



Albania

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Why Go?

Great peaks sprout in the background, vast plains and lakes surround the central mountain ranges, and coastal areas provide the traveller to Albania with dramatically different cultural and geographical landscapes. People who like city living can down coffee in busy, surprising Tirana before heading out to an exhibition or buzzing nightclub.

August sees quiet seaside spots morph into loud discoladen towns where every day is a thumping weekend. Head north and you might spot locals in traditional dress, sworn virgins and shepherds guiding flocks in the mountains.

After years of government-enforced isolation, Albanians welcome travellers with sincere hospitality. Upgraded roads swirl past the new houses and bar-restaurant-hotel developments that demonstrate the country's newfound prosperity. The unique sights of Albania are unforgettable: donkeys tethered to concrete bunkers, houses crawling up each other to reach the hilltops in Unesco World Heritage-listed Berat and Gjirokastra, and isolated beaches.

Best Places to Eat

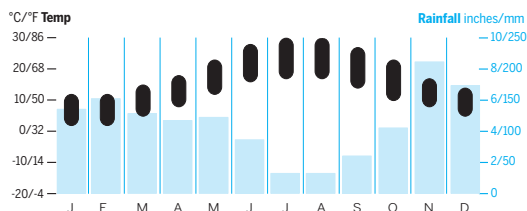
- » Kujtimi, Gjirokastra (p50)
- » Era, Tirana (p45)

Best Places to Stay

- » Berat Backpackers (p48)
- » Hotel Kalem, Gjirokastra (p50)

When to Go

Tirana



Jun Enjoy the Mediterranean climate and deserted beaches.

Aug Beaches are packed and the mood is bright as overseas-based Albanians return to holiday.

Dec Join a truly adventurous snowshoe expedition to isolated Theth.

Connections

Albania has daily bus connections with Kosovo, Montenegro, Macedonia, Italy (via ferry) and Thessaloniki and Athens in Greece. Albania is a short ferry ride from Greece's Corfu. Travellers heading south from Croatia can pass through Montenegro to Shkodra (via Ulcinj), and can loop the country before heading into Macedonia via Pogradec or Kosovo via the Lake Koman ferry or new superfast Albania-Kosovo highway.

ITINERARIES

Three Days

Drink frappé at Tirana's trendy Blloku cafes, check out the museum and art gallery, then spend the night dancing in packed nightclubs. Make the two-hour trip to the Ottoman-era town of Berat, meander through the castle and stay in authentic accommodation in the town's old quarters. Kruja is a good airport detour; check out one of the country's best ethnographic museums and buy souvenirs in its bazaar.

One Week

Spend a day in Tirana then head south to Berat for a few days. Take on beachside Drymades or Jal before making a pit stop at Saranda to prepare for a stroll around Butrint's ruins. Pause at the Blue Eye Spring before getting lost among the historic slate-roofed houses of Gjirokastra.

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, euro (€)
- » **Language** Albanian (some Greek and Italian spoken on the south coast)
- » **Money** ATMs in most towns
- » **Visas** Nationals of most countries don't need a visa

Fast Facts

- » **Area** 28,748 sq km
- » **Capital** Tirana
- » **Country code** 355
- » **Emergency** Police 129; ambulance 127

Exchange Rates

Australia	A\$1	103 lekë
Canada	C\$1	103 lekë
euro	€1	141 lekë
zone		
Japan	¥100	118 lekë
New Zealand	NZ\$1	76 lekë
UK	UK£1	160 lekë
USA	US\$1	99 lekë

Set Your Budget

- » **Budget accommodation** €12-15 per person
- » **Two-course evening meal** €10
- » **Museum entrance** €1-3
- » **Beer (bottle)** €1.50

Resources

- » **Outdoor Albania** (www.outdooralbania.com)
- » **Albania-Hotel** (www.albania-hotel.com)