



# TRAVEL THE UNKNOWN

TAKE THE ROAD LESS TRAVELLED

**ALBANIAN ODYSSEY**

**10 days**



## Countries visited

Albania • Kosovo

## Tour Highlights

- The beautiful Ottoman architecture of Berat
- The history of Ali Pasha Fortress
- The natural beauty of Kelcyra Gorge
- Butrint's three thousand year history
- Gjirokastra castle and cold war tunnel
- The historic town of Shkodra
- Experience the wild but hospitable frontier regions of Albania's North
- Take a boat across Lake Koman
- The beautiful Ottoman neighbourhood in Prizren

## Places visited

Kruja • Berat • Saranda • Butrint • Gjirokastra • Permet • Korca • Shkodra • Valbona • Tirana • Prizren

## What's included

- International return flight (where indicated)
- Airport pick-up & drop-off
- Most meals (refer to itinerary for meal plan)
- Ground transport and driver
- Local guides
- Accommodation
- Entrance fees to sites & parks

*All accommodation subject to availability. Final accommodation choices will be confirmed after booking.*

## Your Itinerary Map



## Your Itinerary Explained

Date	Place visited	Meals
	<p>The first part of the text in each day is the itinerary schedule and will explain what you will normally see/do during this day of your itinerary.</p> <p>---</p> <p><i>The part of the day's text in italics (and comes after the three dashes "---") is background information on the places or sites on that day of your itinerary. It is not part of your itinerary and may mention places that will not be visited on your itinerary. If you have any questions please ask us. Travel times where noted are only meant as a guideline.</i></p>	<p>B: Breakfast</p> <p>L: Lunch</p> <p>D: Dinner</p>

## Tour Itinerary

Day 1	Tirana - Kruja	Meals
 Flight	<p>Arrive into Tirana airport where you will be met by a Travel The Unknown representative and transferred to your hotel in Kruja. Overnight in Kruja.</p> <p>---</p> <p><i>Overnight in Panorama, Kruja</i></p>	D
Day 2	Kruja - Berat	Meals
 Kruja	<p>Visit Kruja in the morning, and have lunch at a restaurant in Durres. Transfer to Berat to visit the citadel and the Onufri Icons Museum. Overnight in Berat.</p> <p>---</p> <p><i><b>Kruja (alb. Krujë)</b> is a medieval town located 32 km northwest of Tirana, built 560 meters above sea level, on the slopes of Sari -Salltiku mountain. The name of Kruja derives from the Albanian word krua, meaning 'water spring'. The citadel has become the main Illyrian fortress in the area in the 4th century AD. In the year 879, Kruja was mentioned for the first time as a Christian religious center, (bishop see). The first Albanian feudal state was created here circa 1190. The Ottomans occupied Kruja two times, in 1396 and 1415. The town reached its zenith on the 28th of November 1443 when Kruja castle was taken by Gjergj Kastrioti (Skanderbeg), who then organized the long anti-Ottoman resistance. From this time on, under the leadership of Skanderbeg, Kruja repelled three Ottoman sieges in 1450, 1457 and 1466. Only ten years after the death of Skanderbeg, in 1478, were the Ottomans able to capture the castle and destroy the town.</i></p>	B L

Known as the 'town of a thousand windows', **Berat**'s Ottoman architecture and ancient history has given it UNESCO World Heritage status. The town is home to Berat Castle, which is perched on a rocky hill and inaccessible from the south. The fortress was so large that it could house a substantial proportion of the town's inhabitants. An influence of different cultures can be found in Berat's mosques and Byzantine churches.

Overnight in Mangalemi, Berat

Day 3	Berat - Llogara - Saranda	Meals
	<p>Transfer to Llogora for optional short hike and lunch. Continue South to visit the Ali Pasha fortress in the afternoon. Continue to Saranda. Dinner in a fish restaurant. Overnight in Saranda.</p> <p>---</p> <p><b>Llogara National Park</b> is home to many different species of wildlife including the Griffon Vulture, Red Fox, Eurasian Otter and Red Squirrel. The park covers an area of 2,500 acres and the air currents of the area have bent the trees into interesting shapes.</p> <p>The <b>Ali Pasha fortress</b> was owned by the notorious Ali Pasha of Tepelena who constructed a number of formidable castles as his territory grew. The defensive reinforcements he made include adding gun batteries and it became his second home. He entertained many notable Western people, including Lord Byron who recorded his encounter with Ali Pasha in 1809 in his work 'Childe Harold's Pilgrimage'.</p>	B L D
Llogara National Park	Overnight in Brilant, Saranda	

Day 4	Saranda - Butrint - Girokastra	Meals
	<p>Visit Butrint Archaeological Park and have lunch at Syri Kalter Springs. Drive to Girokastra to visit the old town. Overnight in Girokastra.</p> <p>---</p> <p>Situated on the Straights of Corfu, <b>Butrint</b> was once the site of a Greek colony. During the 4th century BC, it became one of the most important commercial and maritime centres of the ancient world. Archaeologists have uncovered statues of the 'Goddess of Butrint', Roman amphitheatres and a temple dedicated to Asclepius, the Greek God of healing. The town was uncovered mostly intact thanks to the mud and vegetation of the area and has been granted UNESCO World Heritage Site status. The site is also a haven for many species of fish, birds, tortoises, and vegetation.</p> <p>The city of <b>Girokastra</b>, also known as 'the city of a thousand steps', is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, thanks to its well preserved Ottoman architecture. The city has been occupied by many different countries over the years, including the Turkish Ottomans, the Greeks and the Italians. The city has a diverse culture, with a substantial Greek minority and the area around Girokastra is the centre of Bektashism, a Muslim sect. It is home to Girokastra castle which overlooks the town and is known as the 'city of stone' because of the grey stone houses and cobbled alleyways. The city is also the birthplace of two of Albania's most famous people - the writer Ismail Kadare and the communist leader Enver Hoxha.</p>	B L D
Butrint	Overnight in Cajupi, Girokastra	

Day 5	Girokastra - Kelcyra Gorge - Permet	Meals
	<p>Drive from Gjirokastra to Kelcyra Gorge. Lunch at a village restaurant and visit an Ottoman bridge. Option to walk to Benja village. Overnight in Permet.</p> <p>---</p> <p><b>Gjirokastra castle</b> is one of the biggest castles in the Balkans that was used as a prison under communist rule. Today it is open to the public, along with <b>the cold war tunnel</b>. This giant bunker was built deep beneath the castle, by communist leader Enver Hoxha, in anticipation of a nuclear attack from Western or Soviet forces.</p> <p>The <b>Kelcyra Gorge</b> is an area of stunning natural beauty. Carved by the Vjosa river, the rugged landscape is home to many different species of wildlife such as the jackals, brown bears and wolves, although they are rarely encountered by walkers.</p> <p>Overnight in Alvero, Permet</p>	B L D
Day 6	Permet - Gergenj - Korca	Meals
	<p>Drive to Korca through Gergenj National Park. Afternoon spent exploring Korca. Overnight in Korca.</p> <p>---</p> <p><b>Gergenj National Park</b> covers over 7000 hectares of forest creating a breathtaking landscape. Its main draw is the Lake of Shalgar. It is home to a wide variety of wildlife including wild cats, bears, eagles, foxes and wild goats.</p> <p><b>Korca</b> was under Ottoman rule until 1912 and its proximity to Greece made it fiercely contested during the Balkans War. It became a hotbed of Communist agitation during the inter-war period, its underground Communist movement becoming the nucleus of Enver Hoxha's Albanian Party of Labour. The city has been a centre for Orthodox Christians for centuries as well as having large communities of Sunni and Bektashi Muslims. Korca is nicknamed the 'City of museums' and is home to many museums, like the National Museum of Medieval Albanian Art. It is also known for its folk music, 'kernacka' meat balls and the establishing of the first Albanian school after centuries of Ottoman rule.</p> <p>Overnight in Life Gallery, Korca</p>	B L D
Day 7	Korca - Shkodra	Meals
	<p>Drive towards Tirana along Lake Podgradec and continue North to Shkodra. Overnight in Shkodra.</p> <p>---</p> <p><b>Lake Ohrid</b> straddles the border between Albania and Macedonia. It is one of Europe's deepest and oldest lakes, and the focal point of one of the most unique and important aquatic ecosystems in the world. For this it has been granted UNESCO World Heritage Site. Status and is home to over 200 endemic species. The surrounding weeds and wetlands shelter some of the most endangered birds such as the Dalmation Pelican and Spotted Eagle. On its shores, lies the city of Podgradec, home of many famous writers such as Mitrush Kuteli and Lasgush Poradeci.</p>	B L D

*A diamond-shaped city wedged between the Rozafa Citadel, the magnificent Albanian Alps, deep blue Lake Shkodra, a 30-kilometre sand beach and the serene Buna river delta reservation - **Shkodra** is a diamond in the rough with plenty of potential. While many visitors quickly breeze through the city, Shkodra's turbulent 2,400-year-old history has left plenty of interesting relics that make a stay in Albania's cultural capital worthwhile. Hundreds of years of no-nonsense religious and ethnic tolerance resulted in booming trade, witnessed by Shkodra's grand merchants' homes, and dozens of mosques and Catholic and Orthodox churches standing in close proximity to each other. Travel to Albania is now easier than ever before, the number of visitors to Shkodra is increasing and facilities for travellers are improving rapidly, with good hotels and several excellent restaurants now established.*

*Overnight in Colosseo, Shkodra*

Day 8	Shkodra - Lake Koman - Valbona	Meals
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Valbona

In the morning, drive to Koman and take a boat trip on scenic Lake Koman. In the afternoon, continue to the beautiful village of Valbona and explore a village by foot. Overnight in Valbona.

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*Situated in Valbona Valley National Park, the village of **Valbona** is surrounded by stunning natural beauty. In the heart of the wild Accursed Mountains, this rugged landscape is one of the most unexplored areas of Europe. Its main draw is the Valbona River, its warm people and its spectacular setting.*

***Lake Koman** was created by a dam in the 1980s. It is lined by tree-covered hills and sheer limestone cliffs and the area is very remote. Although the car ferry was rendered defunct by the new highway between the coast and Kosovo, a small boat converted bus now operates the same route, making unscheduled stops along the way to serve the locals.*

*Overnight in Rilindja, Valbona*

B L D

Day 9	Valbona - Prizren - Tirana	Meals
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Prizren

Transfer to Prizren (Kosovo) and explore its Ottoman neighbourhood. Drive back to Tirana. Overnight in Tirana.

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*Situated on the banks of the river Bistrica with a backdrop of the Sharr Mountains, **Prizren** is located close to the border with Albania. It is a very culturally diverse town, with mosques sitting next to Orthodox churches, and it has a prominent Turkish community where Turkish is widely spoken. It hosts Dokufest, the summer film festival, and has many interesting monuments in the town centre, such as the League of Prizren Monument and the Sinan Pasha Mosque. The town centre has the feel of a bazaar, where modern shops blend in with small craft boutiques, delis and sweet shops.*

*Overnight in Diplomat, Tirana*

B L D

**Day 10**

**Tirana - departure**

**Meals**



Flight

Transfer to Tirana airport for departure.

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