of the old city are Mangalemi, Gorica, and Kala, where the castle itself is located. 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 with 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 (Saint Michael) , while the 13th century Church of Shën Maria e Vllahernës, (Saint Mary of Blachernae) (built in XIII century) the Church of Shën Triadha (The Holy Trinity), and the post-Byzantine monumental Cathedral of Shën Maria (Saint mary) 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. 87In 1417, the Ottomans occupied Berati and this conquest left its mark with the building of monuments to the Islamic faith, such as the Xhamia e Kuqe (The Red Mosque) inside the castle, the Xhamia e Plumbit (1555), (The Lead Mosque) , Xhamia Mbret (built in 1481) (The King Mosque), and the Xhamia e Beqarëve (1872).Other sites worth visiting are the Ethnographic Museum, situated inside an 18th century çardak building, and the Gallery of Arts “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 përshesh and Çorba e Tomorrit in the local restaurants.

It was first mentioned in the VII - V centuries as a proto - urban dwelling place. In the year 216, during the wars between Rome and Illyrian armies it was named Antipatrea. What is interesting today is the fact that the castle is still inhabited. There are several Byzantine churches inside the walls and also the museum of the icons “Onufri”, the famous Albanian painter of XVI century and the remains of the Red Mosque.
<http://www.akt.gov.al/en/top-destinations/berat/>

Vlora, the city of two seas!

Vlora is one of the largest and 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. Vlorë is rich in history and antiquity. This historic city dates back to the 6th 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 28th, 1912, it became the first capital of an independent Albania, ruled by the government of Ismail Qemali. The most interesting sights in Vlorë include the Independence Museum (in the headquarters building of the first government), the History Museum, and the Ethnographic Museum. Among the religious objects in Vlorë, the most important is the Mosque of Muradie, built in 1542 by the chief architect of the Ottoman Empire, Mimar Sinan, who was originally from the region. (He was born in Agirnas district of Kayseri- Turkey). He is the constructor of the famous Suleymaniye Mosque in Istanbul and is also known for his work in other cities in Turkey such as Edirne (for the Selymie Mosque), Erzurum, and many 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 Vlorë, 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 Vlorë. <http://www.akt.gov.al/en/top-destinations/vlorë/>



Shkodra, *the “the capital of north Albania” a cradle of Albanian culture!*

Shkodra known as the “capital of north Albania” is one of the oldest cities in the country, founded in the 4th century B.C. as the center of the Labeat tribe of Illyrians. Shkodra has been occupied several times throughout history. First by the Romans (168 B.C.), then the Serbians (1040), the Venetians (1396), and finally by 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 bears 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 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 where 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. <http://www.akt.gov.al/en/top-destinations/shkodra/>

Gjirokastra, *the unique city of the biggest castle in Albania!*

The traditional city of Gjirokastra is part of the UNESCO World Heritage List and is one of the most attractive tourist sites of the country. Perched on the eastern side of the Wide Mountain (Mali i Gjërë), the



city began as a fourth century castle, which is today the greatest castle in the whole country. Inside the fortress is the Museum of Weapons, where weapons of different periods up until the Second World War are displayed.

Gjirokastra is known as “The City of Stone,” and some of the main tourist attractions are old houses, built by stone to resemble small castles, and streets paved with cobblestone. While visiting, you can visit the Ethnographic Museum, located in the house where the former communist dictator Enver Hoxha was born.

The city is a very good starting point for reaching the archaeological park of Antigonea, the archaeological site of Hadrianapol, the Tekke of Melan, the castle of Libovoha near the village of Nepravishta, and the untouched natural areas of the Fir of Sotira in Dropull and the water sources of Viroi etc.

<http://www.akt.gov.al/en/top-destinations/gjirokastra/>



Kruja, the City of national hero Gjergj Kastriot Skënderbeut!

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 Kastrioti Skanderbeg, 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 hamam is on the western side 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 is a religious spot called Sari Salltiku (Bektashi sect). There, visitors can find shelter and accommodation if they wish to climb to that spot. From there, travelers will find a magnificent view toward the valley and further to the Adriatic Sea. <http://www.akt.gov.al/en/top-destinations/kruja/>

Korça, the city of Seranates!

The city of Korça is one of the largest and most important cultural and economic centers of Albania, located in the southeastern part of the country. The city is known for its typical quarters, composed of low houses and villas, which are paved with cobblestone. The city of Korça has a range of museums such as “The Education Museum” (located in the building where the first Albanian school opened in 1887), “The National Museum of Medieval Art”, “The Prehistoric Museum”, the house-museum of the famous landscape painter, Vangjush Mio, the museum of the Oriental Art “Bratko”, etc.



In the vicinity of the city is the cemetery of French soldier killed during the First World War. Beyond the museums and monuments, Korça is the city where the largest carnival in Albania is organized, taking place before Orthodox Easter. Musically, the city is known for the local songs, called “serenata”. In the city you will find many taverns with tasteful traditional cooking such as various types of *opie* which perfectly combines with the good music and the traditional drink, “raki”.

Korça is a very good base for exploring many tourist points located in the nearby mountains such as Voskopoja, Dardha, Vithkuqi and Boboshtica. These villages are well known for offering the possibility to practice many outdoor sports and activities. The area is also famous for the Byzantine churches of Vithkuqi and Voskpoja, whose walls were painted by famous medieval Albanian painters. Close to Korça you can visit Prespa Lake (which is the country’s largest National Park), Drenova National Park, the Neolithic tombs of Kamenica, etc.

<http://www.akt.gov.al/en/top-destinations/korca/>

Pogradec, the Albanian town in Lake Ohrid!

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 nestled 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 village of the same name just 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 at 285 m. This 2-4 million years-old lake is under UNESCO protection due to its unique value and 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 lakeside 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 Pogradeci. The city of Pogradeci was settled in the Neolithic period, and it later became home to the Illyrian Enkelejdhë and Desaretë clans, who built the Castle of Pogradeci on a hill at 870 m above sea level. 61. The city, with its mild climate, lends itself to year-round visits. 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, "Stone of Kamje," which is located in the commune of Dardhas to the way from Pogradeci to Korça, near the village of Osnati. It is 70 m 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 lie 30 km away from Pogradeci. The monuments here date back to the 4th century B.C. and the five rocky monumental graves are found in very few places elsewhere in the Balkans.
<http://www.akt.gov.al/en/top-destinations/pogradeci/>

Elbasan, *the city on the very heart of Albania!*

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 construct 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 Skampini and reconstructed it almost entirely. They renamed the city (Ilbasan) 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, the King Mosque (inside the city walls), the Mosque of Naziresha (very rare because of its feminine name), and the Ethnographic Museum, the newly discovered basilica and the Turkish bath (hammam).

In the district of Elbasani there are also two very unique churches painted by Onufri, the famous Albanian painter of the 16th 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. It dates back to 1381 and was constructed by the Albanian prince Karl Topia, who buried there the remains of Saint Gjon Vladimiri., a famous saint well known in Balkans. Actually his remains are in the Orthodox Church in Tirana. For each 4 of June a pilgrimage on his honor is organized in that Monastery. A few kilometers away from Elbasani are the ("llichat,") the hot springs used since Roman times. There, you can find accommodations and other facilities. <http://www.akt.gov.al/en/top-destinations/elbasani/>

Përmet, *the town of flowers and the place with an idyllic nature!*

Përmet is a town in Albania, capital of Përmet District. The population is 7,717. It is flanked by the Vjosë river, which runs along the Trebeshinë-Dhëmbel-Nemërçkë mountain chain, between Trebeshinë and Dhëmbel mountains, and through the Këlcyra gorge. The greenest and the cleanest town in Albania also known as the "city of roses." The small town of Përmet is famous for its folk music and renown clarinetist Laver Bariu, literature personalities, and the good cooking, especially sweets, the so called 'gliko', or preserves. You will be served good wine and raki in Përmet and around.



The thing to do in Përmet is to climb a big rock , it's very near to the center of the town, it's called the rock of town looking over the town and Vjosa river. Let's say this is the point of observation of the town. There is a famous Spa very near to Përmet, in Bënja, you may take a taxi or even walk if you want. Ask around for directions, the location is south of Përmet. The hot spring is situated in a scenic route. They are found in the village of Benje. There are outdoor hot waters. <http://www.akt.gov.al/en/top-destinations/permet/>

Apollonia, *where August Emperor studied philosophy!*

Apollonia is one of the most important archaeological sites of Albania. In the same time one of the most highly frequented places by most of the visitors coming to Albania.



Cicero, the famed Roman orator, was captivated by the beauty of Apollonia, and in his "Philippics", referred to it as "magna urbs et gravis," or "the great and important city." The ancient city, founded in the 7th century BCE by Greek settlers from Corinth and Corcyra, is located 11 km west of the modern city of Fier. Main works to bring into the sight many of the treasures of Apollonia were made by French mission lead by Prof. Leon Rey, between (1924–1938). Archaeological excavations have shown that Apollonia reached its zenith during the 4th – 3rd century BCE. Studies estimate that around 60,000 inhabitants lived inside the city gates.

The city has a 4 km long wall encircling an area of 137 hectares. Sources depict a flourishing culture with a busy harbor along this active trading route. Among the most interesting remains are the city council building, the library, the triumphal arch and the temple of Artemis. The odeon, from the 2nd century BCE, is also noteworthy, as it once accommodated approximately 10,000 spectators.

There is also a spectacular 77 m long stoa with a covered walkway. An earthquake in the 3rd century CE, in addition to causing damage to infrastructure, altered the path of the Vjosa River and the harbor eventually silted up. This effectively changed the trading route, and the once proud city declined until it was nearly uninhabited. Apollonia was "rediscovered" in the 18th century CE, and archaeological efforts have continued intermittently throughout the 20th century CE. Today the site is easily accessible from the nearby city of Fier and it offers both unique views of the Adriatic coastline and numerous historical and archaeological items of great interest to visitors. Apollonia has today the status of an Archaeological Park.

<http://www.akt.gov.al/en/dont-miss/apollonia/>

For more information: 'Visit Albania' <http://www.albania.al/>