

Travel & Discover



Itineraries
All Over Albania

Albania 
yours to discover

A Walk Along Albanian Territory.

Running from north to south, visitors can experience many different things inside a country even as small as Albania.

If you are looking for an active holiday, you will find plenty of things to do. Through this pocket brochure, we offer you 10 suggested itineraries to choose from. There are numerous different attractions including mountain treks, deep valleys, national parks, lakes, archaeological sites, museum cities, castles, the coastline, and much more. A visit to Albania means that you'll return home both relaxed and energized at the same time.

Welcome and enjoy your stay!

Travel & Discover

Itineraries all over Albania



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TOUR 1



Saranda - Butrinti 18km
Saranda - Gjirokastra 56km
Gjirokastra - Antigonea 12km

Saranda - Finiqi 10km
Saranda - Ksamili 15km

Saranda

Saranda, “the south Albanian seaport,” is located on a natural shelf facing the island of Corfu. There are daily ships that depart, connecting Saranda with this Greek island. Saranda’s name originates from “the Forty Saints,” an old Christian monastery (Saranda means “forty” in Greek). The ruins of the monastery lay in Qafa e Gjashtës, near the city entrance. Prior to Byzantine

rule, Saranda was called by its ancient Greek name, “Onchesmos,” after the father of the Trojan prince Aeneas, who was born at Mount Ida by the Greek Goddess, Aphrodite. The city lies at the southern tip of Albania’s Ionian coastline and has a very pleasant avenue, full of palm trees and pebbled beaches. In the center of the city stand the ruins of the ancient city of Onhezmi, destroyed in the 5th century



A.D. by invading barbarians. In 2002, a synagogue was uncovered in the same area. Just 2 km south of Saranda, on the top of a massive hill, is the Castle of Lëkurs. The castle was built by Sultan Suleiman during his military campaign against Corfu. Today a restaurant sits in the fortress, offering a rich cuisine and breathtaking views of the deep blue Ionian Sea. Heading south, the coastline changes its appearance.

Four small islands emerge in the Ksamili area, covered by Mediterranean vegetation and surrounded by wonderful marine flora and fauna. A salt lake, which is a lagoon of tectonic origin, lies inland near Butrinti. In antiquity it was known by the name Pelodes and it connects with the sea through the channel of Vivar, 3.6 km in length. Tourists can find a large number of sea birds nesting there.



Butrinti

South of Butrinti Lake, 18 km from Saranda, sits the ancient city of Butrinti, the most important archaeological site in Albania, and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The name of Butrinti has been well known since the 7th century B.C. as the most important city of Epirus. According to Dionysius of Halicarnassus, the building of Butrinti was

linked to the presence of the Trojan prince Aeneas during his travel to the temple of Dodona. He paid tribute to the oracle of Dodona by sacrificing a bull (Buthros in Greek) in the place where the city of Butrinti began to rise. The Roman poet Virgil also mentions the visit of Aeneas to Butrinti in his poem, "The Aeneid". There are many sights to see within Butrinti.





The Archaeological Park of Butrinti

The most interesting ones are the Temple of Asclepius (the 2nd century B.C. God of Good Health), a 1,500-seat theater from the 3rd century B.C. (which now hosts the International Theatre Festival every September), the Baptismal (a paleochristian monument), as well as the nymphet, the baths, the stoa (covered walkway), the Lake Gate, the Lion Gate, the

Venetian fortress of Ali Pasha, and many others. Besides its historical value, Butrinti is renowned for its marvelous ecological system. The ruins and the buildings of the city stand amidst an amazing subtropical jungle, with plenty of laurel and other high woods.



Gjirokastra

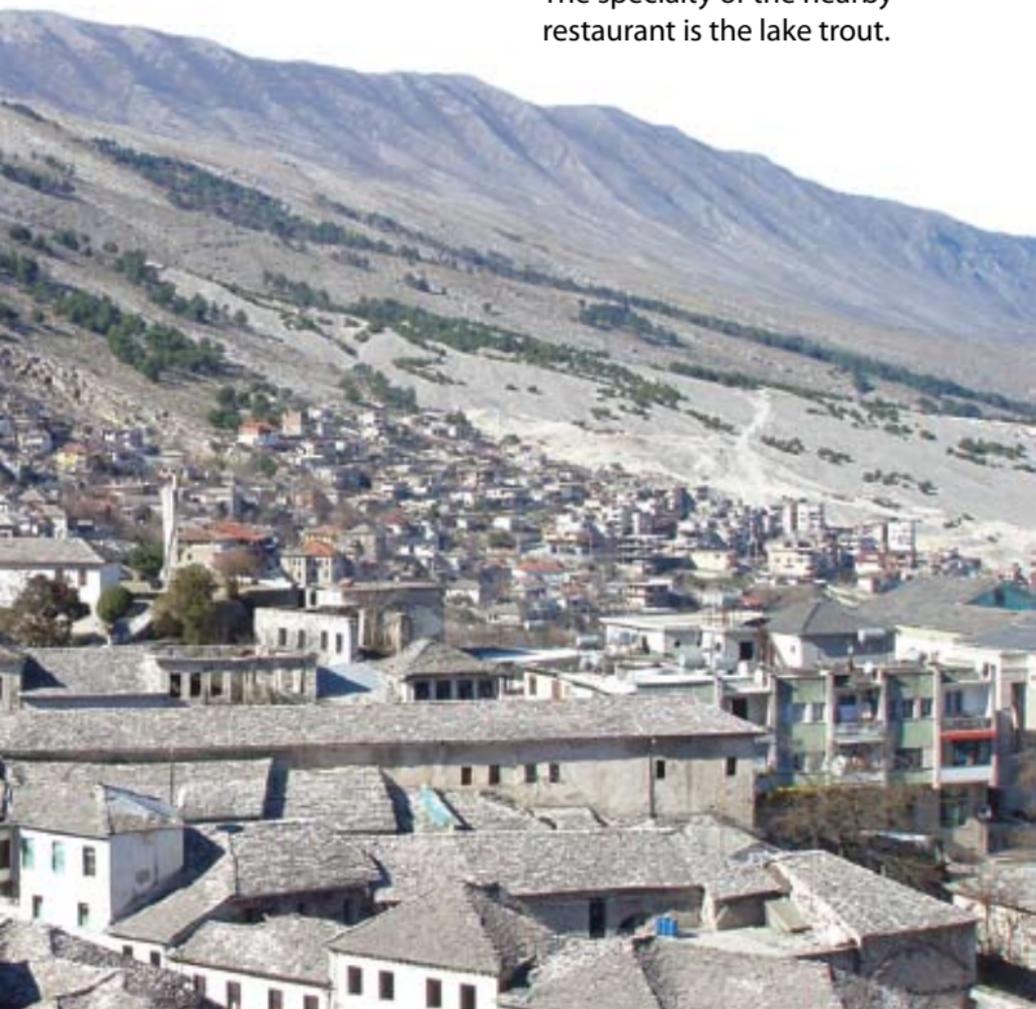
As you depart from Saranda, the national highway will lead you to the unique city of Gjirokastra, only 56 km away.

On the way, just 10 km from Saranda, travelers will find Finiqi, the capital of the Kingdom of Epirus (and named Foinike at the time), which was founded in the



3rd and 2nd centuries B.C.
in the territory of Kaonia.
The historian Polybus called it,
"the most rich and fortified
city of Epirus." Southwest of
Finiqi in the hilltop village of
Mesopotam is the Church of

Shën Kolli, built during the
Byzantine period. One of the
most pleasant surprises along
this journey is Syri i Kaltër (the
Blue Eye), a powerful natural
spring that has created a small
lake of crystal clear water that
looks like a giant human eye.
The specialty of the nearby
restaurant is the lake trout.



Past Qafa e Muzinës runs the national Gjirokastër-Kakavijë highway. As you leave the village of Dropulli on your left, the museum-city of Gjirokastra unfolds in front of you, built on the eastern slope of Mali i Gjerë. Due to its architecture, Gjirokastra is also known as the *“City of Stone”* or *“City of a Thousand Stairs.”* It is an ancient city with early inhabitants, above which was later constructed a fortress that served as the center of the city. What most attracts visitors to Gjirokastra are the traditional tall houses made of

stone, which resemble small fortresses that form a complex of architectural monuments. Due to its architectural value, Gjirokastra is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The main object is the city fortress, named the Fortress of Argjiro – the renowned story of the famous princess Argjiro gave rise to the name *“Argjirokastra,”* given to the city in 1336. The Weapons Museum, located inside of the fortress, displays weapons from the Paleolithic period up until the Second World War. During your stay in Gjirokastra you also can visit



the Ethnographic Museum. Gjirokastra is famous for its food specialties such as shapkat, laropit, byrek (different kinds of pies), and several dairy products known throughout Albania. Some of the more interesting objects and places you might visit are the Theater of Sofratika, the ancient city of Antigonea, the Tekke of Melan, and the village of Sotira. The Theatre of Sofratika, belonging to the Roman city **Adrianopoli** from the 2nd century A.D., held 4,000 spectators in 27 tiers. Antigonea is an ancient city from the 2nd century B.C. and is nowadays an archaeological park situated in the Lunxhëri area, east of Gjirokastra and close to the village of Saraqinisht. It is thought that the city was founded by King Pyrrhus of Epirus, who named the city after his wife Antigonea. The city was 35 hectares in size; its ruins are located on a hill at 600 m above sea level. Tourists can visit the remains and fragments of the surrounding

wall, the agora (market), and the stoa of the city, which are 59 m long and 9 m wide. It is worth mentioning that in the area, archaeologists discovered a seven-inch bronze statue representing Poseidon, God of the Sea, and the Sphinx of Antigonea. Both objects are displayed in the National History Museum in Tirana. The **Tekke of Melan** can be found only 4 km south of the small city of Libovoha. This religious object of the Bektashi sect is open to everyone and guests are not only welcome but also treated with a special hospitality. The village of **Sotira** is located in the region of Dropulli, populated by a Greek minority. It is a mountain village of a rare beauty with little stone houses surrounded by the fir forest of Sotira and many water springs. The region of Dropulli, is known all over Albania for its fine women's' folk costumes and their elegant dances.



Gjirokastra and the Castle

Adriatic
Sea



Ionian
Sea

Vlorë - Radhima 22km
Vlorë - Apollonia 42km
Vlorë - Amantia 20km

Vlorë - Narta 5km
Vlorë - Orikumi 33km

Vlora

Vlora is one of the largest and most populous cities in Albania. It is 130 km from the capital, 120 km from Mother Teresa International Airport, and is home to the second largest port in Albania. Vlora is rich in history and antiquity. This historic city dates back to the 6th century B.C., when it was known as Aulona. Fragments of the massive wall surrounding Aulona have been found in the center of the city, close to ***Sheshi i Flamurit (Flag Square)***. In 1081, the city fell under Norman dominion. In the 14th century it was part of the Kingdom of Arbëria, ruled by the Balshaj, Albanian princes, until 1417 when the city was invaded by the Ottomans. In 1812, the city came under the control of Ali Pashë Tepelena, and one century later, on November 28th, 1912, it became the first capital of an independent Albania, ruled by the government of Ismail Qemali. The most interesting

sights in Vlora include the Independence Museum (in the headquarters building of the first government), the ***History Museum***, and the ***Ethnographic Museum***. Among the religious objects in Vlora, one of the most important is the ***Mosque of Muradie***, built in 1542 by the chief architect of the Ottoman Empire, Mimar Sinani, who was originally from the region. He is the constructor of the famous Suleymaniye Mosque in Istanbul and is also known for his work in other cities in Turkey such as Edirne (for the Selymie Mosque), Erzurum, and others. Also, a prominent hill above the city is home to the ***Bektashi Tekke of Kuzum Babai***. The site offers an amazing view of the city of Vlora, the peninsula of Karaburun, the island of Sazan, and the lagoon of Narta. There are also several interesting clubs and restaurants in the city of Vlora.



Vlorë Beach

Narta

North of the city of Vlora is the lagoon of Narta, the second biggest lagoon in Albania. There are 195 species of waterfowl living in the area and Mediterranean woods cover the tract of land dividing the lagoon from the sea. It's a good place to observe the seabirds or to fish. The water is full of different kinds of fish, especially eels and bass. The village of Narta stands south of the lagoon on the water's edge, and is surrounded by low hills covered with vineyards that are used to make one of the

best artesian wines in Albania. The lagoon also offers the picturesque view of the village of Zvërneci and of the nearby island, which hosts the Byzantine-style Church and the Monastery of Saint Mary. The lagoon ends with the Cape of Treporti, which joins the forest-covered hill to form a beautiful natural ensemble.

Radhima

Continuing the journey southward, you will be able to enjoy the panoramic view of this part of the Gulf of Vlora. After passing through the tunnel in the area known as *Uji i Ftohtë (Cold Water)*,



named after a nearby mountain stream that flows into the sea), you will see the tourist area of Jonufri, with its small rocky beaches known for their crystal-clear waters. Beyond Jonufri lies Radhima, which continues for several kilometers up to the **Dukati** stream, near the small city of **Orikumi**. The beaches in Radhima have beautiful colors, with vivid contrasts between the deep blue of the sea and the green hills, with their Mediterranean olive and citrus plantations. The Gulf of Vlora is also the perfect place to go diving. There are several sunken ships, such as "PO",



the Italian hospital ship sunk in 1941 during World War II. You may also want to dive into the waters of **Zhiron** to observe the green and black algae.



Orikumi

The small city of Orikumi lies on the southern end of the Gulf of Vlora, near a marina that can berth 650 yachts. Orikumi was one of the most important cities in the ancient world; the settlers from the island of Eubea founded it during their retreat from the Trojan War. Orikumi's strategic position turned it into the main port of the Illyrian Amant clan and it played an important role in the civil wars between Caesar and Pompey. During the Byzantine period,

the small port of Orikumi took the holy name "*Jericho*" because of the presence of a Jewish community in the bay of Vlora. During the Ottoman occupation, Orikumi took the name of "*Pasha Liman.*" The most important archaeological object is the antique theater of Orikumi, with 400-500 seats. Another notable local site is the *Church of Marmiroi* from the Byzantine period. Orikumi is a good starting point if you want to explore the peninsula of Karaburun, which encloses



the western part of the Gulf of Vlora. The western shore of Karaburun is spectacular, with small gulfs and isolated beaches with deep and clear water. The marine **Cave of Haxhi Alia**, a 17th century sailor from Ulqin, lies north of the peninsula. Antique writings have been found in the steep slopes close to the **beach of Gramë**, whose name derives from the Greek word Gramata. In this place was supposed to be the ancient temple of Ledea, a Pelasgian princess



The Marmiroi church

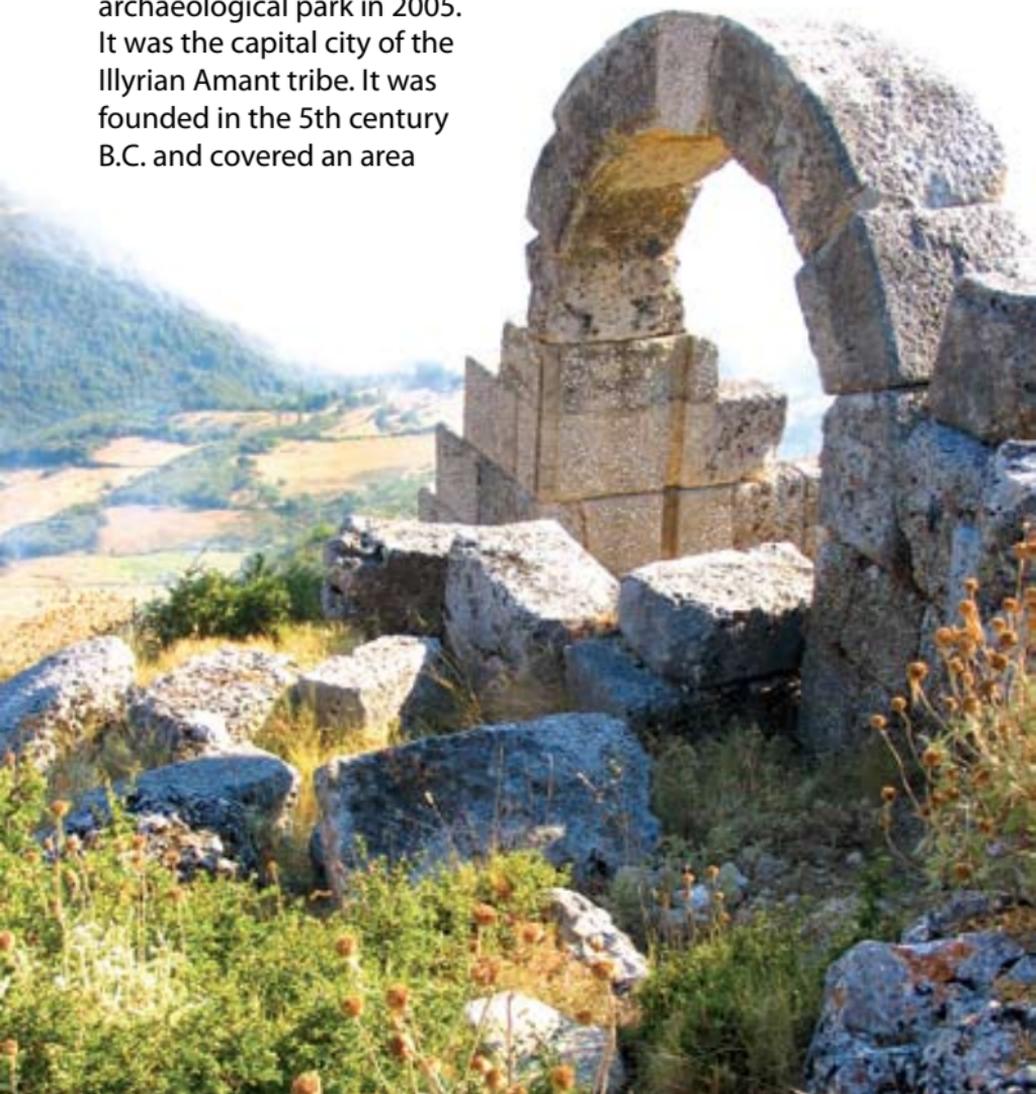


Amantia

The ruins of the antique city of Amantia stand southeast of the Vlora District, close to the village of Ploçë.

Amantia was declared an archaeological park in 2005. It was the capital city of the Illyrian Amant tribe. It was founded in the 5th century B.C. and covered an area

of 13 hectares. The most interesting objects for visitors are the antique Stadium of Amantia, 60 m long and 12.5 m wide, and the fortifications.



Apollonia

Fieri is 34 km from Vlora, and Apollonia is 12 km from Fieri. The city of Apollonia, named for the Greek God Apollo, was founded in the beginning of the 7th century B.C. by Corinthian settlers. The first documentation of the settlers' presence dates back to 588 B.C. The city, located in proximity to the **Aoos (Vjosa) River**, had 60,000 inhabitants, a large city for its time. Among 24 cities in the ancient Mediterranean world with the same name, Illyrian Apollonia was the most

important, as it served as a middleman for trade between the Illyrians and the Hellenes (Greeks). The city remained equally prominent during the Roman period; Octavian Augustus studied oratory here. The vast area covered by monuments, the wonderful view of the plain of Myzeqe and the Adriatic sea, and its proximity to big cities and the southern beaches all make Apollonia Archaeological Park an important site for cultural tourism and also easily reachable for visitors.

The Monastery of St. Mary





The ancient city of Apollonia



Vlorë - Llogara 37km
Palasa - Himara 15km
Borshi - Lukova 16km

Llogara - Palasa 13km
Himara - Qeparoi 13km

Llogara

The Llogara National Park lies approximately 40 km south of the city of Vlora. It is situated on the slopes of the **Llogara Mountain** and covers a surface area of 810 hectares, with elevations ranging from 470 to 2,018 m above sea level. The park combines the beauties of a mountain with a seaside climate. You can enjoy part of its magical beauty while traveling along the Vlorë-Sarandë national highway at **Qafa e Llogarasë**, 1025 m above sea level. Here, medicinal and decorative plants are interspersed within



a forest of pine trees. The park is also home to several animal species. After 20 minutes of driving along the national highway, you will enter the Albanian Riviera. Here, you can stay overnight in the park and enjoy the restaurants, contemporary clubs, activities, and excursions. It is also a great place to enjoy aerial sports as it is known for international aerial sporting events like parachuting and hang-gliding.

Palasa

After passing Qafa e Llogarasë on a road that dates back to the time of Pompey, you descend into the Albanian Riviera. This warm Mediterranean zone has nearly 300 sunny days a year, and the average temperature in July is 25°C (77°F). The list of places to visit begins with the **beach of Dhraleo (Palasë)**, known for its clear waters. Pompey and his army stopped at this beach in ancient times, when it was known as **Palestra**.

The beach of Dhraleo



Dhërmiu

Dhërmiu is famous for its crystal-clear waters and small, intimate pebble beaches, such as *Jaliksari*, *Shkambo*, and *Gjipea*. Situated at the foot of a 70 m cliff, Gjipea is a rare beauty. Close to Dhërmiu is the legendary ***Cavern of the Pirates***.

Dhërmiu is a picturesque village thought to have first been inhabited in 49-48 B.C. The village is home to the

Monastery of Shën Maria, the **Church of Shën Todhri**, the **Church of the Ipapandia** and the **Church of Shën Mitri**, with its frescos dating from the 12th-14th centuries. The main entertainment options in Dhërmiu are swimming, water sports, and diving. There are many hotels, restaurants, pubs, and discotheques. The restaurants combine traditional and foreign cuisines, and serve many seafood specialties.



Vunoi

8 km south of Dhërmiu is the village of **Vunoi**, which is built on a hill facing the sea and is well known for its traditions and patriotism. Here you can visit old churches like the **Church of Shën Spiridhoni**, built in 1778, and the **Church of Mesodhia**, with

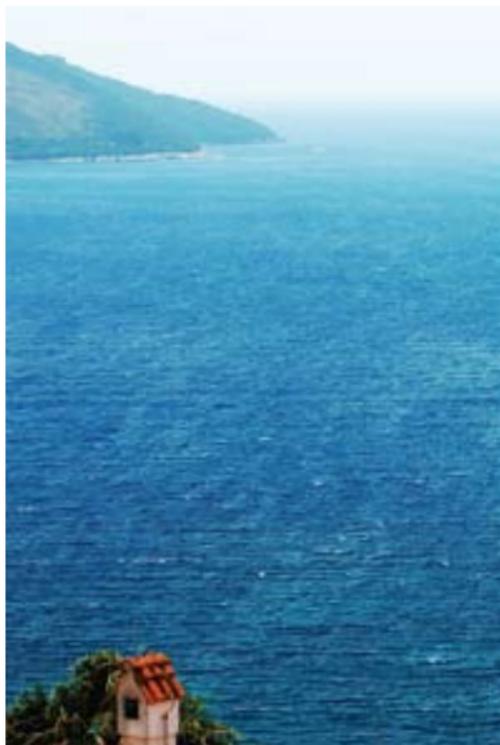
paintings from 1783. There are also several architectural landmarks such as the ruins of the **House of Odise Kasneci** and the tower-like **House of Shane Kote**. From here, follow the road to the wonderful *beach of Jala*, whose gulf is distinctive from those in the rest of the Riviera.



Himara

Continuing your tour towards the south, you will come across the small city of Himara, which has two neighborhoods: **Old Himara**, built on the hill, and **New Himara**, in the gulf of **Spille**. Himara has five beaches: **Filikuri**, **Spille**, **Llamani**, **Potami**, and **Livadhet**. They are all gravel beaches with deep, clear waters. The city comes to life during the summer tourist season, when visitors take up residence in the hotels or in rented houses. Himara is the ancient residence and city of the Illyrian Kaon clan. It was settled in the 5th century B.C. and its name is of Pellazgë (pre-Illyrian) origin. There are several religious sites to visit such as the **Church of Shën Maria e Athalit**, the **Church of Cassiopeia**, the **Church of All Saints**, and the **House of Lilo Llazari**, which has been turned into a cultural monument. Another site to visit is the **Castle of Ali Pashë Tepelena**, built on a small

peninsula in the tectonic gulf of Porto Palermo. The castle was built in the shape of a triangle and has 20 m high walls. Ali Pasha dedicated this castle to his wife, Vasiliqia. It is said that it was built on top of the ruins of an ancient castle. Himara is particularly noted for its traditional Albanian iso-polyphonic songs (part of UNESCO oral art patrimony).



*The
castle
of
Ali
Pasha
in
Porto
Palermo
Himara*



Qeparoi

The village of Qeparoi is located close to the gulf of Porto Palermo and has its own distinctive beach. **Old Qeparoi**, built on the hillside, has several historical sights including the three-story **Towers of Ali Pasha**, the **Monastery of Shën Dhimitri**, and the **House of Minella Gjika**.



*The Saint Mary Church,
Qeparo*

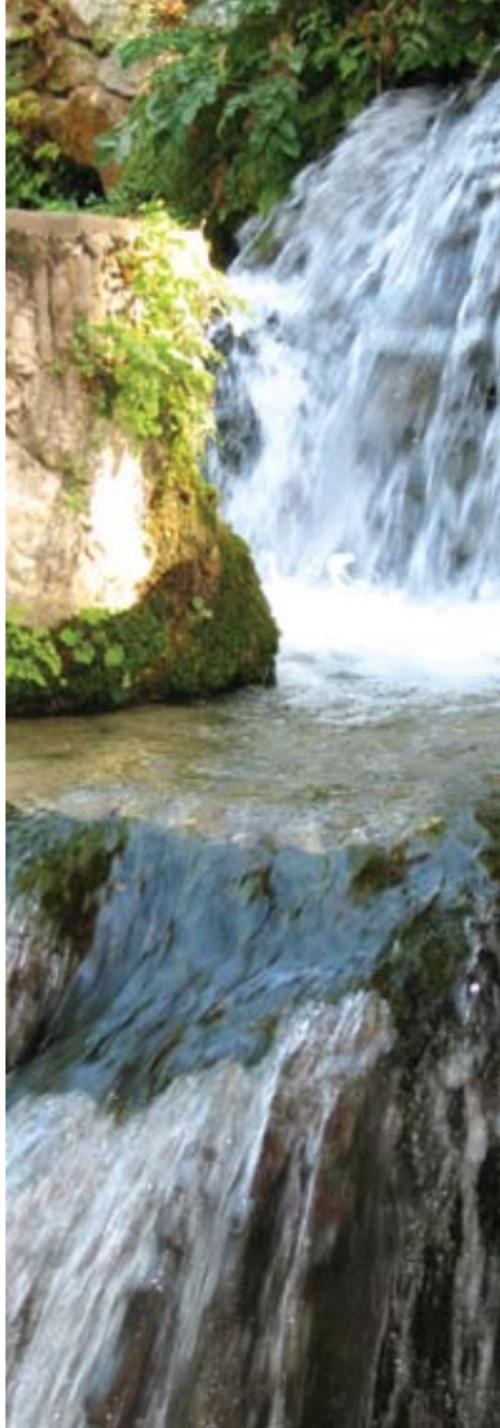


Borshi

The village of Borshi is situated a few hundred meters away from the shore and about 20 minutes from Himara. It is the largest beach of the Albanian Riviera and its clear waters stretch for almost 6 km. Several hotels, clubs, discotheques, and restaurants are built along the length of the beach. The hospitality of the villagers and the traditional dish of grilled lamb are distinctive features found in Borshi.



The Sopoti Castle, Borshi



Lukova

The last seaside village on the Albanian Riviera is the village of Lukova, which is well known for its terraces of citrus and olives. 2 km further you will find the popular **Buneci Beach**, whose crystal-clear

stream flows directly into the Ionian Sea. South of Lukova towards the **Gulf of Kakome** are several kilometers of coastline characterized by gleaming white flint stones. You also can find a number of underwater caves in this area.





Shkodra - Zogaj 10km
 Shkodra - Lezha 47km
 Lezha - Kune Vaini 5km

Shkodra - Velipoja 22km
 Lezha - Shëngjini 7km

Shkodra

Shkodra is one of the oldest cities in Albania, founded in the 4th century B.C. as the center of the Labeat tribe of Illyrians. Shkodra has been occupied several times throughout history: first by the Romans (168 B.C.), then the Serbians (1040), the Venetians (1396), and finally by the Ottomans (1479). The city returned to Albanian control as the feudal principality of the Balshaj during the 14th century

and served as the municipal center of the Bushatllinj Pashallëk from 1757 to 1831. Shkodra is rich with cultural heritage; the city itself as well as the people bears the pride that the large number of artists, musicians, painters, photographers, poets, and writers born here strove to create. Shkodra's main tourist attraction is **Rozafa Castle**. Rising majestically upon a rocky hill west of the city, the outcroppings and battlements paint a blazing



picture against the setting sun. It is surrounded by the waters of three rivers; the **Drini, Buna, and Kiri**. Much like the town it protected, the castle has Illyrian origins. According to the historian Tit Liri, "it was the strongest area of the Labeats." Like all ancient works, the castle comes with a popular local legend. Rozafa was the name of the bride of the youngest of three brothers who originally built the castle. The three men worked

tirelessly by day laying mortar and stone but the walls always crumbled overnight. Consulting a wise man they learned that to expel the evil tearing at their daily work and protect their friends and family with a strong castle that would last through the ages, one of their wives needed to be entombed within the walls. The brothers made a heart-wrenching pact not to alert their wives to this danger, and whoever brought her husband his noon meal



the following day would be sacrificed. The elder brothers broke their word however, and it was Rozafa alone who came with food. When she heard the proclamation, she wept for her newborn son and husband, but allowed herself to become a living part of the walls so that the castle could be built. According to both legend and local folklore, the calcareous water flowing at the entrance of the castle is

the milk flowing from one of her breasts, which she requested be left exposed so that she could feed her baby. She also pleaded for one foot and one arm to be left free, in order to rock her son's cradle at night and sooth him during the day. Historians tell us a less enchanting and more scientific background of the castle's characteristics. It reflects the dominion of the **Balshaj family** but passed through enough other ruling periods that each left their own signs and markings on the grounds, including a distinct Venetian flare, some Ottoman architecture from the 16th and 17th centuries, and even a few modifications from the Bushatllinj family during the 18th and 19th centuries. Within the castle walls is a museum where a discerning lover of antiquities could spend a comfortable afternoon reading more of the history, and a restaurant has been added to showcase local food and traditional dress.



Church of "Zoja e Shkodrës"



In addition to the castle, you might also want to visit other notable landmarks, such as the city's History Museum, near the stadium, and the renowned Marubi Fototekë.

*The Historic Museum
(The former house
of Oso Kuka)*



The Mesi Bridge



Close to the city lies Lake Shkodra, the biggest lake in the Balkans with a surface area of 368 km² (149 of which are Albanian waters). The lake is notable for its different banks: the southern bank is high and rocky while the northern one is low and marshy. For a leisurely cyclist or driver, two main tourist centers are the towns of **Shiroka** and **Zogaj**, located

on the shoreline. Famous for their fishing skills, each village hosts restaurants serving the most popular local dish, baked carp. Every August 15th the Catholic pilgrimage of **Shën Rrok**, or Saint Rocco, is observed in Shiroka to celebrate the historic protector of the town. Tradition holds that after this date it is ill advised to swim in the lake's waters.



Lake Shkodra enjoys warm temperatures, absorbing sunlight most days during the year. Swimming, sunbathing, and rowing are popular for both tourists and locals. Besides these amusements, the lake constitutes a very important natural ecosystem with 281 species of birds and 45 species of fish including carp, eel, and shtojza.



The Shkodra Lake



The **beach of Velipoja** is only 22 km away from the city of Shkodra. Possessing unusually high iodine content, the long shoreline is famous for its therapeutic sand and many people have taken to burying themselves in it to relieve bodily aches and pains. Besides swimming and fishing, the surrounding scenery offers many interesting natural objects worth seeing, such as the small island of Franc Joseph positioned at the mouth of the Buna River, close to the Montenegro border.



The beach of Velipoja



Lezha

The city of Lezha is located 47 km south of Shkodra. Another of Albania's ancient cities, it was first mentioned in historical documents by the name Lissus. In 1398, after the construction of its castle, the city was under direct control of the feudal **family of Lekë Dukagjini**, but was eventually conquered by soldiers from Venice. One of the most important historical events for Lezha, and indeed for all of Albania, was the famed "Assembly of Lezha" on March 2nd, 1444, where under the leadership of national hero Skanderbeg, the Albanian princedoms

united against the Ottomans. The **Memorial Grave of Skanderbeg** is here, at the **ex-Cathedral of Shën Kolli**, where he was buried in 1468. The Castle of Lezha, another Illyrian monument, sits on a hilltop overlooking the city below. Inside the castle, ruins of an Ottoman mosque, a Roman Arch, and an Illyrian Tower all rest together for the ages. Only a few minutes from the city there is the sandy beach of **Shëngjini** at the foot of Mount Renci. The sunny beach community of Shëngjini boasts a long and colorful history, known as both "Cesarean" and "Nymphem" in past centuries. It was here that the Roman general Marcus Aurelius embarked with his fleet in order to chase Pompey during the civil war that he and Julius Caesar engaged in. The mouth of the Drini River is located



*The Monumental Tomb
of National Hero,
Gjergj Kastrioti - Scanderbeg*



The Castle of Lezha

nearby, providing an amazing ecosystem becoming more and more of a key attraction for international ecotourism. Also in the neighborhood is the **Kune-Vain** National Park. With approximately 70 species of birds, 22 species of reptiles, 6 species of amphibians, and 13 species of mammals, it is a wide and

diverse protected habitat. One of the most pleasant surprises is the sandy island of Kune, which turns into a peninsula depending on the water level. With 227 different kinds of plants growing on the island, Kune's dense vegetation provides nesting grounds for many birds and, consequently, many bird-watchers.



TOUR 5



Bajram Curri - Shoshan 3km
Dragobi - Valbona 10km

Shoshan - Dragobi 9km
Valbona - Rrogami 10km

Valbona

The *Valbona River Valley* lies in the eastern part of the *Albanian Alps*. A national park of 8,000 hectares, it is one of the most beautiful natural areas in Albania. The park lies about 22 km from the

alpine city of **Bajram Curri**.

Before entering the valley you will find the spring (vrellen) of Shoshan, located only 3 km away from Bajram Curri. This spring rushes through limestone fissures on its way to the Valbona River creating



an attractive canyon 2-3 m wide and 50 m deep. After entering the valley, you will pass several picturesque villages. The first, with alpine style houses, is called **Dragobia**, and it is where the valley narrows.



Past Dragobia, at the foot of the mountain where the **Cerremi** stream joins the Valbona River, is the famous cave where the national hero Bajram Curri was besieged and killed. It was after this event that the city took his name. **Valbona (or Selimaj)** is located 25 km away from the city of Bajram Curri and is the most important inhabited center of the valley. It is full of traditional houses that create a picturesque view in symmetry with the natural wonders of the valley, which widens again at this point.



In **Selimaj**, there is a comfortable and traditional hotel, or you may have the opportunity to stay at a village home, for the inhabitants' generosity and hospitality are well known. The zone is also known for its characteristic regional cooking, with specialties such as mazja, flija (a many layered

pancake-like dish cooked outdoors over open coals and steamed, often served with local honey), and pitja. Beyond Selimaj, the road continues through the valley among marvelous views of nature with rich colors of both springtime and of the snow that covers the peaks of the craggy mountains.



The final village before you arrive at the source of the Valbona River is Rrogam. **Rrogam** is a remote village surrounded by virgin and intact nature. The entire valley is resplendent with rare colors and beauty. On one side, you see the crystal-clear waters of the Valbona, and on the other the sharp but verdant mountain edges. Up until May you can enjoy the contrast of the clean white snow on the treetops against the blue sky. The flora of the national park includes a variety of plants and trees, the most wide-spread groves of which are the *Hormoq tree*. The rest consists of beech woods, arnen, walnuts, chestnuts, and wild apple trees. There are also many forest fruits such as blueberries and strawberries. The animals in the park include bears, wolves, wild cats, and even herds of wild goats climbing on the rocks. In the river can be found marble trout, a rare fish found in the crystal-clear waters of the Valbona with a special and exquisite taste.



The valley, the park, and all the surroundings are known for heavy snowfall, which starts in early November and lasts almost until May. The average amount of snow in this region during the year is 100 cm. There are many outdoor activities in the national park, such as skiing,

mountain climbing, fishing, excursions and trekking throughout the valley and streams (**Cerremi, Kukaj**), and canoeing along certain parts of the river. Valbona may also serve as a starting point if you wish to climb the *Jezerca Mountain*, the second highest mountain in Albania.





Shkodra - Razma 41km
Boga - Thethi 17km

Razma - Boga 33km
Shkodra - Vermoshi 95km

Razma

An alpine tour of Albania isn't complete without a stop in the famed Western Alps, or *Alpet Perëndimore*. Here you will enjoy the unique opportunity to walk, breath, sleep, and eat amidst the legends dating from Homer



and through modern tales of our majestic mystery and intrigue. This tour gives you the rare chance to enjoy the heart of the Albanian Alps, *Gropa e Thethit*. The journey begins from the cultural capital of Shkodra and wanders 41 km away to the village of Razma. Situated on a blackberry hill at the feet of the *Veleşik Mountain*, Razma stands amid lush forests of pine and birch trees. Meadows and amazing alpine pastures abound, drenching any visitor with a keen eye in the beauty of the Balkans. Even in the depths of winter when the snow drifts to its highest level of the season, adventure tourists visit Razma. Several hotels already exist and others are being completed. Common activities on the excursions are mountain climbing, skiing, and, weather permitting, camping.



Boga

The road turns from Razma to the village of **Dedaj** and then onto Boga, a village surrounded by the Alps and described by Edith Durham in her book, "The Burden of the Balkans." It is here that the wealthy families of Shkodra built their houses and villas to rest and escape the city before the Second World War. Boga is the perfect place for mountain climbing, skiing, and cave spelunking. Among the most famous caves,

visitors often delve into the *Cave of Mulliri (Mill)*, *Akullore (Ice Cream)*, and *Njerëzvetë lagun (Wet People)*. The *Cave of Puci* is one of the most attractive, situated 1,087 m above sea level and 5 km deep. This cave is rich in stalactites, stalagmites, and wall veils, and branches into many different levels, five alone at the center. Passing through its curved galleries you can walk into the next cave, the *Cave of Husi*.



Thethi

After Boga, you can find one of the most popular tourist spot of the entire area, Thethi. Located 70 km from Shkodra, you must pass **Qafa e Tërthores** at 2,000 m. above sea level before descending to **Gropa e Thethit** by crossing a stream bearing the same name. It is a journey you'll want to have your camera ready for, full of long views from the mountains, with

water cascading down craggy hillsides and trees struggling for sunlight on rocky slopes. The area is rich in attractive sights like the **waterfall of Grunas**, 30 m high, the amazing cold-water sources of **Okol**, and the caves of **Birrat me Rrathë (Round Holes)** and **Arapi**. In the park people often amuse themselves by hiking, mountain climbing, skiing (especially on the



eastern slope), fishing, even mountain biking and spelunking. Almost 90% of the park area is covered by beech trees, providing shade for many different types of flowers such as the ***Wulfenia Baldacci***, discovered by the Italian botanist Baldacci. Fascinatingly, this flower is found only in Thethi. The fauna is just as rich as the flora, distinguished by the famed ***Golden Eagle***

and ***Rriqebulli (lynx)***. In the waters of the Stream of Thethi, marble trout make their home. While in Thethi you can stay in local hostels designed to display traditional alpine architecture. The characteristic dish of the area is ***fërliku (baked meat)*** or sample one of a large varieties of local trout. If time permits, many travelers enjoy a short excursion to the valley of the ***Shala River*** which brings them close to the heart of the Alps.



A waterfall in Theth





Vermoshi

Another interesting spot of the Western Alps is Vermoshi, part of the northern-most mountains of the country, located 95 km from Shkodra in the region of **Kelmendi** (from the Roman word “Clemens,” meaning gentle, simple, and good). The first thing to catch the eye along the journey is **Qafa e Rrapshit**, where you can see the crystal-

clear waters of the **Cemi River** creating a beautiful contrast with the surrounding landscape. During summer, the ponds of the river are perfect for sunbathing and many visitors stop to lounge in the sun and enjoy themselves.

Wulfenia Baldacci



Vermoshi stands in an alpine field 1,100 m above sea level surrounded by high slopes. You can entertain yourself by trekking, mountain climbing, skiing, or fishing for mountain trout. The locals pride themselves that their cuisine is only truly enjoyable for visitors when accented by their own dairy products, so be sure to indulge. The full

journey among the people of this Albanian region will give you not only the chance to live between a mythical atmosphere and the contemporary world, but will also let you enjoy the renowned hospitality mentioned by almost every foreigner who has been fortunate enough to visit.



TOUR 7



Lini - Pogradeci 25km
Korça - Voskopoja 24km
Korça - Vithkuqi 27km

Pogradeci - Korça 41km
Korça - Dardha 20km

Pogradeci

You enter the region of Pogradeci via the national highway where the road from Macedonia crosses *Qafa e Thanës*. This crossroad offers picturesque views of *Lake Ohrid*, a true pearl nestled between *Mali i Thatë (Dry Mountain)* in the east and the Mokra highland in the west. A little ways down, you might stop at the **Lini** peninsula and in the village of the same name just 25 km outside of Pogradeci.

It is said that in ancient times, this was the favorite holiday destination of the Roman Emperor Justinian's parents. In addition to the enchanting views are the mosaics of the *Bazilika e Linit*, dating back

to the 7th-6th centuries B.C. This ancient artwork exhibits an amazing ensemble of zoomorphic, floral, and geometric decorations resembling those of ancient Durrësi. The road to Pogradeci passes along the shore of the tectonic Lake Ohrid, the deepest lake in the Balkans at 285 m. This 2-4 million years-old lake is under UNESCO protection due to its unique value and houses 17 species of aquatic animal, 70% of which are native and 30% migrant. The sponge of Ohrid is found only here and in Lake Baikal. By the lakeside you will find an array of restaurants, clubs, and comfortable hotels. You must not miss a taste



of the traditional fish dishes, especially the ***baked speckled trout (Koran in Albanian)***, as well as the famous pickles and kollofacet. You might also sample the various wines on offer, but don't miss the traditional unique wine of Buti, or the famous ***Perla*** and ***Moskat*** raki of Pogradeci. The city of Pogradeci was settled in the Neolithic period, and it later became home to the Illyrian Enkelejdë and Desaretë clans, who built the ***Castle of Pogradeci*** on a hill at 870 m above sea level.



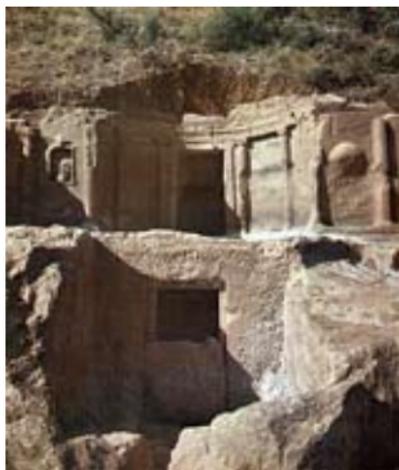
The Basilica of Lini



The city, with its mild climate, lends itself to year-round visits. Before leaving Pogradeci don't miss **Driloni** and **Tushemishti**, just 4-5 km south of the city. The Driloni source waters form a small lake, surrounded by beautiful greenery that makes the area and the nearby village of Tushemishti a unique oasis of beauty and tranquility. The region of Pogradeci is rich in striking and distinctive natural and historical monuments. You might visit the natural monument, "*Stone of Kamje,*"



which is located in the commune of **Dardhas** (on the way from Pogradeci to Korça, near the village of **Osnati**). It is 70 m high and suddenly rises out of the surrounding terrain like a “ship sailing in a sea of green.” The archaeological site and **Monumental Graves of Selca** lie 30 km away from Pogradeci. The monuments here date back to the 4th century B.C. and the five rocky monumental graves are found in very few places elsewhere in the Balkans.



The Monumental Graves of Selca e Poshtëme

The water sources of Driloni



Korça

The next surprise after the exceptional city of Pogradeci is the city of Korça, one of the biggest urban centers in Albania. During springtime, the soft fragrance of sturgeon flowers fills the main avenue, while during winter you can enjoy a quiet stroll under the snow-dusted trees. In 1887, the first Albanian school

opened in Korça. During the First World War, the French invaded the city and it became the "Autonomous Region of Korça." In 1917, the French Lyceum (one of the most notable schools in Albania) opened. Besides its history, Korça's traditional architecture, with its villa-like houses encircled by banisters and flowery gardens, attract





attention. The zone between Republika and Shën Gjergji boulevards is very interesting: here, housed in two traditional Korça buildings are the **Medieval Art Museum** and the **Prehistoric Museum**, displaying nearly 1,200 artifacts from the **Prehistoric, Hellenic, Roman, and early-Byzantine eras**. Other objects of interest include the **Museum-house of the master artist Vangjush Mio**

and the **Museum of the Bratko Collection**, opened in 2003 and displaying art objects from the Far East.

The house museum of the wellknown painter Vangjush Mio



You might want to also visit the bazaar (dating from the turn of the 20th century), the **Mosque of Iliaz Bej Mirahori** (the oldest monument in the

City, dating back to 1484), and the **Cathedral Ngjallja e Krishtit (Resurrection of Christ)**, one of the biggest cathedrals in the Balkans.



The city is known for its characteristic songs, called "*serenades*," which are played by guitars. In the city taverns you can sample local dishes (be sure to not miss the *lakrori with onion and tomato as well as the tava e korminës*), and don't forget the Festival of Carnivals, the biggest celebration of its kind in all of Albania.



The Carnivals of Korça



Voskopoja

Voskopoja was historically one of the most important Balkan centers, dating back to 1330. It reached its golden age in 1794, with a population numbering 30,000 and contacts with Leipzig, Budapest, Venice, and Vienna. The city was also home to 27 churches, an academy,

a library, and the first printing house in the Balkans (in 1720). Pay a visit to the **Monastery of Shën Prodhomi**, **Church of Shën Kolli (1721)**, **Church of Shën Thanasi**, **Church “Fjetja e Shën Marisë,”** and the **Church of Shën Ilia**, which houses pictures of famous Albanian iconographers, such as David





Selenicasi and the Zografi brothers from Korça, who also worked in the Saint Mountain of Athos, in Halkidiki, Greece. In addition to its invigorating climate and pine-filled air, Voskopoja offers comfortable hotels and private houses for family tourism as well as a natural ski-run for skiing enthusiasts.



Dardha

Another unforgettable mountain spot is the village of Dardha, 20 km southeast of Korça, at 1,350 m above sea level. There is snow during the winter months, the air is crystalline, and the water of the village's many natural fountains is pure and invigorating. Look out for the unique folk women's'

costumes dominated by black and red (the colors of the national flag), visit the stone houses that offer hospitality to travelers, and don't miss a taste of the traditional plum raki and the *lakrori në saç* (a traditional pie made with cabbage between two sheets of dough, and baked in a wood fired oven).



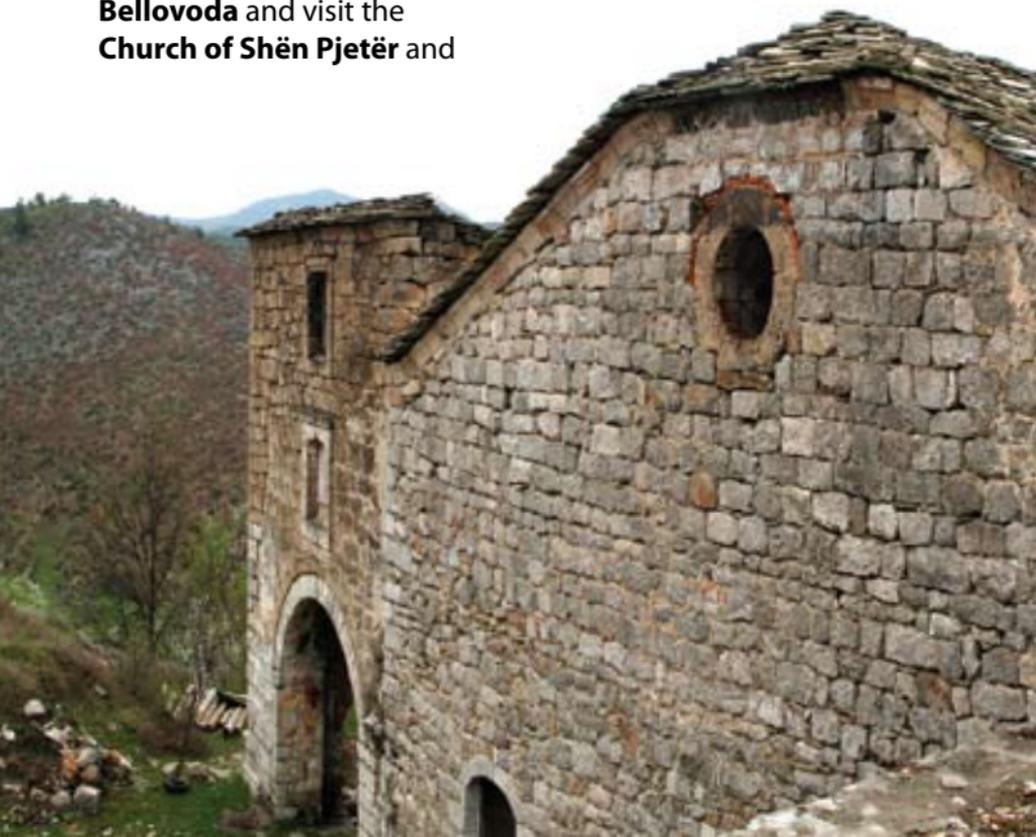
The spring in the village of Dardha



Vithkuqi

The mountain village of Vithkuqi, birthplace of the Albanian Renaissance pioneer Naum Veqilharxhi, stands 25 km southwest of the city of Korça. It has been a population center and a well-known economic and cultural center since medieval times. During your stay, you absolutely must drink the water of the **Bellovoda** and visit the **Church of Shën Pjetër** and

the **Church of Shën Pavël**. If you have enough time, you also should climb Rungaja (1,750 m above sea level) by foot or horse. Don't worry about accommodation for the local people have a reputation for hospitality and will surely invite you into their comfortable and characteristic homes.



Boboshtica.

Boboshtica is an attractive village 16 km from Korça with a range of rustic restaurants offering traditional regional

specialties; don't miss the mulberry raki. You may also visit the old churches of **Saint Demetrio (Shën Mitri)** and **Saint Giovanni (Shën Jovani)**. Boboshtica is known for its nearby ski resort of *Bigëll*, 1,700 meters above sea level, where diverse ski competitions are organized.



Saint Paul Church
Vithkuq



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Këlcyra - Përmeti 20km
Përmeti - Bënja 3km

Përmeti - Frashëri 30km
Kosina - Përmeti 10km

Këlcyra

As you leave either Gjirokastra or Tepelena, **Gryka e Këlcyrës** will appear in front of you. This natural gate of the Valley of Vjosa will be the first to say “Welcome,” showing its natural beauty, the high colorful mountains, and the magnificent **Vjosa River**, a rapid and blue river full of tasty fish and amazing cataracts. You should not continue your

journey without eating in the restaurants of Gryka e Këlcyrës, set among picturesque views of nature, to taste their lamb and dairy specialties. Past the small town of Këlcyra, known in antiquity by the name Klistyra, as you travel through the **Valley of Vjosa (Aos, in antiquity)**, you will be able to admire the sight of the mountains **Dhëmbeli, Trebeshina, Kokojka**, and,





on the horizon, ***Nemërçka***
("a big, regal woman")
cradling a valley
"embroidered" by the people
of this region through their
wisdom and hard work.

Përmeti

In Përmeti you will enjoy the relaxing calm, the flowers, and the greenery without end. You will find hospitality and a touching kindness in the streets, houses, restaurants, and hotels.

A night in the pleasant and comfortable hotels on the banks of the Vjosa will leave you with the impression of sleeping amidst the waves of the river itself. Përmeti, a city of flowers, roses, irreplaceable songs, cleanness, and tranquility (its antique name



was **Tryfilia**, inhabited by Illyrians), was known as an administrative center since the 15th century and its several rich bazaars were often visited by residents of the surrounding countries. Today, we invite you to see **Gurin e Qytetit (City's Stone)**, a surprising natural stone monument that distinguishes the city. You should also see the churches, especially the 18th century **Church of Leusa**, famous for its icons and wood engravings, and

the 12th century **Church of Shën Maria** in Kosina. The restaurants of Përmeti and the surrounding area offer a special cuisine and unforgettable service. Among the city's traditional famous dishes, you can sample ingjinari with olive oil, wild meat, mountain partridge me përsesh, boar meat, rabbit, and the delicious fish of the Vjosa. You should also taste the famous wine (**Kabërnë, Merlot, etc.**) and the traditional raki, as well





as the delicious gliko, a kind of jelly made from many types of fruits and especially from walnuts. During summer, you will find many beaches in Përmeti that look like pools carved out of the river's edge. The banks of the Vjosa are often crowded by fishing amateurs and during the summer there is an annual canoeing competition that starts from the source of the Vjosa, at the feet of the **Pindi Mountains**, and ends

with a ceremony in the city of Përmeti. There are two other annual rituals: the International Multicultural Festival in June and ***Dita e Verërave (Wine day)*** in May. During the same month, the city hosts a national festival dedicated to the famous personalities born in the nearby village of **Frashëri**.



Although it is a small city, Përmeti is the birthplace of many well-known politicians, scientists, writers, musicians, and figurative artists of the Albanian pantheon. While here, you should not miss the chance to visit Frashëri, 30 km away from the city. It is the birthplace of the Frashëri brothers and many other noted personalities that built the foundation of the Albanian nation and defined

what we call, “the Albanian gene.” However, this is not the only reason why we direct you to Frashëri. Traveling towards the village you will pass through the *Bredhi i Hotovës* National Park, meaning you will have the chance to see an incredible view with fir-woods, endless pines, and many coldwater sources. As you leave Përmeti behind, the road heads toward the Greek border, just 30 km away





from the city, towards the city of Leskoviku, famous for the thermal waters in **Vronomero** and the saunas of **Postenani**. But you cannot say goodbye to Përmeti without visiting the thermal waters of **Benja** and the **Valley of Lengarinca**, just 3 km away from the city. There are six natural outdoor sources of warm curative water there, even in winter. These waters

flow from the beautiful canyons of two bridges built in the time of Ali Pashë Tepelena: **Ura e Kaikut** and **Ura e Dashit**.



Autumn in the National Park of Hotova





Berati - Tomorri Mountain 40km

Berati - Osumi Canyons 50km

Berati

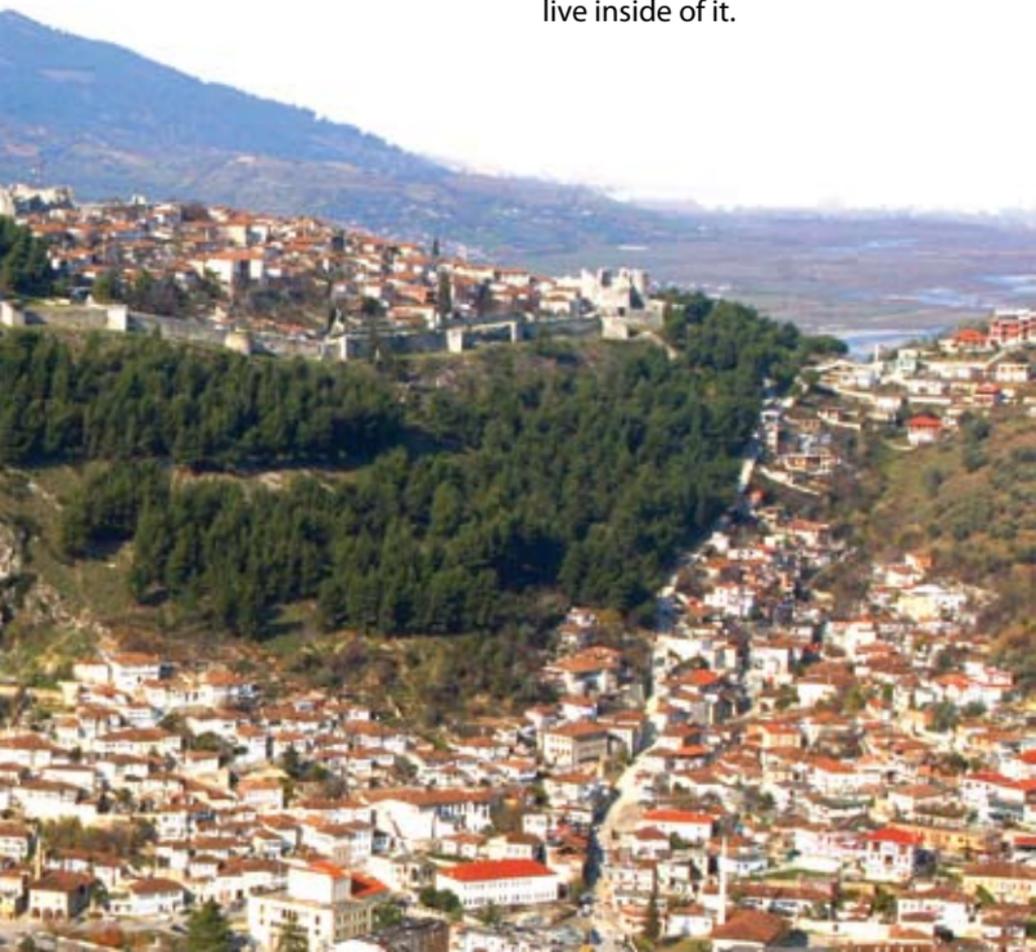
This 2,407 years-old city, the pride of Albanian antiquity and architecture, and under the protection of UNESCO, is

located 120 km from Tirana. The city forms a wonderful combination of eastern and western cultures, costumes, traditions, and outlook. Berati is a treasure-trove of Albanian



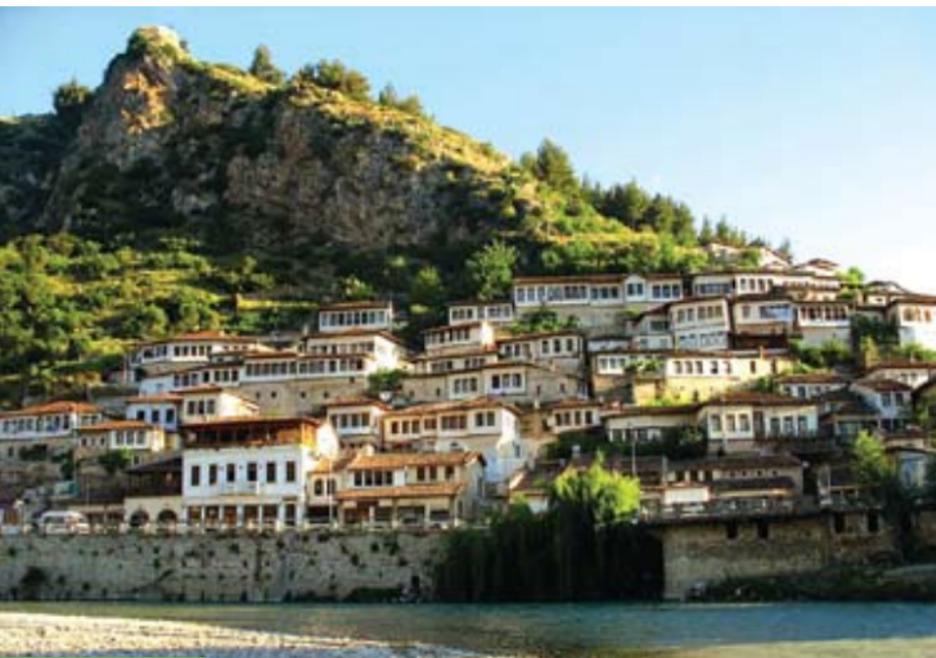
history and culture, and a testament to the country's tradition of religious harmony. The city's life began in the 6th-5th century B.C. as an Illyrian settlement. Later, in the 3rd century B.C., it was turned into a castle city

known as ***Antipatrea***. The castle expanded afterwards, particularly during the feudal dominion of the ***Muzakaj family***. Inside the castle, they built churches with precious frescos and icons, and also a calligraphy school. Today, the castle is made unique by the fact that people continue to live inside of it.



The three major neighborhoods of the old city are **Mangalemi**, **Gorica**, and **Kala**, where the castle itself is located. In Mangalemi, below the castle, you can see the famous view of the façades of the houses, with windows that seem to stand above each other. In general, a traditional house has two floors, where the second is prominent and has many cambered windows

and wood carvings. With its houses built along the steep hill, the view of Mangalemi is the reason that another name for Berati is "**City of the Floating Windows.**" Across the **Osumi River** lies the Gorica neighborhood, whose houses face those of Mangalemi. The arched bridge of Gorica, built in 1780, is a beautiful architectural monument constructed to link Gorica with Mangalemi.





The ensemble of the Byzantine churches in the castle of Berati is extraordinary. At the foot of the castle, there is the **Byzantine Church of Shën Mëhilli**, while the 13th century **Church of Shën Maria e Vllahernës**, the **Church of Shën Triadha (The Holy Trinity)**, and the post-Byzantine monumental **Cathedral of Shën Maria** are located within the castle. The Cathedral of Shën Mëria houses a museum of works by the famous iconographers of

the 16th century: **Onufri**, and his son, **Nikolla**. There are over 100 icons on display and they also include works of other artists such as **Joan Çetiri**, **Onufër Qiprioti**, and many anonymous painters. You also can visit the **Monastery of Shën Spiridhoni** in Gorica.

The Saint Mary and Jesus icon painted by Onufri



In 1417, the Ottomans occupied Berati and this conquest left its mark with the building of monuments to the Islamic faith, such as the **Xhamia e Kuqe (Red Mosque)** inside the castle, the **Xhamia e Plumbit** (1555), **Xhamia Mbret** (16th century), and the **Xhamia e Beqarëve** (1872).

The ruins of the Red Mosque



The Halveti Tekke





Other sites worth visiting are the ***Ethnographic Museum***, situated inside an 18th century *çardak* building, and the ***Gallery of Arts "Edward Lear,"*** a well known English painter who painted so much of Berati and Albania. In addition, Berati is known for its culinary and traditional dishes. It is worth tasting specialties such as ***Pula me përsesh*** and

Çorba e Tomorrit in the local restaurants.

The interiors of a traditional room at the Ethnographic Museum of Berati



Mount Tomorri

The city of Berati is a good starting point to explore Mount Tomorri (also called the Albanian Olympus, or "*Gods' Throne*"), located 30-40 km away from the city. Mount Tomorri is famous for its mystical appearance; it looks like a giant lion lying behind the city. This is one of the highest mountains in Albania, reaching 2,416 m above sea level. The western slope is the most beautiful and is covered with mixed



vegetation. The forest is mostly made of beech, pine, maple, ash, and fir trees.





Bears, wolves, foxes, weasels, and *rabbits* make up the park's animal population. Mount Tomorri is perfect for mountain climbing, trekking, and other similar activities, and the area surrounding the mountain is an ideal place for camping. Another interesting spot on the mountain is **Tyrbja e Kulmakut** and the grave of Abaz Aliu, the saint of the Bektashi believers,

situated at 1,200 m above sea level. This monument is believed to have first been a pagan temple, was later on converted to a Christian monument, and now is the present monument. During August, pilgrims come to his grave and many burnt offerings are made. This is the biggest pilgrimage for the Albanian and foreign Bektashi.

The Canyons of Osumi

The *Cave of Pirrogoshi* lies near the village of *Radeshi*, midway to the *valley of Osumi*, in the stream of **Çorovoda**. Pirrogoshi is the biggest and longest cave in

Albania, stretching almost 1,500 m with an entrance 5 m wide. The most interesting part of the cave is the giant corridor full of many different Carstic shapes. The cave ends with a deep



well full of bat colonies. **Gradeci Canyon**, the most beautiful and spectacular canyon of the valley of Osumi, stands close to the cave. It is 4 km long, 40 m high, and in different spots, only 1.5 m wide. Its slopes descend rapidly into the river. To reach the other canyons of Osumi, you must journey southward. These other canyons are located 3 km south from the town of Çorovoda. They are natural magnificent objects with a total length of 15 km. In this area, you can practice water sports like canoeing and kayaking. There are also several spots that serve as small beaches, such as **Varishta**.

The Kaso Bashi bridge





Osumi Canyon



Tirana - Kruja 32km
Tirana - Elbasani 54km

Tirana - Durrësi 39km
Durrësi - Kruja 46km

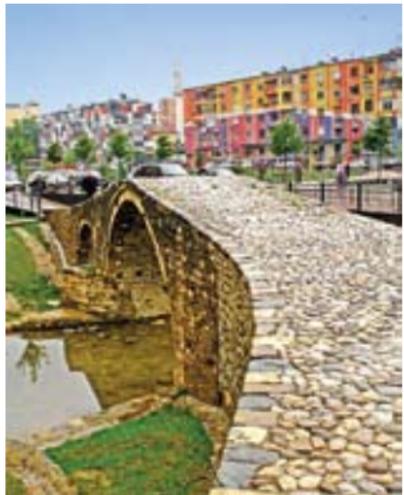
Tirana

Tirana, the heart and capital of Albania, like all other European metropolises has a never-ending movement and energy. With its clubs, pubs, cafes, and taverns, Tirana is worth discovering by both day and night. The value and hospitality shown towards tourists is something that will mark your journey not only in Tirana but also all over the country. There are different thoughts regarding the origin of the name of the city. Some think that it

relates to **Tyrrenia** (a name of Etruscan origins), while other believe that it relates to the word **Theranda** (harvest), or to the **Tirkan** (a castle at the foot of **Mount Dajti**). Your own journey might begin by visiting the museums and the key spots such as **Sheshi Skënderbej**, where you will be able to see the **Mosque of Et'hem Bey** (built between 1798 and 1812) and the 35 m high **Kulla e Sahatit** (the Watch Tower), built in 1822 with a San Marco style cupola. Next, you can visit the



famous Mosaic uncovered on the floor of an old Roman lodge. Its center configures the walls of the castle of the Roman emperor Justinian (A.D. 520). The monumental ***Tomb of Kapllan Pasha*** and the ***Ura e Tabakëve*** (a bridge constructed in the beginning of the 19th century, located on Bulevardi Zhan D'Ark) are other interesting place to visit. As a capital, Tirana has the country's finest museums, theatres, and galleries representing the national arts.



*Old bridge in Tirana
(Ura e Tabakëve)*



A visit to the **National History Museum**, the **Archeological Museum**, the **Natural Science Museum**, the private “**Mezuraj Museum**,” and the **National Gallery of the Arts** will leave wonderful memories. You can also pass a pleasant evening in the **National Theatre or the Opera and Ballet Theatre**. For dining, Tirana will be glad to offer you both a rich traditional cuisine and a variety of foreign fares, from Italian to Chinese, or even Indian.



Traveling by teleferic to the National Park of Dajti



There are also several clubs and restaurants in Mount Dajti to discover and enjoy. There is the ability to travel there by cable car, which is a very special experience. In the region of Tirana you may also visit the castles of Petrela and Preza, as well as some natural attractions, such as *Pëllumbasi Cave, Shkalla e Tujanit*, and more.



Kruja

The historic city of Kruja lies on a panoramic mountain slope 32 km away from Tirana, 600 m above sea level. The city is one of the most beautiful tourist spots due to its natural views and its history. Here **Gjergj Kastrioti (Skanderbeg)** protected Albania and Europe from the Ottomans. The most

important attraction of the city is the **Museum of the National Hero, Gjergj Kastrioti Skanderbeg**, situated in an Illyrian castle, which took its present facade during the 5th-6th century. The castle has nine towers, a few houses, and the **Teqja e Dollmasë**. The hamam is on the western side of



the castle. Inside the castle grounds, you can also visit the **Ethnographic Museum**, a typical house made of *çardak*, which belonged to the illustrious Toptani family. The traditional market of Kruja stands near the castle. It is one of Albania's largest handicrafts market. This *bazaar* has operated since the

15th century. On the top of the mountain over the town of Kruja is a religious spot called **Sari Salltiku** (Bektashi sect). There, visitors can find shelter and accommodation if they wish to climb to that spot. From there, travelers will find a magnificent view toward the valley and further to the Adriatic Sea.



Kruja

Durrësi

Durrësi, the biggest seaport of the country, is located 34 km away from Tirana. It is the most ancient city in Albania, with almost 3,000 years of history. Its foundation dates back to 627 B.C. when the Corinthians and settlers from Corcyra invaded the Illyrian territory of the *Taulants*. The city is home to many ancient

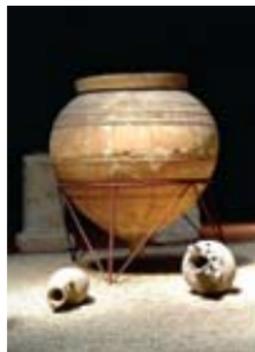
archaeological sites and finds. The most notable tourist attraction in Durrësi is the amphitheater of the Roman Emperor Adrian with 15,000 seats, the second biggest amphitheatre in the Balkans. During the 9th century, a small church with mosaic-covered walls was built nearby. You can also see the bathhouses of the 2nd century A.D. and the





nearby Byzantine forum of the 5th-6th century with marble columns. One-third of the original wall of the city castle is still standing, and you can even walk along the same road that Caesar himself trod. The Archeological Museum is a new building on Taulantia Avenue. It is one of the most important of its kind and is of great interest to visitors. The most renowned archaeological object uncovered in Durrësi is *"Bukuroshja e Durrësit,"* a mosaic of the 4th century B.C. Today, it is exhibited in the

National Historic Museum in Tirana. In addition to its historical value, Durrësi is also a beautiful place to take a modern vacation, due to its sandy beaches, hotels and metropolitan feel. You will find excellent restaurants and accommodations all along the sea's edge.



Elbasani

Located at the *Shkumbini River*, where it crosses the famous *Egnatia Road*, the city of Elbasani – ancient *Scampini* – is just 50 km away from Tirana. In ancient times, Scampini was a typical Roman fortification, but in the 4th century it received a new administrative status and, with its new name Hiscampis, it became one of the major cities of the new Epirus, home of the area's only Roman

legion. According to the historian Tit Livi, King Pyrrhus of Epirus was the first to teach others how to construct a camp, which is why the city's fortification is in the form of a square. In the 6th century, the city broadened beyond the walls of the castle due to its needs as center of the episcopate, with several cathedrals and a large basilica on the hill of Tepe, near the castle. In 1466, the Ottomans took control of the castle of



Skampini and reconstructed it almost entirely. They renamed the city Elbasani and it became center of the sanxhak between the 17th and 18th centuries. This was a time of heavy trade, both in and out of the country, which encouraged the significant development of handicrafts. Today, tourists can visit the **Church of Saint Mary**, the **King Mosque** (inside the city walls), the **Mosque of Naziresha** (very rare because

of its feminine name), and the **Ethnographic Museum**. In the district of Elbasani there are also two very unique churches painted by Onufri, the famous Albanian painter of the 16th century. You should travel to the villages of **Shelcani** and **Valëshi**, in the region of **Shpati**, to visit them. On the other hand, just 4 km before the entrance of Elbasani, coming from Tirana, there is the **Monastery of Shën Gjon Vladimiri**.





Shën e Premte Church in Valësh, painted by Onufri

Illyrian Woman, archaeological object, Elbasani



It dates back to 1381 and was constructed by the Albanian prince Karl Topia, who buried there the bones of Saint Gjon Vladimiri. A few kilometers away from Elbasani are the “*Ilxhat*,” the hot springs used since Roman times. There, you can find accommodations and other facilities.

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