



Albania

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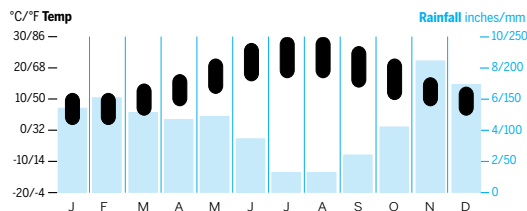
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Why Go?

Albania has natural beauty in such abundance that you might wonder why it's taken 20 years for the country to take off as a tourist destination since 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 codes of behaviour, 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 any elsewhere 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



Best Places to Eat

- » Kujtimi (p70)
- » Era (p53)
- » Tradita G&T (p57)
- » Oda (p53)

Best Places to Stay

- » Tradita G&T (p57)
- » Hotel Rilindja (p58)
- » Hotel Mangalemi (p63)
- » Hotel Kalem (p69)

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.

Connections

Albania has excellent connections in all directions: daily buses go to Kosovo, Montenegro, Macedonia and Greece. The southern seaport of Saranda is a short ferry trip from Greece's Corfu, while in summer ferries also connect Himara and Vlora to Corfu. Durrës has regular ferries to Italy. Travellers heading south from Croatia can pass through Montenegro to Shkodra (via Ulcinj), and loop through Albania before heading into Macedonia via Pogradec or Kosovo via the Lake Koman Ferry or new super-fast Albania-Kosovo highway. There are, however, no international train routes from Albania.

ITINERARIES

One Week

Spend a day in busy Tirana, checking out the various museums as well as the Blloku bars and nightclubs. On day two, head up the Dajti Express cable car and then make the two-hour trip to the Ottoman-era town of Berat. Spend a few nights in Berat, before continuing down the coast for a couple of days on the beach in Himara or Drymades. Loop around for one last night in charming Gjirokastra before returning to Tirana.

Two Weeks

Follow the first week itinerary and then head north into Albania's incredible 'Accursed Mountains'. Start in Shkodra, from where you can get transport to Koman for the stunning morning ferry ride to Fierzë. Continue the same day to the charming mountain village of Valbonë for a couple of nights, before trekking to Theth and spending your last couple of nights in the beautiful Theth National Park.

Essential Food & Drink

- » **Byrek** Pastry with cheese or meat.
- » **Fergesë** Baked peppers, egg and cheese, and occasionally meat.
- » **Midhje** Wild or farmed mussels, often served fried.
- » **Paçë koke** Sheep's head soup, usually served for breakfast.
- » **Qofta** Flat or cylindrical minced-meat rissoles.
- » **Sufllaqë** Doner kebab.
- » **Tavë** Meat baked with cheese and egg.
- » **Konjak** Local brandy.
- » **Raki** Popular spirit made from grapes.
- » **Raki mani** Spirit made from mulberries.

AT A GLANCE

- » **Currency** lekë
- » **Language** Albanian
- » **Money** ATMs in most towns
- » **Visas** Most visitors don't need one – a 90-day stamp is issued at the border

Fast Facts

- » **Area** 28,748 sq km
- » **Capital** Tirana
- » **Country code** 355
- » **Emergency** Ambulance 127, fire 128, police 129

Exchange Rates

Australia	A\$1	114.59 lekë
Canada	C\$1	107.95 lekë
Euro Zone	€1	140.19 lekë
Japan	¥100	116.24 lekë
New Zealand	NZ\$1	91.85 lekë
UK	UK£1	165.99 lekë
USA	US\$1	109.70 lekë

Set Your Budget

- » **Budget hotel** €10–15 per person
- » **Two-course meal** €8
- » **Museum entrance** €1–3
- » **Beer** €1.50
- » **City transport ticket** 30 lekë

Resources

- » **Albania-Hotel** (www.albania-hotel.com)
- » **Balkanology** (www.balkanology.com/albania)
- » **Journey to Valbona** (www.journeytovalbona.com)