



# Albania

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## Best Places to Eat

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## Best Places to Stay

- ➔ Tradita G&T (p49)
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- ➔ Gjirokastra Hotel (p54)
- ➔ Hotel Mangalemi (p51)

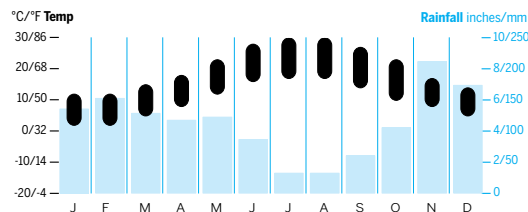
## Why Go?

Albania has natural beauty in such abundance that you might wonder why it's taken a full 20 years for the country to take off as a tourist destination after the end of a particularly brutal strain of communism in 1991. So backward was Albania when it emerged blinking into the bright light of freedom that it needed two decades just to catch up with the rest of Eastern Europe. Now that it arguably has done so, Albania offers a remarkable array of unique attractions, not least due to this very isolation: ancient mountain behaviour codes, forgotten archaeological sites and villages where time seems to have stood still are all on the menu.

With its stunning mountain scenery, a thriving capital in Tirana and beaches to rival anywhere else in the Mediterranean, Albania has become the sleeper hit of the Balkans. But hurry here, as word is well and truly out.

## When to Go

### Tirana



**Jun** Enjoy the perfect Mediterranean climate and deserted beaches.

**Aug** Albania's beaches may be packed, but this is a great time to explore the mountains.

**Dec** See features and shorts at the Tirana Film Festival, while the intrepid can snowshoe to Theth.

## Albania Highlights

1 Catch the **Lake Koman Ferry** (p50) through stunning mountain scenery, then continue to **Valbona** (p50) and trek through the 'Accursed Mountains' to **Theth** (p50).

2 Explore the Unesco World Heritage-listed museum town of **Berat** (p50), the so-called 'city of a thousand windows'.

3 Catch some sun at **Drymadës**, (p52), just one of the many beaches on the south's dramatic Ionian Coast.

4 Travel back in time to the ruins of **Butrint** (p53), hidden in the depths of a forest in a serene lakeside setting.

5 Feast your eyes on the wild colour schemes and experience Blloku cafe culture in **Tirana** (p45).

6 Take a trip to the traditional Southern Albanian mountain town of **Gjirokastra** (p54), with its spectacular Ottoman-era mansions and impressive hilltop fortress.

