

October 2025 Tour of Albania

Itinerary for 8 days, 9 nights

October 4 - 13, 2025

Day 1: Arrival Day (Saturday, October 4): Arrive at Tirana's Mother Theresa International Airport where you will be met by a driver who will take you to check-in at the Tirana International Hotel located right on Skanderbeg Square in downtown Tirana. Depending on your arrival time, meet your Tour Leader, Dr. Eyal, in the hotel lobby at 8 PM for a short night-time tour and dinner. Note that this is an informal pre-tour activity and optional if you are arriving late or tired from your travels. We will cover the same ground and in more detail on day two.

Day 2: Have a Capitol Day (Sunday, October 5): After breakfast, we will meet in the lobby at 8:30 AM where we will meet our local Albanian guide before heading out for our first full day of touring. We will start our tour of Tirana by first visiting Skanderbeg Square at the heart of this vibrant and hip city. Within sight of the square, we can see the National Historical Museum, the Opera and Ballet Theatre, City Hall, Tirana Castle, government ministries, the Et'hem Bey Mosque, Resurrection of Christ Orthodox Church, St. Paul's Cathedral as well as several recent post-modernist additions to Tirana's skyline.



In addition to the stately statue of Albania's national hero, Skanderbeg, we will indicate the nearby spot in the square where the statue of Albania's erstwhile dictator, Enver Hoxha, was torn down by protestors on February 20, 1991. This act officially marked the end of forty-six years of Communist misrule in Albania.

Following our walking tour in the center of Tirana, we will meet our minibus and head to the Dajti Mountain (1613 meters) where we will visit the massive Bunk'art 1 Museum. This museum, which was built in one of the city's underground nuclear bunkers built during the Communist regime, tells the story of that repressive historical period from 1946 to 1991.

After our visit to Bunk'art 1, we will drive to the Dajti Mountain cable car station and ride 4.35 kilometers up to the top. From there, we will enjoy commanding views of Tirana and farther out to the coastal city of Durrës and the Mediterranean Sea. Here we will eat a traditional lunch together at the Dajti Balcony Restaurant prior to heading back down to the city. Lunch is included in the cost of your tour.

Once down, we will drive to the World Headquarters of the Bektashi Order. The Bektashi are an Islamic sect, and we will visit their museum to learn about their unique faith and the heterodox ideas which distinguish them from most other Islamic movements. Recently, plans were unveiled to establish a sovereign microstate along the lines of the Vatican at this site. If this plan is approved, it would become the smallest country in the world at only 27 acres in size!



Dinner is on your own, please speak with Eyal for dinner suggestions and consider exploring the trendy Biloku area located about a 15-minute walk from the hotel.

Day 3: Skanderbeg and the North (Monday, October 6): In the morning, we will check out of Hotel Tirana International at 8 AM and drive about an hour to the hillside fortress town of Kruja. The capital of Albania in the 15th century, Kruja's imposing fortress has been renovated and turned into an informative museum dedicated to the Albanian national hero Skanderbeg. From this strategic location, and against all odds, Skanderbeg held the Ottoman Turks at bay for a generation.



In addition to the fortress, Kruja has a bright and colorful market filled with traditional Albanian handicrafts and clothing. We will visit one of the shops and see a demonstration of how the iconic Albanian *qeleshe*, or felt hats, are made.

From Kruja, we will continue north along the coast to Lezhë to see the remains of Saint Nicholas Church where Skanderbeg was buried and learn about the 1444 League of Lezhë that united the noble families of Albania against the Turks. Here we will also see a replica of his inimitable goat head's crown. Albanians are proud of their struggle against the Ottoman Turks and Albanian historians claim that the League of Lezhë was the first true parliamentary assembly in Europe.

From Lezhë it is a short drive to the Rural Tourism initiative of Mrizi I Zanave where we will have a traditional meal for lunch. Everything served in the restaurant comes straight from

the surrounding farm (“farm to table”). A true culinary experience, there is no doubt that if the Michelin guides ever give out stars to restaurants in Albania, Mrizi I Zanave would top that list.

From here we will head north to Shkodër, which is the third largest city in Albania. Known in Italian as Scutari, between 50 and 60 per cent of the population of the city are Roman Catholic, a fact that distinguishes it from the rest of the predominantly Muslim country. Shkodër was the last bastion of independent Albania captured by the Ottoman Turks in 1479.



We will cap off our day with a visit to the spectacular Rozafa Castle that has breathtaking views of Shkodër below – including Lake Shkodër and the confluence of the Drin, Buna, and Kir rivers. Dating back to Illyrian times, we will explore the ancient walls of the fortress and retell the poignant tale of Rozafa’s sacrifice. Shkodër is a beautiful and colorful city, and we will spend two nights at the Golden Palace Hotel.



Day 4: The Albanian Alps (Tuesday, October 7): We will meet in the lobby at 8:30 to explore the stunning Albanian Alps. Our drive will take approximately two and a half hours through winding mountain roads and bring us to the charming little town of Theth. Surrounded by rugged peaks, crystal-clear rivers, and cascading waterfalls, Theth is a paradise for hikers and nature lovers.

We will continue driving up to the end of the road and follow the footpath straight up to the Eye of Theth – a picturesque waterfall hidden away up in a mountain valley. The hike, which is strenuous in parts, is breathtaking in more ways than one and takes about two and a half hours round trip. Following the hike we will sit down for lunch together.

Before leaving Theth we will visit the Roman Catholic Church and learn about local customs that date back hundreds of years. We will also take this opportunity to learn about Edith Durham, the pioneering British Anthropologist who studied these alpine communities – the last tribal communities in Europe – prior to World War I. From Theth we will drive back to Shkodër and the Golden Palace Hotel.



Day 5: Historical Albania (Wednesday, October 8): This morning we will check out of the hotel and at 8:30 AM begin our drive to southern Albania. The first leg of our tour today will take us to the coastal town of Durrës, which is about one hour and forty-five minutes from Shkodër.

Known in antiquity as Epidamnus by the Greeks, Dyrrachium by the Romans, and Durazzo by Venetians, Durrës is Albania's second largest city after Tirana. Strategically located, Durrës was the starting point of the Via Egnatia – the most important road in the Roman Empire that connected the capital cities of Rome and Constantinople.



We will visit an archaeological site with an impressive 2nd century Roman amphitheater that was uncovered in the heart of the old city. Seating over 20,000 people, this is the largest

Roman amphitheater built in the Balkans, and it has been nominated for UNESCO World Heritage status.

From Durrës, we will drive about an hour and a half to the picturesque city of Berat. Known as the "City of a Thousand Windows," Berat is a UNESCO World Heritage Site that dazzles visitors with its stunning Ottoman-era architecture. Nestled on the banks of the Osum River and framed by picturesque hills, this historic city is a blend of natural beauty and cultural heritage. We will explore the ancient Kala Castle, where people still live within its walls, and admire the beautifully preserved churches and mosques that reflect Berat's harmony of religions.



Speaking of which, while in Berat, we will visit the Solomani Museum, which tells the story of Albanian Jews in World War II. Few people are aware that Albania was the only country in all of Europe that ended the war with more Jews than it had when the war started. The brainchild of a local schoolteacher, this museum commemorates the largely untold history of how the Albanian people risked themselves to save Jews from certain death. What makes this story even more amazing is that this feat was accomplished while Albania was under Nazi occupation. We will spend two nights in Berat at the Hotel Portik.

Day 6: From Roman Conquest to Independence (Thursday, October 9): After breakfast,

we will meet in the lobby at 8:30 AM and drive about an hour to the impressive archaeological site of Apollonia.

Founded by Greek settlers in 588 BCE, Apollonia was a thriving center of art, philosophy, and commerce. It became particularly notable as the home of Emperor Augustus during his youth, and its excavated ruins include a majestic theater, an iconic colonnaded

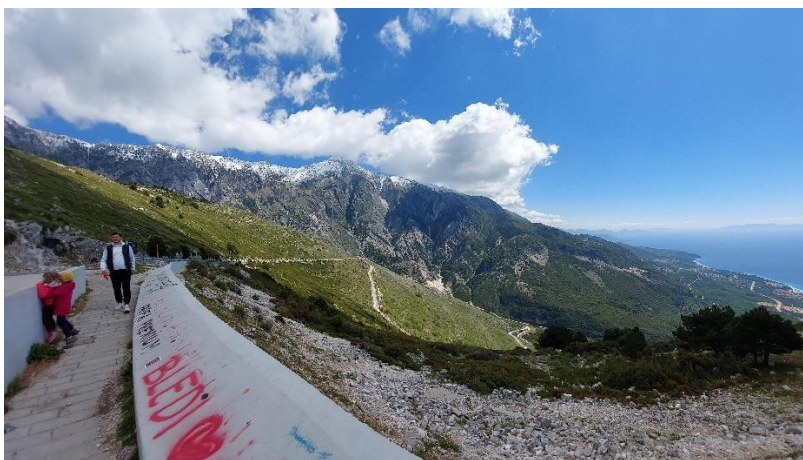


bouleuterion, and numerous other Roman-era structures. In addition, the site houses an excellent archaeological museum and the Byzantine-era Church of Saint Mary.

From Apollonia, we will head south roughly thirty minutes to the city of Vlorë. Located where the Adriatic and Ionian seas meet, Vlorë is a vibrant coastal city that combines broad, sunny beaches with a rich history. Known as the birthplace of Albanian independence, it is home to the Independence Museum and the historic Flag Square. We will visit the small old town and see Synagogue Street where there was once a thriving Jewish community. From Vlorë, we will drive back to Berat where we will spend one more night at the Hotel Portik.



Day 7: The Albanian Riviera (Friday, October 10): We will check-out from the hotel and depart at 9 AM. From Berat we will head south again, this time along the coast to the Albanian Riviera and the resort town of Sarandë. On the way, we will marvel at the dramatic scenery of the mountains plunging into the Mediterranean Sea. If we are lucky, we may even see some snowcapped peaks towering overhead. On the way, we will drive by bunkers and learn about Albania's coastal defenses during the paranoid Communist era, see the Porto Palermo castle constructed by Ali Pasha Tepelena in the early 19th century, and stop at Uji I Ftohë, a restaurant built over a series of waterfalls in the hamlet of Borsh.



The drive, together with the stops along the way, will take the better part of the day. When we arrive in the coastal resort city of Sarandë, weather permitting, we will take in the breathtaking view of the bay from Kalaja le Lëkurësit - the castle perched high above the city. From here you can see the Greek island of Corfu just off the coast. Sarandë will be our base for the next two nights and we will sleep in the comfortable Hotel Agimi.

Day 8: Southern Albania (Saturday, October 11): With its beautiful beaches, resort atmosphere and easy access to local sites, Sarandë is the perfect place to spend a few days. We will meet in the lobby at 9 AM and head out to the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Butrint that is located about thirty minutes south of Sarandë, in Ksamil, not far from Albania's border with Greece.

According to legend, the ancient city of Butrint was founded by Greek survivors of the Trojan War. It is a rich archaeological site that demonstrates continuous habitation and showcases layers of Greek, Roman, Byzantine, and Venetian history. Nestled within a lush natural landscape near the Vivari Channel, its highlights include the well-preserved theater, a Baptistery with intricate mosaics, and the imposing Lion Gate.



Following our visit to Butrint, we will head to the nearby town of Ksamil for lunch before driving inland about an hour to the Blue Eye (Syri i Kaltër). A unique natural phenomenon, the Blue Eye is a karstic spring over fifty meters deep that emerges suddenly and dramatically out of the ground.

It is called the Blue Eye for its dramatic cerulean blue color and it is in a leafy nature reserve that was preserved in Communist times because it was off limits to all but the highest-ranking members of the Party and their families. From here we will return to Sarandë and end the day a bit early so that you have some free time to walk along the promenade. Once again, we will stay overnight at the Hotel Agimi.



Day 9 (Sunday, October 12): We will meet in the lobby at 8:30 after check-out for the last day of the tour. Before departing Sarandë for Gjirokastër and Tirana, we will briefly visit the small archaeological site in the heart of Sarandë. This site contains the remains of a 6th century church built on top of an earlier 4th or 5th century synagogue. During excavations carried out in 1979, a mosaic floor with Jewish symbols was unexpectedly discovered and

shed light on a previously unknown Jewish presence in Byzantine-era Albania. The site was excavated by Israeli archaeologist Ehud Netzer who excavated Masada and Herodion.

We bid farewell to Sarandë and head inland to begin our drive back north which includes a visit to the UNESCO World Heritage town of Gjirokaštër. Known as the "City of Stone," Gjirokaštër, is famous for its beautifully preserved Ottoman-era architecture and the fact that it was the hometown of both the Communist-era dictator Enver Hoxha, and the Albanian dissident, and anti-Communist author, Ismail Kadare.



The city's cobble streets lead visitors to historic landmarks like the imposing Gjirokaštër Castle, which offers panoramic views of the Drino Valley. With its traditional houses, vibrant bazaar, and rich culinary traditions, Gjirokaštër offers a captivating journey into Albania's past.

From here, we will drive north two hours back to the Tirana International hotel for our last night and farewell dinner.

Day 10 (Monday, October 13): Departure Day

Transportation to the Mother Theresa International Airport from the Tirana International hotel will be provided based on your flight's departure time.

Tour of Albania with People not Places – October 4-13, 2025

- 8 days, 9-night tour of Albania, the most interesting and enigmatic corner of the Balkans.
- Visit several remarkable UNESCO World Heritage sites including Butrint, Berat, Gjirokastër as well as Appolonia and the Durres amphitheater that are awaiting final UNESCO approval.
- Explore the breathtaking Albanian Alps, learn about the customs of these remote mountain communities, and hike up from Theth to a beautiful waterfall.
- Drive south to relax by the beach at the Albanian Riviera town of Saranda
- Experience the hip and urbane capitol city of Tirana with its youth culture, post-modernist architecture, and lively nightlife.
- Learn about Albania's dark communist past and how it went from being an isolated hermit state to the vibrant country and EU candidate that it is today.
- Immerse yourself in Albania's vibrant culture and language, and uncover its inspiring legacy of religious tolerance, maintained even through great adversity

Tour Albania with Dr. Eyal Dujovny of People not Places

Dates: October 4 to 13, 2025 (8 days, 9 nights)

Participants: Maximum 15 participants!

Cost:

- ❖ 8 to 11 guests - 1990 Euros per person
 - ❖ 12 to 15 guests - 1640 Euros per person
- (Above based on double occupancy)
- ❖ Single supplement - 425 Euros

The Tour Includes:

- ✓ Dr. Eyal Dujovny, Anthropologist and Tour Leader
- ✓ English speaking local guide
- ✓ 4- & 5-Star hotels
- ✓ Half-Board basis (breakfast and either lunch or dinner)
- ✓ Lunch at the renowned Mrizi I Zanave restaurant
- ✓ Luxury transportation in AC Minibus
- ✓ Transfers to and from the airport
- ✓ All entrance fees

Not Included:

- Flights to and from Tirana, Albania
- Travel / Health Insurance
- Soft drinks & Alcoholic beverages at meals
- Tips as applicable