

Albania - Southern

Saturday 15th June - Wednesday 26th June 2024

Albania is a fantastic country for cycle touring especially in late spring/early summer. Road surfaces are in the main excellent and there is very little traffic outside of the main towns. This tour will start at the capital Tirana and explores the country to the south, including a short visit to North Macedonia, to visit a World Heritage site, along with three others that we will visit in Berat, Gjirokastra and Butrint. There are stunning views to enjoy at the top of mountain roads, as well as the coastal scenery of the Albanian Riviera. The tour will be fully supported.

Itinerary

Saturday 15th June - Arrive in Tirana

Arrive in Tirana to meet at the hotel at 18:00

- No cycling
- Accommodation: Hotel
- Meals: (D)

Sunday 16th June - Tiranë-Pogradec

Our tour will start with a transfer to the north of Lake Ohrid which borders both North Macedonia and Albania. This will be an easy cycling day to start our tour with a descent followed by relatively flat roads along the shore of the lake. After arriving at our accommodation for the day we will visit the monastery at St Naum in North Macedonia.

- Route distance: 29.0 km
- Route altitude gain: 70.0 m
- Accommodation: Hotel
- Meals: (B, L, D)

Monday 17th June - Pogradec-Korcë

Leaving Lake Ohrid, we climb to a high plateau surrounded by mountains. We continue following the gorge for a while until the hills open up, leading to a colourful patchwork of individual farms. Depending on our arrival at the city of Korçë, we will have the time to visit the old market and its quaint cobblestone streets running between and behind the main streets. Our day ends with a short walking tour of Korçë, the Paris of Albania

- Route distance: 51.0 km
- Route altitude gain: 512.0 m
- Accommodation: Hotel
- Meals: (B, L, D)

Tuesday 18th June - Korçë-Sotirë

We leave behind the agricultural plateau of Korçë, ascending steadily into the border mountains through a landscape of barren rock interspersed with wild flowers. Numerous cols and valleys lie ahead, climbing into the heart of the Grammoz Mountains and over the Barmash Pass at 1,159m. We will stop for lunch in the town of Ersekë, the highest city in Albania at about 1000m above sea level. Our overnight is at Sotirë farm, nestled in its own tranquil valley.

- Route distance: 72.0 km
- Route altitude gain: 1170.0 m
- Accommodation: Cabin
- Meals: (B, L, D)

Wednesday 19th June - Sotirë-Bënjë

We climb to a high pine forested plateau surrounded by soaring peaks, before descending through a spectacular gorge to Leskovik. After this there is a 17km descent to Çarshovë. Having reached Bënjë we will visit the thermal pools at Langarica

- Route distance: 66.0 km
- Route altitude gain: 680.0 m
- Accommodation: Guesthouse
- Meals: (B, L, D)

Thursday 20th June - Bënjë-Gjirokastër

We continue along the valley towards Këlcyrë. After following another gorge we finish at Gjirokastër

- Route distance: 70.0 km
- Route altitude gain: 427.0 m
- Accommodation: Hotel
- Meals: (B, L, D)

Friday 21st June - Rest day in Gjirokastër

A chance to explore the 'stone city' featuring a castle, Zekate House and Skenduli House

- No cycling
- Accommodation: Hotel
- Meals: (B)

Saturday 22nd June- Gjirokastër-Sarandë

The day starts with a brief transfer to start cycling at the top of Muzina pass towards Sarandë. There follows a short ferry ride to the UNESCO Heritage site of Butrint. We finish the day heading north along the coast

- Route distance: 70.0 km
- Route altitude gain: 525.0 m
- Accommodation: Hotel
- Meals: (B, L, D)

Sunday 23rd June - Sarandë-Himarë

A steep climb from Sarandë, takes us to a rocky plateau. The ride then climbs again with lovely views of the mountains to the right and the Mediterranean sea to the left. Descending to Shkallë and along the coast, the majority of the climbing is finished before arriving at the coastal resort of Himare, where we will spend two night

- Route distance: 52.0 km
- Route altitude gain: 1064.0 m
- Accommodation: Hotel
- Meals: (B, L, D)

Monday 24th June - Rest Day in Himarë

A chance to relax for a day by the sea

- No cycling
- Accommodation: Hotel
- Meals: (B)

Tuesday 25th June - Himarë-Vlorë

Today's ride is not only the most challenging but also the most spectacular. We will gradually climb from sea level up to 1,000m through forests, gorges and hairpin bends. After lunch in the beautiful national park of Llogara we will descend towards Vlorë for an afternoon's relaxation by the Ionian coast.

- Route distance: 64.0 km
- Route altitude gain: 1590.0 m
- Accommodation: Hotel

- Meals: (B, L, D)

Wednesday 26th June - Departure and transfer

After breakfast there will be a two and a half hour transfer to Rinas Airport in Tirana

- No cycling
- Accommodation: Hotel
- Meals: (B)

Dates and Prices

Cost

- Land only price: £1250.0

Payment Schedule

A deposit of £300 per person is payable upon booking, with the final balance of £950 per person to be paid by 7th April 2024 (10 weeks before departure)

Price includes:

- 12 nights accommodation on a twin share basis
- 11 breakfasts, 8 lunches and 9 dinners
- Rental bike
- English speaking cycling guide
- Tips for our support crew
- Support vehicles and 1 driver
- All transport described in the itinerary

Price does not include:

- Travel to and from Albania
- Any other meals or refreshments
- Single supplement £210 (if available)
- Entry fees at any attractions
- Any other personal expenses
- E-Bike supplement (£150)
- Travel Insurance

Cancellations

Written Notice Received: Cancellation Charge:

- Before 1st December 2022 : £300 (deposit)

- 7th April 2024 through to departure : £1250 Full amount)

Holiday Information

Accommodation

- On 12 nights, accommodation will be in 3-4 star hotels of the Albanian Tourist Board grading system with en-suite facilities. One night will be in a guesthouse with en-suite facilities (Single supplements will need to pair up on this night), and one night will be in cabin. Each cabin has 2 rooms, sharing a bathroom. All rooms are based on two people sharing with breakfast and evening meal included. Lunches are included on all cycling days. Vegetarian/fish meals may be available if requested.

Meals

- Adequate breakfasts are provided at the accommodation. Lunches will be taken at local restaurants, except one day in the mountains when a packed lunch will be provided. Evening meals are traditionally meat based, but vegetarian and pescatarian food is also available on request (in advance). Desserts are not normally served.

Area Covered

- The tour covers the area of the country south of Tirana. It is mountainous, and the cycling can be quite strenuous. The main roads follow valleys, often following rivers that have carved out huge gorges. There is an extensive plateau around Lake Ohrid and Gjirokastra, providing a patchwork landscape of fields and remnants of the collective farms.

The beautiful Ionian coast is heavily indented, the land being covered in pine forest offering some shade to the new road as it snakes its way up and down through fishing villages. There will also be the opportunity to visit the ruins of the ancient Greek archeological site of Butrint.

Inland, the museum town of Gjirokastrai allow you to wander through its cobbled alleyways, taking in their architectural beauties of white-washed Ottoman houses whose courtyards are covered in trailing vines shaded by trees. In contrast, buzzing Tirana, like any other European city, has cafes, bars, restaurants, hotels and shops.

Rides and Rest Days

- This tour is classified as a 6 and suitable for experienced touring cyclists. Roads are sealed and generally in good condition, but there are some rough stretches. On several days there are demanding climbs, but the distances are generally modest, and a support vehicle will carry all luggage and provide assistance to tired riders if requested. It is not practical to ride as one group, and you are free to progress at your own speed. We will regroup occasionally throughout the day. GPX files and detailed route instructions will

be provided approximately 3 weeks prior to the start of the tour. There will be rest days in Gkirokaster and Himare.

Route Sheets

- Details of routes and further tour information will be distributed approx four weeks before the tour departs. GPX routes and maps will be supplied

Getting to Albania

- As this is a land only holiday, it is very important that you note that neither your leader, nor Bikexplore are responsible for you in any way until the appointed time at the designated meeting point. Should you fail to arrive at the appointed meeting point, for whatever reason, we will not be responsible for any additional costs you may incur in order to meet up with the tour group. Before finalising travel arrangements to meet the tour you should ensure that you have read and understood our booking conditions. Should this tour not attract sufficient bookings to reach the minimum operating size, we may cancel the tour at any time up to 10 weeks before departure. It is therefore recommended that you book fully flexible and refundable transport and accommodation, or wait until you have been informed that the tour will go ahead, as in the event of the tour being cancelled we will not be responsible for any losses incurred.

Group information

- The maximum group size will be 14, the minimum 10 (including the Tour Leader).

Weather and Clothing

- At this time of year the weather should be sunny and warm, with cool early mornings and temperatures dropping rapidly at night in the mountains as the sun goes down. Rain or thunder storms are possible in the mountains. It is recommended you take a fleece and long trousers for evenings and waterproof cycling jacket and gloves in case of rain. Sunscreen is essential, as is a covering for your head.

Cycles / Equipment

- You are welcome to take your own bike at your own expense. Bikes can be transferred from the airport at a cost of 60 euros and this applies from 1 to 4 people, provided that you are on the same flight. However bikes will be available at no extra charge. The bikes are Giant Roam 0 with flat handlebars. Ratios of rear 11x36, front 26/36/48 and have hydraulic brakes. It is recommended that you bring your own helmet and saddle along with pedals if you use SPD's or like. Several weeks before the tour they will want to know which type of bike you need, your height and/or frame size required and if you will be bringing your own saddle and pedals. Please note, though, that neither Neil Wheadon or Bikexplore accept any liability for participants using hire bikes. You are entirely responsible for the safety and suitability and maintenance of the bike you ride. Cycle hire is not part of your holiday contract.

Maps

- You will be given daily maps and enough information to navigate during the tour. If you want more information, try the Bradt Travel Guide - Albania - ISBN-13 978 1 84162 387 0

Money

- The currency in Albania is the Lek (approximately 115 Lek = £1)

Travel Insurance and Advice

- Please ensure that your insurance covers you for medical emergencies and also repatriation of your bike, should this be necessary, and ensure that the single item limit on your luggage is adequate to cover your camera or similar item you bring. You should bring your insurance documents with you. Before booking you should check the Foreign Office 'Travel Advice by Country' at www.fco.gov.uk/ or on 0845 850 2829. Bikexplore cannot accept responsibility for any costs that may be incurred due to insufficient insurance cover.