ALBANIA (LAND ONLY) - £1,120

15th May 2020 - 29th May 2020 (15 days)

In 2014, the New York Times ranked Albania 4th among 50 recommended destinations. In 2011, Lonely Planet ranked it at number 1. Now is the time to visit Albania, as it emerges from its political constraints. This tour will start in buzzing Tirana before cycling over mountains, through gorges and villages. Encounter friendly people struggling with a subsistence lifestyle and visit beautiful seaside resorts on the Ionian coast. There will be free time in Berati, reputedly the most beautiful town in Albania and a World Heritage site, and visits to Gjirokastra, another World Heritage town, plus the ancient Greek ruins at Butrint. Suitable for fit cyclists able to cycle up to 90km per day.

HOLIDAY TYPE: Guided
TOUR MANAGER: Pat and John Ashwell
GRADE: Challenging
BOOKING STATUS: Fully Booked
ACCOMMODATION: Hotel & Guesthouse
BOARD BASIS: Half Board
TRAVEL ARRANGEMENTS: Land Only
ROAD / OFF ROAD: Road
HOLIDAY STYLE: Moving-on
VEHICLE SUPPORT: Luggage Transfer
HOLIDAY REF NO: 03455

Holiday Itinerary

Friday 15th May
Meet at Hotel Austria, Tirana. Assemble bikes. Stay 1 night. Meals: D

Saturday 16th May
After leaving bustling Tirana, we will cycle to Ballkan Resort, situated beside the Shkumbi River between the towns of Elbasan and Librazard. After a welcome coffee stop, the road climbs for 8km to a traditional Albanian cafe for lunch of barbequed goat and salad, before plunging downhill via a sinuous road to Elbasan and a vast gorge. 72km (965m total ascent). Stay 1 night. Meals: B L D

Sunday 17th May
After breakfast, an optional ride, crossing the border into Macedonia, to visit Saint Naum monastery, named after the medieval Saint Naum who founded it. The monastery was built on a rock above the Lake with lovely views of Lake Ohrid and of the surrounding mountains and is one of the most popular tourist destinations in Macedonia. We return to the hotel for coffee before cycling to Korce, passing through traditional farming communities and rural

Monday 18th May
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Tuesday 19th May
Today's ride will take us into the heart of the Gramnos mountains to Farma Sotira near Germenj. We will stop for lunch at a small restaurant in Erseke, situated at the foot of the mountains. It is a small town, at 1,050m in altitude one of the highest towns in Albania. From here, the road climbs into the mountains over Barmash Pass (1,759m). We will stay the night in cabins at Farma Sotira where fish is farmed. The location is beautiful, set in forests in a tranquil valley. 69km (1,134m total ascent). Stay 1 night in cabins. Meals: B L D

Wednesday 20th May
From the cabins, we'll cycle a beautiful and quiet, but sometimes pot-holed road, with distant glimpses of snow-capped mountains. We'll climb out of the valley then continue 15km downhill via a lovely scenic, newly-paved road, stopping for coffee close to the border with Greece. The road follows the river through beautiful mountains before our turn off into a quiet valley to the guesthouse near Petran. After lunch, ride along the valley to the hot-pools and Ottoman bridge. 59km (640m total ascent). Stay 1 night. Meals: B L D

Thursday 21st May
Continuing along the valley, we will enter the scenic Drinos Gorge before the scenery opens up into a wide plain. After lunch, we'll continue to the preserved historic World Heritage town of Gjirokaster, 'city of 1000 steps'. Defined by its castle, roads paved with chunky limestone and shale, imposing slate-roofed houses and views out to the Drina Valley, Gjirokastra is a magical hillside town with 600 beautiful Ottoman-era houses. The former dictator, Enver Hoxha, was born here. There will be time to explore the narrow cobbled alleys and take a guided tour of an Ottoman House; optional visit to the castle high above the town. 71km (498m total ascent). Stay 1 night. Meals: B L D

Friday 22nd May
Saranda, one of Albania's most popular seaside resorts, is our next destination. On route, there is a 6km well-graded climb and a tough 2km climb to the town of Saranda, before heading downhill to the promenade and sea. Lunch will be pizza served in a nice sea-side restaurant near the small harbour. There will be plenty of time to explore the town and swim in the calm blue waters of the Ionian Sea. 54km (550m total ascent). Stay 2 nights. Meals: B L D

Saturday 23rd May
Today there is an optional cycle to Butrint, an ancient Greek and later Roman city, abandoned during the Middle Ages after a major earthquake. It is now an archeological site close to the Greek border. It is located on a hill overlooking the Vivari Channel and is part of the Butrint National Park. Butrint is considered as one of the most important archaeological sites in Albania. On the strength of the immense wealth of cultural, historical and natural value with a considerable history, Butrint was declared a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1992. It is a beautiful circular ride but there are local buses to Butrint if you want a day off cycling. 46km (402m total ascent). Meals: B D

Sunday 24th May
We continue our cycling along the coast to the small town of Himare with its quiet unspoilt sandy beach. It's a roller coaster ride over hills and around headlands. On the way we will pass Ali Pasha's castle, named after Ali Pasha of Tepelenë who resided there until 1820. The current fortress was rebuilt in 1819 from its surface with 3 towers. Off shore, a short distance further on, we can see the underground caves where German U-boats were hidden during the war. 52km (929m total ascent). Stay 1 night. B L D

Monday 25th May
Today's ride is challenging. More ups and downs along the beautiful coast will take us to the foot of the Llagaraja pass (1,025m). The climb to the top of the pass is 12km long, with great views of the Ionian coastline far below. After descending 2km, we stop for lunch at the So Fo Restaurant where famous chef, Rick Stein, called for lunch on his gastronomic road trip from Venice to Istanbul. From here, the road plunges downhill via a twisting road back to the coast and the hotel near Vlore in time for a swim. Dinner will be served on the outside patio overlooking the sea. 64km (1,549m total ascent). Stay 1 night. Meals: B L D

Tuesday 26th May
Today is our longest ride, but the terrain is much easier. We'll cycle from the coast inland to the mountains and hills to the lovely town of Berati. It is surrounded by mountains and hills, and the Osum River runs through the city. It was designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2008 and comprises a unique style of architecture with influences from several civilizations that have managed to coexist for centuries throughout the history. It is an old fortified city with churches, mosques and a university. Arguably the most beautiful town in Albania. 91km (717m total ascent). Stay 2 nights. Meals: B L D

Wednesday 27th May
Take a day off the bike to explore Berati, the cobbled alleys and white-walled houses, visit the citadel high above with its fantastic view of the surrounding countryside and enjoy the pavement cafe culture in the pedestrianised town centre. Or have a final scenic ride through the mountains and villages to the small town of Policand return. 46km (701m total ascent). Pack bikes. Meals: B D

Thursday 28th May
After breakfast, we will transfer by coach from Berati to the hotel in Tirana - approximately 2 hrs 30 mins. Free time in Tirana to explore Albania's bustling capital city. Farewell dinner at a traditional Albanian restaurant. Stay 1 night. Meals: B D

Friday 29th May
Tour ends after breakfast. Meals: B

Meals: B = Breakfast  L = Lunch  D = Dinner

Holiday Summary

Accommodation & Meals
On 12 nights accommodation will be in 2-4 star hotels of the Albanian Tourist Board grading system with en-suite facilities, and one night will be in a guesthouse with en-suite facilities, all based on two persons sharing. One night will be in cabins, 4 persons per cabin sharing a bathroom, 2 persons per room. Breakfast and dinner is included, along with lunches on all cycling days. Vegetarian meals are available if requested at the time of booking.
Vehicle Support
Transport will be provided for the transfer of the group and bikes from Berati to Tirana. There will be a support vehicle for luggage, capable of carrying up to three riders and bikes if required.

Passports, Visa & Health
EU citizens must hold a passport that is still valid on the date of their return to their home country. Holders of non-EU passports are advised to check whether they require a visa.
There are no compulsory health related requirements for UK residents, but you are strongly advised to check that your tetanus protection has not expired. You should contact your doctor at least 3 months prior to travel to obtain the latest advice to travellers.

Travel Insurance
Clause 7 of our Booking Conditions stipulate that, for holidays outside the UK, Travel Insurance is mandatory. Details of the level of cover needed and other conditions you should check are stated in the Booking Conditions. CTC Cycling Holidays & Tours Ltd cannot accept responsibility for any costs that may be incurred due to insufficient insurance cover.

Price
The price of £1,120 is based on a minimum number of 16 people taking part in the holiday; please note Booking Conditions, clause 3. If there are insufficient bookings by 6th March 2020, we will contact you and return all monies paid, although in certain circumstances the tour may still run at below minimum numbers but at the same price.

Price Includes
- Vehicle transfer from Berati to Tirana
- 12 nights hotel, 1 night guesthouse, 1 night cabin, sharing room/cabin
- 14 breakfasts, 10 lunches, 14 dinners
- Support vehicle with English speaking driver/guide to carry luggage and up to 3 riders and bikes if required
- CTC Cycling Holidays & Tours costs

Price Does Not Include
- Flights to and from Tirana Nënë Tereza Airport
- Transfers from Nënë Tereza Airport to hotel in Tirana
- Lunches on non-cycling days or refreshments at morning/afternoon stops
- Gratuities for support crew
- Any other personal expenses
- Travel insurance

Payment Schedule
A deposit of £160 per person is payable upon booking, with the final balance of £960 per person to be paid ten weeks prior to departure, by 6th March 2020.

Cancellations
Should you be forced to cancel your booking for any reason you must notify us in writing. Cancellation charges are as follows:

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<tr>
<th>Written notice received:</th>
<th>Cancellation charge:</th>
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<tr>
<td>Before 6th March 2020</td>
<td>Deposit (£160)</td>
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<tr>
<td>From 6th March 2020 through to departure</td>
<td>100% (£1,120)</td>
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Additional Information

Area Covered By The Holiday
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. We will overnight in Saranda, the largest town in the south, and along the coast in Himare and the port of Vlora. There will also be the opportunity to visit the ruins of the ancient Greek archeological site of Butrint, either by bike or local bus.
Inland, the museum towns of Gjirokastra and Berati allow you to wander through their cobbled alleyways, taking in their architectural beauties of white-washed Ottoman houses whose courtyards are covered in trailing vines shaded by trees. In contrast, bustling Tirana, like any other European city, has cafes, bars, restaurants, hotels and shops.

Rides & Rest Days
This tour is classified as challenging and suitable for experienced touring cyclists capable of riding up to 90km per day. Roads are sealed and generally in good condition, but there are some tough 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, though we will regroup occasionally throughout the day. GPS files and detailed route instructions will be provided approximately 3 weeks prior to the start of the tour. There will be rest days in Saranda and Berati (with optional cycling).

Accommodation & Meals
Adequate breakfasts are provided at the accommodation. Lunches will be taken at local restaurants. Dinners are traditionally meat based. Desserts are not normally served.

Travel
On 'land only' bookings, it is very important that you note that neither your Tour Manager nor CTC Holidays & Tours are responsible for you in any way until the appointed time at the designated meeting point. Should you fail to arrive at the appointed time for whatever reason, we will not be responsible for any additional expenses 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 this tour is going ahead, as in the event of the tour being cancelled, we will not be responsible for any losses incurred.

Group Information
The maximum number of participants will be 18 excluding the Tour Manager(s).

Weather & 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
Touring bikes, lightweight mountain bikes or hybrid bikes will all be suitable if geared for long climbs. Ensure that your bike is well maintained and that you have tools and spares for simple roadside adjustments and puncture repairs. You will not need to carry luggage as this will be transferred, but a bar bag, rack pack or saddlebag will be needed for wet weather gear, camera and snacks etc. Mudguards are optional. Lights are not required.
Giant Rove and Giant Roam bikes and Giant Explore e-bikes are available for hire directly from the agent in Tirana. These bikes are well maintained and the gearing is suitable for the terrain. Please contact the Tour Managers if you require further information.

Maps & Guides
Reise Know-How Verlag Map - ISBN-10: 3831772673 has been used when planning this tour. Detailed route sheets, daily profiles and gpx tracks for Garmins will be provided. Bradt Travel Guide - Albania – ISBN-13 978 1 84162 387 0 – is a useful source of information.

Travel Insurance & Advice
Make sure you have read Clause 7 in the Booking Conditions. Before booking you should check the Foreign Office 'Travel Advice by Country' at www.fco.gov.uk or on 0845 850 2829.

Other Information
Money: The currency in Albania is the Lek (approximately 150 Lek = £1).

Tour Manager's Contact Details
If you require any assistance, or have any queries, please don't hesitate to contact the Tour Manager using the information provided below.

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