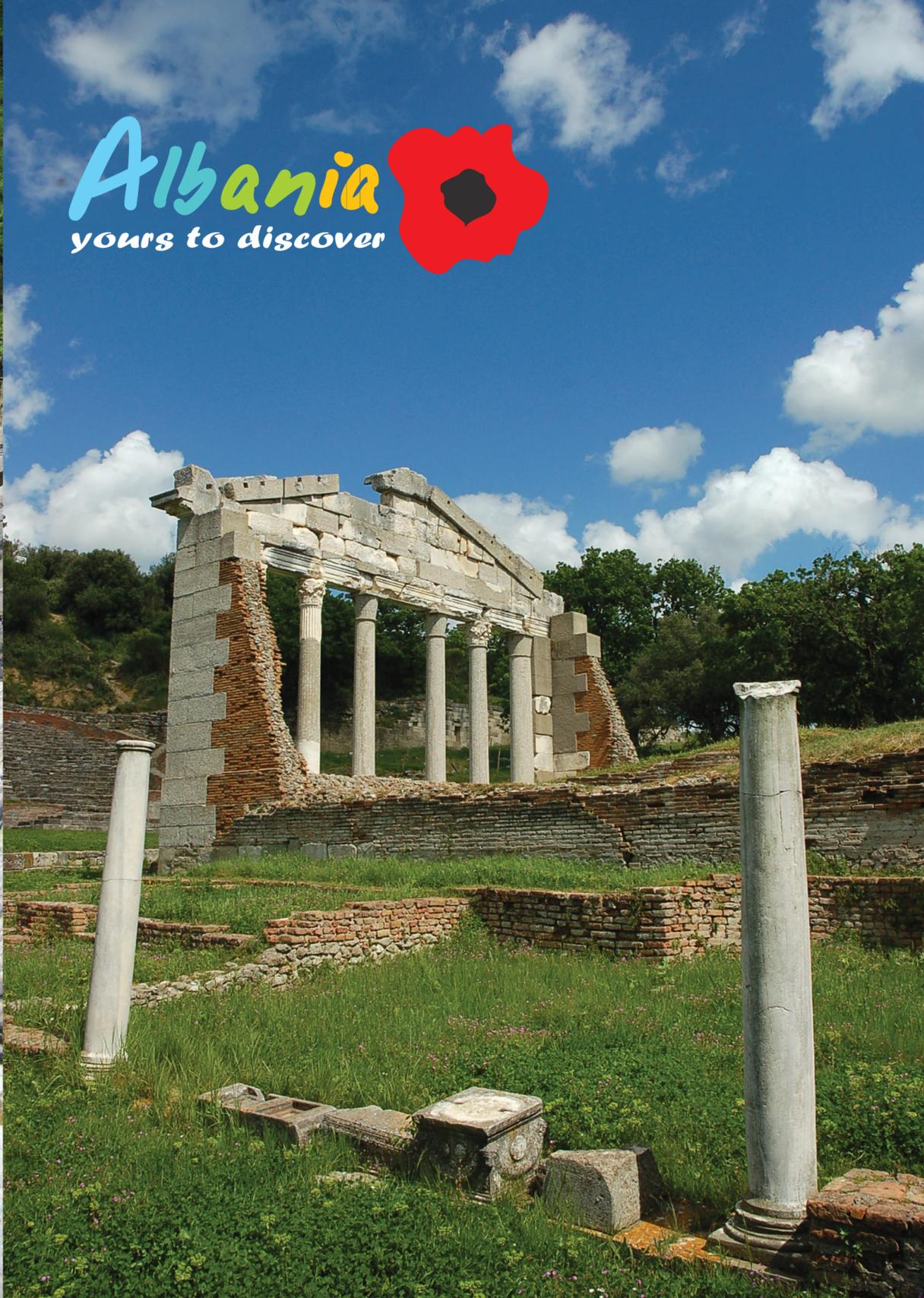


ALBANIA



Albania
yours to discover

1. The **Karavasta Lagoon** is one of the largest lagoons in the Mediterranean Sea and is home to the Dalmatian Pelican, as well as over 250 bird, mammal, and amphibian species. Five percent of the world's Dalmatian Pelican population is found in this lagoon.



2. Did you know that the first printing press in the Balkans was established in 1720 in **Voskopoja**, in eastern Albania? This printing press produced a total of nineteen books, mainly *Services to the Saints* but also the *Introduction of Grammar* by a local scholar. Moreover the city had an orphanage for children, known as *Orphanodioketerion*, possibly the first in the post-Byzantine Orthodox world, a hospital and a total of 24 churches.



3. **Mother Teresa**, whose given name was Gonxhe Bojaxhiu, was an ethnic Albanian. Mother Teresa's work has inspired commemorations throughout Albania, including the name of Albania's international airport: the Tirana International Airport "Nënë Tereza".



4. The second largest **Roman Amphitheater** in the Balkans, is located in Albania's port-city of Durrës. Built in the 2nd century AD, the theater could hold 20,000 spectators, about one-sixth of the current population of Durrës.



5. Two of the seven **"purple codices,"** written between the sixth and eighteenth centuries are preserved in the UNESCO city of Berat in Albania. The two Albanian codices are very important to international scholars and the study of ancient biblical, liturgical and hagiographical literature.

6. The 16th century Albanian iconographer, **Onufri**, was the first iconographer to introduce realism and individuality into facial expressions in religious iconography. Many of his works depicted scenes of Albanian landscapes, towns, peasants, shepherds and especially knights. A characteristic feature of Onufri's paintings is the so-called "Onufrian red" which is admired to this day.



7. Did you know that the first Emperor of the Roman Empire, Augustus, studied in **Apollonia**, near the city of Fier, in 44BC?

8. The main legacy of the Albanian national hero, **Skanderbeg**, was to stop the expansion of the Ottoman Empire in Western Europe. His contribution is commemorated in monuments, statues, and squares named after him in Rome (Italy), Vienna (Austria), Geneva (Switzerland), Michigan (USA), Skopje (Macedonia), Pristina (Kosovo), Paris (France), Spezzano (Italy) and Brussels (Belgium).



9. Albania is rich in natural water sources including rivers, lakes, and a long maritime coastline. Two of the most significant ecosystems are the lakes of **Shkodra** and **Ohrid**, recognized by the RAMSAR Convention and UNESCO. Lake Shkodër, also called Lake Scutari and Lake Skadar, shares a border with Montenegro and is the largest lake in the Balkan Peninsula. It is named after the city of Shkodra in northern Albania. It is one of the largest bird sanctuaries in Europe, with 270 bird species, among which are some of the last pelicans in Europe. Lake Ohrid connects the mountainous border between eastern Albania and Macedonia. As Europe's oldest lake and the deepest in the Balkans, Lake Ohrid preserves a unique aquatic ecosystem with more than 200 species.



10. Did you know that the origins of **iso-poliphony**, one of the world's most ancient a capella singing traditions, can be traced to the Illyrians, the ancestors of modern Albanians? The term **"iso"** refers to the drone, which accompanies the iso-polyphonic singing and is related to the "ison" of Byzantine church music, where the drone group accompanies the song. This unique musical tradition was recognized by UNESCO in 2005 when it was added to the list of "Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity."



11. The **Albanian language** is a stand-alone branch of the Indo-European language family and is now spoken by close to eight million people around the world. In addition to a large diaspora, over 80,000 Arbëresh speak Albanian in Southern Italy. The estimated 260,000 Arbëresh are direct descendants of Skanderbeg following a mass migration after his death in the late 15th century.



Why Albania?

Albania is a land to be loved. In this small Mediterranean country, virgin nature and cultural mysteries combine to create a unique sense of place. From the snow-capped mountains in the winter to the fields blanketed in spring by red poppies, Albania's landscape is ever-changing with the seasons, offering visitors the opportunity to enjoy a warm summer beach holiday or a mountain trek in the crisp and cool air of the fall. In Albania, visitors are welcomed as guests and witnesses to the country's rich cultural traditions and heritage. The warm hospitality of the Albanians, known worldwide, make every traveler feel at home in this small wonderful land. There are many brilliant beaches, spectacular mountains, scenic river valleys, and many other gems of nature for visitors to enjoy.

Several of the country's main cities are situated along the pristine seashores of the Adriatic and Ionian Seas. An important gateway to the Balkan Peninsula, Albania's ever-growing road network allows travelers to reach its neighbors to the north south, east, and west. Albania is within close proximity to all the major European capitals with short flights operating daily from its new and modern airport in Tirana.

Tourists can see and experience Albania's ancient past and traditional culture. The Albanian language is one of the oldest living languages in the world. Throughout the country there are newly discovered and exciting archaeological sites, preserved Illyrian and medieval castles, and Byzantine churches and monasteries which contain a rich collection of frescoes and icons.

The **Albanian coast** offers visitors an escape to calm waters as almost the entire coast is sheltered from winds making it a paradise for swimmers. Tourists will find the 450 km of coast a wonderful place to enjoy many of Albania's unspoiled beaches. The Albanian coast offers two distinct zones: the Adriatic and Ionian Seas. Beaches on the Northern Adriatic coast are shallow and excellent for children and family vacations. Much of the coastline is composed of pine forests and several lagoons for nature and wildlife lovers. The southern Ionian coastline is dramatically rugged, with steep mountainous landscapes as a backdrop to smooth pebbled beaches below. The coastal waters offer many opportunities for water sports and diving.

Albanian cuisine offers a truly unique blend of Mediterranean flavors. "East meets West" in many discernable ways throughout Albanian culture, but nowhere is this more evident than in Albania's cuisine. Representing a rich historical past, the food of modern Albania has been developed over millennia and reflects a variety of influences. Among of the many typical dishes, visitors should not miss *byrek*, minced meat, vegetables, eggs and cheese in flaky pastry; *tavë kosi*, (traditional Albanian meal), mutton baked in a dish with yogurt and onions; *tavë korani*, a unique kind of trout found only in Lake Ohrid, baked with nuts, sauce and onions; and *pasha qofte*, a hot soup with meatballs, rice and eggs. Albania is well known for its "Scanderbeg" cognac, mentioned for its unique flavor and aroma. But the most popular and traditional of Albanian beverages is *raki*. It is usually made from grapes, though there are also other kinds of raki made from plums, mulberries, and walnuts.



Natural Splendors and Outdoor Activities

Within a small territory, Albanian nature is amazing. The country is home to fourteen National Parks, all of them offering something unique. For instance, Divjaka National Park is the most western nesting point in Europe for the Dalmatian Pelican, an endangered species that draws many birdwatchers. These wetlands have been protected by the International Convention of RAMSAR since 1994. In southern Albania, Butrint National Park is also a protected wetland due to its high diversity of flora and fauna. An added treasure nestled among the "jungle" of laurels and tall trees in this park is the archaeological remains of the ancient city of Butrint. Llogara National Park is located more than 1,000 meters above sea level and is only a short distance from the inviting beaches of the Albanian Riviera, where visitors combine the pleasures of fresh mountain air with the warmth of the sea. The clear, blue waters of the Adriatic and Ionian Seas will entice you with both their scenic vistas and the culinary delights they provide. The cliffs of Llogara are internationally recognized as one of the best places in the Balkans for air sports such as paragliding. Many other outdoor activities are also available in Albania, such as trekking, mountain climbing, hiking, skiing, rafting, kayaking, bird watching, fishing, mountain biking and more. Rivers crisscross this land and offer both the beauty of the canyons they have carved and the opportunity to traverse them via raft, kayak, or canoe. Visitors can organize these activities through the different travel agencies that specialize in outdoor and adventure tourism.

Albania is a mountainous country, with the highest peak, Mount Korabi (Dibra district), towering 2,751 m above sea level. Albania's mountains offer travelers a variety of opportunities, from spelunking to skiing. Some of the areas renowned for outdoor activities are: Dajti, Llogara, Dardha, Bozdoveci, Voskopoja, Valbona, and Thethi.

Culture Heritage at a Glance

Hospitality is a hallmark of Albanian culture dating back hundreds of years. It was written in the Ancient Albanian civil code, the Kanun of Lekë Dukagjini, "The house is always open for guests." Albanians are a friendly people and make visitors feel very welcome.

Located at the crossroads of ancient Rome and Byzantine Empire, many conquerors and peoples have passed through the region, leaving traces of their cultures. The treasures and remains of some of the world's great civilizations and are still visible today, including the Hellenes, Romans, Byzantines, Ottomans, Venetians and modern Italians. At our archaeological parks, tourists have the opportunity to touch the ruins of some of these mighty civilizations. "The land of the eagles," Albania is an attractive tourist destination, not only due to its varied landscapes, but also thanks to its rich cultural and historical treasures.

An assortment of Byzantine and post-Byzantine churches, mosques, monasteries with valuable frescoes and icons, old Ottoman-style bridges, and other monuments will all enrich your visit to Albania. And crowning the heights of many of the country's rugged mountains are castles dating back to the time of the Illyrians and into the Middle Ages.

The cities of Berat and Gjirokastra, with their traditional architecture, have also been highly praised throughout the centuries by the countless visitors who traveled through Albania. Fans of archaeology will surely marvel at the mystic atmosphere of Butrint and will enjoy the beautiful panorama of the ancient city of Apollonia.

UNESCO has also honored Albania by adding three sites to the culturally prestigious World Heritage List.

But Albania's culture does not stop there – artisan practices are alive and flourishing and the country's tradition of iso-polyphonic singing, under the protection of UNESCO, is recognized as unique in the world.

Albania's living connection to its rich cultural heritage is also complimented by its commitment to keep pace with a highly vibrant and contemporary life, echoing its affinity and presence in the European community. Albania is a place where, historically, different religions have peacefully coexisted side by side in a manner that has been internationally lauded as example of religious harmony.



Area: 28,748 km²
Capital city: Tirana
Population: 3,150,886 habitants
Language: Albanian
Highest Mountain Peak: Mount Korabi (Dibra district), which towers 2,751 m above sea level.
Largest Lake: Shkodra Lake 319 km²
Time zone: GMT +1
Currency: Lek

International Airport: "Mother Teresa" - Rinas
Climate: Albania has a mild Mediterranean climate. On average, Albanians enjoy a great deal of sunshine, second only to Spain in average annual sunny days. The overall climate is pleasant and favors outdoor activities.
Government: Parliamentary Democracy
Flag: Black double-headed eagle on red background
International telephone prefix: 00 355

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