



*"Djoser... Organized Adventures for Independent Minded Travelers"*



Albania & Macedonia Tour, 15 days



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## Itinerary

- Day 1 Tirana
- Day 2 Tirana
- Day 3 Tirana - Elbasan - Ohrid
- Day 4 Ohrid
- Day 5 Ohrid - Sv Naum - Korca
- Day 6 Korca, excursion Voskopoja
- Day 7 Korca - Baramsh-pas - Kekylla Caves - Gjirokastra
- Day 8 Gjirokastra
- Day 9 Gjirokastra - Blue Eye national park - Saranda
- Day 10 Saranda, optional excursion Butrinti
- Day 11 Saranda - Apollonia - Berat
- Day 12 Berat
- Day 13 Berat - Durrës - Shkoder
- Day 14 Shkoder - Kruja - Tirana
- Day 15 Tirana



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## Day by day

Tirana

Day 1 Tirana

Day 2 Tirana

We begin our land program in the capital Tirana at the Mother Theresa airport, named after the greatest Albanian-born celebrity of the past century. Most of the other participants will come from Holland and Belgium and will arrive with the Dutch tour leader on the flight from Amsterdam. You will meet them at the at the first hotel where all will gather for a first meeting to get acquainted and to get a briefing on the trip logistics.

In the fertile Tirana valley, the Romans built an important fortress, but it was not until 1920 that the center of power was established here, in the geographical center of the country. The National Historical Museum gives an excellent picture of the history of the region. For an overview of modern Albanian art from 1850 to the present. You can also visit the National Art Gallery.

The central Skanderbeg Square the political and cultural center of the city. You will find the Palace of Culture, built in 1971 in a traditional Soviet style. Inside is the concert hall where the national opera performs.

Other attractions are the more than two-hundred year old Haxhi Et'hem Beg Mosque, the Turkish villa Dervish Khorosani, and the modern orthodox Albanian cathedral that opened in 2012. At the market you can see the traditional merchandise of the countryside alongside contemporary articles from surrounding countries such as Bulgaria, Greece and Turkey.

The first elected mayor, Edi Rama, has energetically tackled the neglected appearance of the capital since he took office. The Lana River has been dredged, old boulevards have been laid out again, tons of debris have been drained, many hectares have been planted, 4000 trees have been planted and the gray Stalinist blocks have been given cheerful Caribbean colors. Tirana is now a lively city with summer terraces and many bars and restaurants. You also have plenty of opportunities to get acquainted with Albanian cuisine, in which you recognize Italian, French and Turkish influences.

Ohrid and Korca

Day 3 Tirana - Elbasan - Ohrid

Day 4 Ohrid

Day 5 Ohrid - Sv Naum - Korca



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#### Day 6 Korca, excursion Voskopoja

Along the old route between Rome and Constantinople, Via Egnatia, we travel to Ochrid via Elbasan. This houses the oldest mosque in the country and here we drink coffee before we arrive at the beautiful lake of Ohrid, on the border of Albania and Macedonia. We spend the night on the Macedonian side in the eponymous Roman fortified town.

Before the war in Yugoslavia, Ohrida was popular as a holiday resort; now it has been rediscovered. It has a long, turbulent history as one of the oldest settlements in Europe. Here the Cyrillic script originated, which is still used in the entire Slavic world. There is a statue for the compilers, the monks Kyrillos and Methodios. Incidentally, there is also a statue by the Dutch writer A. den Doollaard, who wrote the book "The Inn with the Horseshoe". UNESCO has placed the city and the surrounding area on the World Heritage List, not only because of the beautiful location, but also because of the remains of a large fort, the monasteries and the numerous medieval churches. The latter contain a wealth of frescos and icons. For those who want a more in depth look, an optional guided city tour is possible.

Lake Ohrid is not only the deepest in Europe, but also one of the oldest in the world. Of the unique, ancient organisms, it is a popular place for researchers. You can get the daily fresh Ohrid trout at a restaurant on one of the many terraces along the water.

On our way to Albania we stop at Sveti Naum, a beautiful monastery near the sources of Lake Ochrid. You can rent boats to sell here. Back in Albania we get to know the mountainous part of the country, in a region where maize, grains and grapes are grown. We settle in Korça, at a crossroads of roads to Greece, Macedonia, Bulgaria and Turkey, and visit the mountain village of Voskopoja. This was an important art center in the 14th century and in the 17th century it developed into the largest city in the Balkans with about 40,000 inhabitants and 24 churches. Now it is a sleepy village. In any case, we visit St. Nicholas Church, with colorful frescoes of saints inside and fresh trout at the trout farm.

#### Gjirokastra and Saranda

Day 7 Korca - Baramsh pass – Kekyra Cave- Gjirokastra

Day 8 Gjirokastra

Day 9 Gjirokastra - Blue Eye national park- Saranda

Day 10 Saranda, optional excursion Butrinti

Through a beautiful route we travel through the White Mountains over the 1157 meter high Barmash pass, with beautiful views over the Gramos mountain range that forms the border between Albania and Greece. The tops are covered with snow for most of the year.

After a winding descent we descend to the village Permeti, the most important wine area of the country and then drive through the spectacular Kelcy Canyon, carved by the Vyoda River on the way to the Adriatic Sea. There are many species of birds in this environment that are rarely seen in the rest of Europe. The eagle is an example of this. Life moves at a slow pace in the region.



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The mountain town of Gjirokastra is known as the city of the thousand stairs. It is built against a mountain and although the old center was built in the 50s and 60s, the old Ottoman center remained intact. You walk along narrow streets, paved with cobblestones, where you can discover medieval houses and an imposing castle, strategically placed on a passage route from the Ionian Sea to Greece. The bell tower on this castle is visible from all sides. Gjirokastra was built around this castle in the 13th century and has grown into one of the largest cities in the country. It played an important role in the liberation after 400 years of Ottoman authority.

Gjirokastra is also the birthplace of Enver Hoxha, the Stalinist ruler who kept Albania from the rest of the world until his death in 1985. After that it took until the early 90s before the people sent the oppressive regime away. The house of Hoxha is now a small museum. Also the Albanian writer Ismael Kadare, who is famous in his own country, was born there. The shopping streets in the old center offer grocery stores, coffee houses, hairdressers and some souvenir shops. For modern shops, go to the new city center.

We stay one full day in Saranda, which lies on the Ionian Sea. The proximity of the Greek island of Corfu (about 6 miles) gives Saranda a more cosmopolitan character than other Albanian places. Many Albanians choose to get married in this town. You can visit one of the numerous terraces or relax on the beach for an afternoon. Walk in the evening, with the locals, on the pleasant promenade along the sea and see the sun behind Corfu.

Of course you also visit the excavations of Butrinti, which is one of the most important archaeological excavations of the Balkans. It is also a nice excursion for the non-archaeologically included people! Butrinti is in fact shady and is very beautiful, right on the coast with a magnificent view of Corfu. Butrinti is originally a Greek city, which was already walled in the 6th century BC. During the later Byzantine and Venetian domination, the town developed into an important naval base and stock city. In 1992 Unesco took over the excavation. Important sights are the remains of the Greek theater, a Roman house, the thermal baths (with underfloor heating), the temple of Asklepios and the Byzantine baptistery.

Berat and Durrës

Day 11 Saranda - Apollonia - Berat

Day 12 Berat

Day 13 Berat - Durrës - Shkoder

Day 14 Shkoder - Kruja - Tirana

Day 15 Tirana

We drive along a beautiful route along undiscovered bays to Apollonia via Himarë and Vlora, where we have lunch. On the way we pass an underground city from the time of Hoxha. Apollonia was founded in 588 BC. by settlers from Corfu and Corinth. The most impressive sight is the façade of the



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council chamber, the Bouleuterion, which dates back to the 2nd century, of which all six columns are still standing. The city was founded in honor of the god, Apollo, and retained its dominant position until in the 3rd century, an earthquake changed the course of the Vosja River and made the soil marshy and unproductive.

Berat, located inland, is also called the city of 1000 windows. Berat is on the UNESCO World Heritage list because it has a very authentic cityscape. The whitewashed houses with red roofs between the Osuma River and the 7926 foot high Tomori mountain are the main attractions of this spectacularly located city. You can also see a fortress, old mosques and churches and a stone bridge from the 18th century. Interesting is the Onufri Museum with a collection of icons and other religious objects. In order to preserve the authentic atmosphere, new construction is subject to strict rules.

Today we have a travel day from Berat via Durrës to Shkoder. Durrës is located on the Adriatic coast and has long since become a major port where ferries to Italy now depart. The city still has a number of historical remains. For example, Durrës is surrounded by walls from Byzantine times, where you can find the largest amphitheater in the entire Balkans. It was built at the time of Emperor Hadrian and offered seats to 15,000 people.

We travel to Shkoder, one of the oldest cities in Europe and the economic center of northern Albania. The castle of Rozafa and the special Marubi photo collection are worth a visit.

The last highlight of this trip is the Kruja mountain settlement. In the castle the local 15th-century hero Skanderbeg resisted with his armies against Ottoman sieges for 25 years, after which Albania, from 1443, enjoyed 30 years of freedom. We take plenty of time to view the castle and the local museum. The fort is a true pilgrimage site and popular with ethnic Albanians from around the world. The medieval bazaar specializes in woolen kilims and wooden utensils. Here you will certainly find a nice souvenir.

Finally we drive to Tirana to the airport the next day (13 miles) where everyone will catch their flights home.

On the road with Djoser

On a Djoser trip the itinerary is not rigidly set. The travel days are fixed, and the guide will have programs laid out for most days with some excursions included. Other excursions are not included, and you may decide, on the spot, if you would like to partake or explore on your own. The guide can make suggestions for independent activities and dining. We believe that a degree of freedom enhances the travel experience.

The maximum group size is 22 people.



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## Practical information

### Accommodations & Meals

We use comfortable, tourist class hotels. Typically 3-star. Breakfasts are included on this trip. The following are our typical hotels, but subject to change.

Irana	Villa Tafaj
Ohrid	Toni Hotel
Korca	Grand Hotel
Gjirokastra	Hotel Cajupi
Berat	Hotel Mangalemi
Kruja	Panorama Hotel

### Hotel Extension

It is possible to book an extra hotel night in Tirana in a centrally located hotel. The price is \$90 for a double room and \$80 for a single room.

An extension in Kruja is also possible at the end of the trip. A double room based on bed / breakfast costs \$90. The price of a single room is \$75 per person.

Airport transfers are not provided.

### Meals

The breakfasts are included in the trip. You can decide for yourself when and where you want to have lunch and where to eat in the evening. Your guide can make recommendations. In the larger cities you can now choose from a number of restaurants. In the smaller places the choice is limited.

The prices of meals (including a drink) vary in the larger cities from \$10-\$15. In smaller places, the meals are slightly cheaper.

Albanian cuisine has Turkish and Italian influences in particular. In every bakery you will find, for example, the typical Turkish delicacies baklava or byrek. Greek cuisine is clearly recognizable in the use of feta and olives. At breakfast, omelets, bread and jam are eaten. Sometimes there is fruit juice and yogurt, at least tea and coffee. In a number of hotels there is a breakfast buffet.



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Lunch and dinner normally consist of a meat dish (such as moussaka) with a 'Greek salad', which contains feta cheese. You will also regularly find pasta dishes on the menu. Popular vegetable is the okra, an elongated bean. A real Albanian specialty is the yogurt, or kos. With the meal, beer or wine is usually served. A national drink is raki, a juice of grapes or prunes.

### Flights & Transportation

We provide the land program only therefore you will need to organize your own flight and transport to the hotel on arrival. As the majority of the group participants will be arriving from Amsterdam, you should organize your flight to arrive at the same time or before their arrival. Your departure should be scheduled at the same time or after the Dutch participants.

The flight schedule for the Dutch participants is as follows: (subject to change)

Austrian Air –

Arrives Tirana at 14:20

Departs Tirana at 15:05

Do not book a flight until you have an email confirmation from us that there are enough people signed up for the trip to go.

### Local Transport

During the tour we have our own bus, adapted to the group size. On the way there is often a lot to see and because the bus is at our disposal, we can stop where we want to stretch our legs, take a picture or visit a nice place or market along the way.

In cities, bicycles are part of the daily street scene, and therefore very useful as a means of transport. In some cities it is possible to rent bicycles. In the smaller towns, walking is often the most convenient.

### Money Matters

#### Money matters

In Albania the currency is the Lek and in Macedonia the Denar. Look for the current prices on [oanda.com](http://oanda.com) .

ATMs: ATMs are available in all cities. Keep in mind that these can be empty or out of order.



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Cash: dollars can easily be exchanged at exchange offices, take a small amount of cash in case of emergency.

Credit cards: Typically not accepted (except in Tirana and the coastal towns).

#### Out of Pocket Expenses

You will need to budget for expenses that are not included in the fare, such as meals, entrance fees, optional excursions and personal expenses. See prices/Dates pages for cost summary.

It is customary to give tips for services rendered. At the beginning of the trip, a tip jar is organized by your guide from which tips are paid to the drivers, guides, hotel staff, etc. The guideline for the tip jar for this trip is \$30 per person. This does not include a tip for your tour guide. Tips are appreciated and the amount is up to you.

#### Excursions

At Djoser you decide which sights you find worthwhile to visit. One person may want to go in search of bargains, the other wants to look around at a museum or to relax on a terrace, to watch daily life while enjoying a drink. In most cases you can go out on foot or with local transport yourself or with fellow travelers, with or without help from our tour guide. Admission fees are not included in the fare, so you have the freedom to determine your own preferences.

Some places of interest should not be missed or are difficult to reach or are 'en route' to our next place to stay. Such excursions are built into the program at Djoser however entrance fees are exclusive.

During this trip through Albania, the following excursions are included in the itinerary:

Visit Elbasan, with the oldest mosque in the country

Visit Sveti Naum (old monastery) and the sources of Lake Ochrid

Excursion to Voskopoja, an important art center from the 14th century

Visit to Blue Eye national park

Excursion to Butrinti, a Greek city from the 6th century BC, beautifully situated on the coast

Visit to Apollonia, a Greek city from the 6th century BC.

On the spot there are several other possibilities for activities.

#### Travel Documents

Passport & Visa Albania

**PASSPORT VALIDITY:** Three months



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BLANK PASSPORT PAGES: One page required for entry stamp  
TOURIST VISA REQUIRED: Not required for stays under one year  
VACCINATIONS: None

#### MACEDONIA

PASSPORT VALIDITY: Six months beyond your planned stay recommended  
BLANK PASSPORT PAGES: One page required for entry stamp  
TOURIST VISA REQUIRED: Not for stays less than 90 days within a six month period

#### Health Issues & Insurance

Usual Inoculations recommended:  
Recommended vaccinations: DTP and hepatitis A.

#### Money matters

In Albania the currency is the Lek and in Macedonia the Denar. Look for the current prices on [oanda.com](http://oanda.com).

#### Group Composition

Djoser travelers are active, enthusiastic travelers of all ages. Join an international group with travelers from the Netherlands, Belgium and North America, who will be the minority group on these trips. Most of our trips range from a minimum of eight participants to a maximum of 20 or 22. You will find couple and singles on our trips. Feel free to call us if you wish to know the demographic make-up of a particular trips (number of singles and age range).

Minimum group size: 8  
Maximum group size: 22

What to expect when traveling with an international group – Most of our group trips are arranged in cooperation with Djoser, B.V. in the Netherlands. They have been in operation for about 30 years, and we have been in operation in the U.S. for 20 years. Because they cater to the voracious travel appetites of the Dutch, we are able to offer a vast number of programs around the world with hard-to-find itineraries, with numerous departure dates.

You will be traveling with an international group, with most participants from Holland and Belgium. The international make-up of our groups is the attraction for many regular Djoser travelers and adds another cultural element to the trip. Typically, there one to three North Americans per group. You will find that almost all of your fellow travelers have an excellent command of English and most are very willing to socialize.



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It takes a day or two for group members to warm up to one another, and for the Dutch to brush off their rusty English skills. That is always easier in a one to one setting, so we suggest extending an invite or two for a coffee or beer. As with every tour group, compatibility has most to do with individual personalities.

You will find the travelers in our grips are typically experienced, hearty traveler, whatever their age. You can count on lots of walking. Participants welcome opportunities for independent explorations in addition to group activities.

The Dutch and Belgian travelers will fly as a group from Amsterdam. You will meet the group and tour leader at the hotel where the program will begin.

### Tour Leaders & Support Staff

Our trips are guided by an experienced Dutch guide who speaks Dutch and English. He or she will be responsible for the organizational and technical aspects of the trip coordinating with the driver, hotels, and other vendors along the way. The tour leader has extensive travel experience and expertise as well as a comprehensive training. The guide is a logistics coordinator and not a lecturer. Because of the group make-up, you will hear lots of Dutch, but the guide will make sure that you get the important information at the first meeting and throughout the trip. If you have any qualms about the make-up of the group, please discuss with us.

Our experienced land representatives are situated in the destination country you will visit. We work closely with them and they function as the liaison between our office, the guide, drivers and hotels. They are also available to assist in the event of an emergency.

### Climate & Geography

Albania is located along the coast with a beautiful Mediterranean climate: dry, hot summers and mild winters. Inland there is a continental climate. This means warm summers and rainy, cold winters. The best times to travel are spring and summer. The average maximum summer temperature varies from 77 to 95° F. July is the warmest month in Tirana, the average temperature is around 77 ° C and there is plenty of sunshine. In the spring and autumn you have to take into account cooler days and cool nights. In the higher areas it can also be brisk in the summer months.

The majority of the Albanian landscape has a mountainous structure. Along the coast the landscape looks flatter and much more fertile. Originally there were many marshes in this area.