

EUROPE · BEACHES · MOUNTAINS · HIKING · HISTORY · ROAD TRIPS · OFF THE BEATEN PATH



Albania

Ionian beaches, Ottoman hill towns and some of the Balkans' wildest mountains all fit inside a country smaller than Belgium. Berat's white-walled houses earn it the name 'city of a thousand windows', Butrint layers Greek, Roman and Venetian ruins on a lagoon, and prices still run well below neighbouring Croatia and Montenegro.

 Before you go, read the UK government's travel advice for Albania and entry requirements (visas, passport validity). Last updated by FCDO 15 October 2026.

 CAPITAL Tirana	 CURRENCY Albanian lek (ALL) £1 ≈ ALL 108	 LANGUAGE Albanian, Italian Greek	 BEST TIME May–Jun, Sep
 DAILY BUDGET £35–£160 ££ Moderate	 PLUGS Type C, F 230V · adapter needed	 FLIGHT FROM LONDON 2h 50m direct ~£90–£280 return	 TIME ZONE UTC+1 standard time

Albania spent four decades sealed off under Enver Hoxha's communist regime, and the concrete bunkers he scattered across the country still poke out of beaches and fields. Since opening up in the 1990s it has revealed a remarkable spread: the Ionian coast from Vlorë to Ksamil, the UNESCO-listed Ottoman towns of Berat and Gjirokastër, the ruins of Butrint and the Accursed Mountains on the Montenegrin and Kosovan borders. A first trip usually runs north to south — Tirana, Berat, Gjirokastër, then the Riviera and Sarandë — with a northern loop via Shkodër, the Koman Lake ferry and the Valbona–Theth hike for walkers.

Travel here is cheap, informal and occasionally chaotic. Furgons (shared minibuses) leave when full, timetables are loose and mountain roads take far longer than the map suggests, so build slack into any itinerary. Hospitality is a point of honour, and visitors are often surprised by how readily strangers offer coffee, directions or a lift. July and August bring Kosovar and diaspora holidaymakers to the coast and push beach prices up, while May, June and September are calmer and still warm enough to swim. Albania suits independent travellers, hikers and road-trippers better than anyone wanting polished resort service.

Top 5 highlights

1

ARCHITECTURE

Berat old town

Tiers of white Ottoman houses climb the hill above the Osum river, their windows stacked so densely that Berat is called the 'city of a thousand windows'. The lived-in castle quarter holds Byzantine churches and the Onufri icon museum.

2

BEACH

Albanian Riviera

The Ionian coast between the Llogara Pass and Sarandë strings together pebble coves, startlingly clear water and hillside villages such as Dhërmi and Himarë. Come in June or September to avoid August's crowds and inflated prices.

3

HISTORY

Gjirokaštër

A UNESCO-listed hill town of slate-roofed stone tower houses below a vast castle, birthplace of both Enver Hoxha and the novelist Ismail Kadare. The cobbled bazaar and the Skenduli House show how wealthy Ottoman-era families lived.

4

HISTORY

Butrint National Park

On a wooded lagoon peninsula near the Greek border, Butrint's ruins span more than two millennia: a Greek theatre, Roman baths, a Byzantine baptistery and a Venetian tower. Arrive early on summer days to beat tour groups from Corfu.

5

ADVENTURE

Theth–Valbona hike

The classic day hike across the Accursed Mountains links two remote valleys over the Valbona Pass, at around 1,800 metres. Reach Valbona via the dramatic Koman Lake ferry and sleep in family guesthouses in Theth.

Biggest cities

LARGEST CITY

Tirana

≈ 600,000 people

Painted façades, the pedestrianised Skanderbeg Square and the Blloku café district, once reserved for the communist elite, make the capital a lively two-day stop. Don't miss the BunkArt museums.

2ND LARGEST CITY

Durrës

≈ 154,000 people

Albania's main port has a Roman amphitheatre in its old centre and a long, built-up beach strip. Handy for the airport and ferries to Italy, but rarely anyone's highlight.

3RD LARGEST CITY

Elbasan

≈ 115,000 people

An industrial city wrapped around a walled Ottoman-era castle quarter that is still lived in. Worth a stop between Tirana and Lake Ohrid, especially for the Dita e Verës celebrations in March.

Ranked by urban-area population where available. Figures are rounded estimates, and sources define city limits differently, so rankings of similar-sized cities can vary.

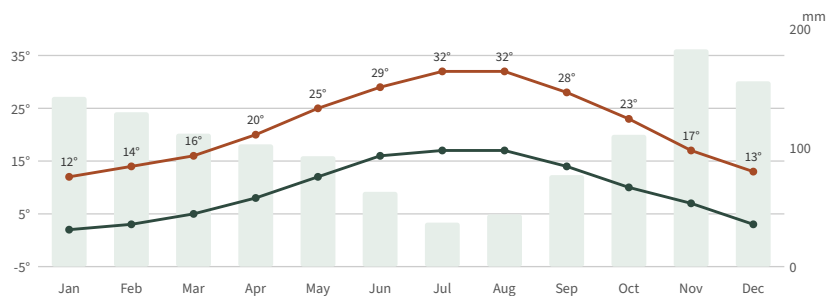
When to go to Albania

Best time: **May–Jun, Sep.**



Average climate in Tirana

— High °C — Low °C — Rain (mm)



Festivals & events

Mar	Dita e Verës Summer Day on 14 March is a public holiday rooted in pagan spring rites, celebrated hardest in Elbasan with concerts, crowds and trays of ballokume butter biscuits.
Jun	Kala Festival A week of electronic music on the beach at Dhërmi each June, drawing international DJs and crowds; tickets and nearby rooms sell out months ahead.
Aug	Mount Tomorr pilgrimage Each late August, thousands of Bektashi pilgrims climb Mount Tomorr above Berat to the shrine of Abbas Ali, camping, praying and feasting on the slopes.

How much does Albania cost?

SHOESTRING £35 per person / day ≈ ALL 3,783 hostels, street food, buses	MID-RANGE £75 per person / day ≈ ALL 8,106 3-star hotels, restaurants, some taxis	COMFORTABLE £160 per person / day ≈ ALL 17,293 4-star+, guided trips, private transfers
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Estimates per person per day, excluding flights. Prices vary by season and city.

Food to try

Tavë kosi Baked lamb and rice set in a tangy yoghurt-and-egg custard, a dish claimed by Elbasan and served in homes and restaurants across the country.	Byrek Flaky filo pie filled with spinach, cheese, minced meat or onion, sold warm from bakeries as the standard breakfast on the go.	Fërgesë A Tirana speciality of peppers, tomatoes and salty gjizë curd cheese baked in a clay pot and scooped up with bread.
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Getting around

Most travellers rely on buses and furgons (shared minibuses), which link Tirana with nearly every town; services thin out after mid-afternoon. Passenger rail has long been of little use to visitors, though a new Tirana–Durrës line has been under construction. Hiring a car opens up the Riviera and mountain villages, but expect slow, winding roads and erratic driving. The Koman Lake ferry is the scenic route to Valbona, and ferries cross from Sarandë to Corfu.

Practical information

PLUGS & VOLTAGE C F 230V — bring a UK-to-C/F adapter	EMERGENCY NUMBERS Ambulance: 127 Fire: 128 Police: 112 Source: FCDO “Getting help”
DIALLING CODE +355	TIME ZONE UTC+1 (standard time)

TAP WATER

Varies — bottled or filtered is safer

DRIVING

On the right

TIPPING

Not obligatory, but rounding up in cafés and leaving around 10% in restaurants is appreciated. Tip guides and guesthouse hosts in lek.

ETIQUETTE

Head gestures can confuse: many Albanians shake the head side to side for yes and nod for no. Cover shoulders and remove shoes in mosques, and accept offered coffee or raki graciously.

MAIN AIRPORTS

Tirana International Airport Nënë Tereza (TIA), Tirana

Visas & entry for Albania

Shown for a British passport.

No visa needed

You can visit Albania without a visa for up to 90 days in a 180-day period, for tourism or business.

If you want to stay longer than 90 days, you must apply in advance for a long-stay visa or apply for a residence permit from within Albania.

From the UK government's FCDO entry requirements for British passport holders — read the full page for passport validity, permits and exceptions.

Health & vaccinations



See a travel health nurse, GP or travel clinic **6–8 weeks before you go**. Make sure routine UK vaccinations (such as MMR and diphtheria-tetanus-polio) are up to date.

RECOMMENDED FOR MOST TRAVELLERS

Hepatitis A

Tetanus

SOMETIMES ADVISED — DEPENDS ON YOUR TRIP, ACTIVITIES AND HEALTH

Hepatitis B

Rabies

Tick-borne encephalitis

Typhoid

YELLOW FEVER CERTIFICATE

A yellow fever certificate is only required if you arrive from (or transit through) a country with yellow fever risk — not if you fly direct from the UK.

MALARIA

No malaria risk

Source: TravelHealthPro (National Travel Health Network and Centre), checked 21 October 2026. This is a summary, not medical advice.

Public holidays in Albania

The next 12 months. Banks, offices and some sights may close, and transport and hotels get busy around these dates.

Sun 22 Nov 2026

Alphabet Day

Mon 23 Nov 2026	Alphabet Day (observed)
Sat 28 Nov 2026	Flag and Independence Day
Sun 29 Nov 2026	Liberation Day
Mon 30 Nov 2026	Flag and Independence Day (observed)
Tue 1 Dec 2026	Liberation Day (observed)
Tue 8 Dec 2026	National Youth Day
Fri 25 Dec 2026	Christmas Day
Fri 1 Jan 2027	New Year's Day
Sat 2 Jan 2027	New Year's Day
Mon 4 Jan 2027	New Year's Day (observed)
Tue 9 Mar 2027	Eid al-Fitr (date may shift)
Sun 14 Mar 2027	Summer Day
Mon 15 Mar 2027	Summer Day (observed)
Mon 22 Mar 2027	Nowruz Day
Sun 28 Mar 2027	Catholic Easter Sunday
Mon 29 Mar 2027	Catholic Easter Sunday (observed)
Sat 1 May 2027	International Workers' Day
Sun 2 May 2027	Orthodox Easter Sunday
Mon 3 May 2027	International Workers' Day (observed)
Tue 4 May 2027	Orthodox Easter Sunday (observed)
Sun 16 May 2027	Eid al-Adha (date may shift)
Mon 17 May 2027	Eid al-Adha (observed, estimated) (date may shift)
Sun 5 Sep 2027	Mother Teresa Canonization Day
Mon 6 Sep 2027	Mother Teresa Canonization Day (observed)

National holidays only. Dates based on lunar calendars can move by a day or two depending on official announcements.

Useful phrases in Albanian

ENGLISH	ALBANIAN	SAY IT
Hello	Përshëndetje	<i>pur-shun-DET-yeh</i>
Thank you	Faleminderit	<i>fah-leh-meen-DEH-reet</i>
Please	Ju lutem	<i>yoo LOO-tem</i>
Excuse me	Më falni	<i>muh FAHL-nee</i>
How much is this?	Sa kushton kjo?	<i>sah koosh-TOHN kyoh</i>

Know before you go

Carry lek in cash outside Tirana. Euros are widely accepted on the coast, but change comes back in lek at the vendor's rate, so you usually lose a little.

Book the Koman Lake ferry a day or two ahead in summer; operators bundle minibs transfers from Shkodër, and services are reduced outside the main season.

Fill up before mountain drives and avoid driving rural roads after dark, when unlit bends, livestock and potholes are hard to spot.

Visa, health and safety rules change. Before you book or travel, check the FCDO travel advice (gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice) and TravelHealthPro (travelhealthpro.org.uk). Costs are estimates. © 2026 Pick My Trip.