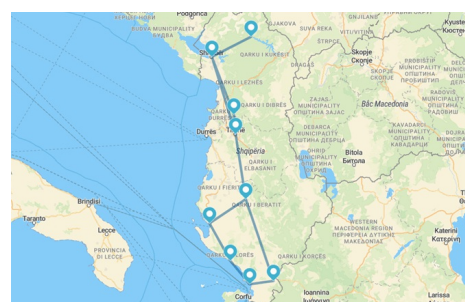




Albania, 8 Days · Tailor-made by car

## Route of the fabulously unspoilt Albania

Cut off for decades, Albania is finally opening up to the world. The country was a huge enigma for years, but today, after the fall of communism, Albania is developing in leaps and bounds. Now's the perfect time to discover its culture and its ancient history. Visit one of the most amazing destinations in Europe, where Romans, Illyrians, Byzantines, Greeks and Ottomans have all left their mark. Explore its capital Tirana, a colourful and vibrant city with a firm gaze on the future. Discover the museum-like town of Berat, with its traditional whitewashed houses at the foot of its impressive castle. Fall in love with the medieval village of Krujë, a key player in the history of Albania. And make sure you get to see the blissful Albanian Riviera, lapped by intense blue waters, and the Albanian Alps, also known as the Accursed Mountains. And it gets even better: Albania is a country populated by friendly and very welcoming people. In short, you'll be amazed by this little piece of paradise, with its white-sand beaches and truly majestic lakes and mountains.



**Departure date:** Departures from May 2026 till May 2027

**From:** Dublin, Shannon, Cork

## Travel details

### DAY 1 · CITY OF ORIGIN - TIRANA

Flight departure from the city of origin to Tirana.

Arrival and rental car pick-up.

Rest of the day at your leisure to discover the allure of Tirana, a city brimming with life and colour far removed from its communist past. Stroll through this chaotic capital and discover the footprints that recent history has left on its most iconic landmarks. Explore its markets, cafes and terraces, and let yourself get lost in its streets and squares. Tirana is the gateway to a very different Europe. Make sure you unearth all its contrasts.

Overnight stay in Tirana.

## DAY 2 · TIRANA - BERAT

From Tirana, head south and stop off in Berat, a charming little town located just under one hundred kilometres from the capital. It's commonly known as 'the city of a thousand windows' and is believed to be the oldest in Albania, having been founded in 314 BC. Interestingly, its name means 'white city'. Strategically located and with a frenetic history, this town has served as the natural border of empires such as the Roman and Byzantine. Many other civilisations have passed through here, bestowing it with an incredible range of cultural elements. Berat was proclaimed a 'museum city' by the communist regime and has been named a World Heritage Site by UNESCO. Stroll through its winding stone streets and past traditional houses with wooden balconies huddled around a hillside. The old town is formed by three districts: Kalaja, Mangalem and Gorica. Perched above them is Kalaja Castle, which was built in the thirteenth century to defend Berat from the Ottomans. And inside the castle is yet another pocket-sized neighbourhood. The area is still inhabited, so there's no exact opening and closing time. Inside the castle are must-sees such as the thirteenth-century Orthodox Church of the Holy Trinity and the Cathedral of Saint Nicholas, which today houses the Onufri Iconographic Museum, named after the most important Albanian painter of the sixteenth century. Meanwhile, the National Ethnographic Museum showcases traditional furniture and utensils, located in the heart of Berat in a beautiful eighteenth-century Ottoman villa. Mangalem is the Muslim area of Berat, home to three mosques. These are the sixteenth-century Sultan's Mosque, the Lead Mosque, named after the material used to build its dome, and the nineteenth-century Bachelors' Mosque. The neighbourhood of Gorica, with its whitewashed houses, lies on the other bank of the Osum River that flows through the city, on the Orthodox Christian side. It's the perfect place to look for a restaurant for a spot of lunch.

In the afternoon, time permitting, you can visit the Bogove Waterfall and Osum Canyon, located forty-five minutes and one and a half hours away, respectively, from the centre of Berat.

Overnight stay in Berat.

## DAY 3 · BERAT - VLORË - HIMARË - SARANDË

A demanding day lies ahead in terms of distance, reason why we recommend setting off as early as you can. Getting to the Himara/Himarë region from Berat is quite easy. Half an hour after leaving Vlorë, you'll see that the road begins to get quite steep and that the scenery starts to change. This is because you'll be crossing through the Ceraunian Mountains, with peaks of two-thousand-plus metres that descend abruptly to sea level. This relief is why Himara boasts some of the most incredible unspoilt beaches in the Mediterranean. Off we go! Bid farewell to Berat and head to the stunning Adriatic coast, specifically to the town of Vlorë. It's nestled in the bay of the same name surrounded by mountains, gardens and olive trees, in the well-known and very popular Albanian Riviera. Vlorë now has a student atmosphere and has played a key role in the country's history. The Romans, Byzantines, Ottomans and many others have occupied this breathtaking area with stunning sea views. Even the Nazis had a submarine base here. What's more, the independence of Albania was declared in 1912 and Vlorë was the national capital from that year until 1914. Attractions here include the Muradie Mosque, in the heart of the city, and the National Museum of Independence. The beaches are the major draws of Vlorë, though, ranked some of the most beautiful in the whole country. Any alternatives? You can visit the nearby fishing villages of Dhërmi or Drymades or take a peek at Orikum Marina. After your visits, follow the route southwards until you get to Himarë, which is located in an area of lofty mountains and stunning white beaches that contrast with a dreamlike blue sea, such as Livadhi or Gjipe. In Himarë, there has also been an important Greek community since ancient times. Nearby, you'll find ruins of Roman baths and medieval settlements. The final destination of the day is Sarandë, where you'll arrive late in the afternoon.

Overnight stay in Sarandë.

#### DAY 4 · SARANDË - GJIROKASTRA - BERAT

Sarandë is just a few kilometres from the Greek border and the most important city on Albania's southern coast. It's a major tourist resort that's great as a base to explore the surroundings. Perched atop a hill is the sixteenth-century Lëkurësi Castle, with magnificent views over to the Greek island of Corfu. Around Sarandë there are ancient monasteries and traditional villages. Ksamil beach is just a fifteen-minute drive away. You'll love the small white-sand coves along this stretch of the coastline. Make sure you visit the impressive ruins of Butrint, thirty kilometres from Sarandë, listed as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO. They date back to 400 AD and have been influenced by many civilisations, so you'll see a Greek amphitheatre, a Paleo-Christian baptistery and remains of Greek and Venetian buildings. Nearby, in a wooded area, there's a fantastic place known as the Blue Eye, named after the colour of its waters. Onward journey to Gjirokastër. This is a picturesque town nestled in the mountains with a sixteenth-century citadel overlooking the valley of the River Drinos. It was declared a city-museum during the socialist era, as the dictator Enver Hoxha was born here. It's known as the city of stones, because most of the roofs of the old houses are covered with this material. The typical Balkan architecture with Ottoman influences has been well preserved, which is why UNESCO included it on the list of World Heritage Sites. The town is home to remarkable examples of houses with turrets known as 'kule', which are of Turkish origin. Make sure you try the traditional local food known as 'qifqi', which are delicious meatballs with rice.

Overnight stay in Berat.

#### DAY 5 · BERAT - TIRANA

Our suggestion today is to head back to the capital to explore it even further and get ready for the tour around the north of the country.

Head north out of Berat until you end up in Tirana. The city revolves around Skanderbeg Square, named after the great Albanian national hero and with a statue of him in the middle. The square is also home to the National Museum of History, which chronicles the rule of Illyrians, Greeks, Romans and Byzantines in chronological order. The museum is the perfect introduction to Albanian history. On the facade, you can see the famous mosaic known as 'The Albanians'. Also surrounding the square is the Palace of Culture, which houses the Opera House and the National Library, the Clock Tower and the Et'hem Bey Mosque. The building known as The Pyramid was built in 1988 to house the museum of the communist leader Enver Hoxha. Another option is to visit Bunk'Art 2, a former nuclear bunker converted into an underground museum dedicated to the political history of Albania. It will help you learn more about the country's history. A real head-turner is the sheer amount of colour on the streets of this city that is being reinvented at breakneck speed. Tirana is also the ideal place to savour the delicious national cuisine, with Turkish, Greek, Balkan and Italian influences, and soak up a lively nightlife. The district of Blloku is brimming with vibrant cafes, restaurants, pavement terraces and pubs. Our recommendations for eating out? Try 'qofte korçe' (delicious meatballs in sauce) washed down with local beer, or take a risk with the mind-blowing national alcoholic drink known as 'raki'.

Overnight stay in Tirana.

#### DAY 6 · TIRANA - KRUIË - SHKODËR

Next stop is Krujë, thirty kilometres north of Tirana, a pocket-sized town steeped in history. Krujë was the birthplace of Gjergj Kastrioti, better known as Skanderbeg, a soldier and aristocrat who fought off the Turkish invasion in the fifteenth century. It's a medieval town full of charm set amid a majestic landscape. Its castle was built in the fifth century and has an elliptical shape. Nearby is the Skanderbeg Museum, which will help you learn more about the history of Albania and the Ottoman invasion. Take a stroll around the Turkish-influenced bazaar in Krujë and visit the ruins of the ancient city of Albanopolis, the capital of the Alban tribe to which the country owes its name. After the visit, it's onward with the journey. Get ready to change beaches for mountains. Head towards Shkodër, which lies on the shores of the lake of the same name in the northwest, right next to the border with Montenegro. It was founded by the Illyrians in the fourth century BC. Later became the capital of Albania, until Tirana replaced it in 1920.

One of the main reasons to visit the city of Shkodër is to drive through one of the most incredible routes in the whole of Europe, i.e. the Albanian Alps, but we'll leave that for tomorrow.

Overnight stay in Shkodër.

## ● DAY 7 · SHKODËR - (OPTIONAL EXCURSION TO THE ALBANIAN ALPS: KOMAN - FIERZË - VALBONË NATIONAL PARK) - TIRANA

Shkodër is the cultural capital of Albania. It's a very tolerant city where you can visit the Orthodox Cathedral of the Nativity or the Ebu Beker Mosque (also known as the Great Mosque), a few metres from which is the Monument to Mother Teresa of Calcutta, who lived here for several years. It's a very lively university city with countless terraces. Stroll through the streets of Shkodër and visit its bazaars and antique shops, or cross the hundred-metre Ottoman bridge, a meeting place for inhabitants of the two banks of the Kir River. The History Museum will give you a great insight into Shkodër. Four kilometres away is Rozafa Castle, which dates back to Illyrian times and commands spectacular views of the city, the surrounding area and the so-called Albanian Alps. If you opt for the excursion to the Albanian Alps, you should get up early to take advantage of the day. Your first stop will be the town of Koman, surrounded by impressive mountains. You'll cross Lake Koman on the same car ferry used by locals. (Note: The ferry ticket isn't included and costs six euros per person per journey to Fierzë. If you pay for the journey online, the fare is five euros per person per trip; and six euros per m<sup>2</sup> for your car (five euros if paid online). So, the approximate cost to cross with your car - depending on the size - is twenty-eight euros each way). The landscape around Lake Koman is breathtaking and the journey to Fierzë will take two and a half hours. From there you can head over to the Valbonë National Park, a one-hour drive on mountain roads. Valbonë is an idyllic place in the heart of the Alps where you can go hiking along wonderful natural trails. (When planning the day, remember to take into account the return trip times of the ferry).

Return to Tirana for accommodation.

## ● DAY 8 · TIRANA - CITY OF ORIGIN

Depending on the time you leave your flight, you can dedicate a few hours to enjoying the country's capital.

Arrival at the airport with enough time to drop off your rental car and flight back to the city of origin.

Arrival. End of the trip and our services.

## Your trip includes

### Your trip includes

- ✓ Return flight.
- ✓ Stay in selected hotel in Tirana.
- ✓ Selected meal plan in Tirana.
- ✓ Stay in selected hotel in Berat.
- ✓ Selected meal plan in Berat.
- ✓ Stay in selected hotel in Sarandë.
- ✓ Selected meal plan in Sarandë.
- ✓ Stay in selected hotel in Shkodër.
- ✓ Selected meal plan in Shkodër.
- ✓ Rent-a-car.

### Your trip doesn't include

- ✗ Possible toll charges.
- ✗ Insolvency protection.

## Destinations Visited

Tirana



Berat



Vlorë



Himarë



Sarandë



Bodrishtë



Krujë District



Shkodër



Fierza



## Important remarks

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- Albania is a Muslim country and the month of Ramadan is of major significance to its residents. During Ramadan, entertainment and alcohol will be restricted in most of the country. The sale of alcohol will be restricted in many places, although some establishments will offer alcohol for sale to tourists. During this period, local businesses may also have shorter opening hours.
- Triple rooms in Europe are generally rooms with twin beds or a double, in which a folding bed is installed to accommodate the third person. Due to the inconvenience this causes, we advise against using this option as far the possible.
- Check-in time at the hotel on the day of arrival depends on each establishment, but in no case will it be before 3:00 p.m., unless otherwise indicated.
- The proposed excursions and tours for each day are purely suggestions, as you can tailor the trip to suit your times, tastes and needs.
- A credit card is considered a guarantee, so sometimes you will need one for check-in at hotels.
- Hotels usually have cots available. Otherwise, babies will have to share a bed with an adult.
- To pick up your rental car, you'll need a credit (not debit) card in the name of the person who made the booking, who must also be the named driver of the vehicle.
- Consult the necessary documentation to enter the destinations visited and for transit in the countries where air stopovers are made.