ALBANIA - ACCURSED MOUNTAINS (WITH FLIGHT) - £1,660

11th September 2020 - 25th September 2020 (15 days)

In 2014 the New York Times rated Albania 4th among 50 recommended destinations and in 2011 Lonely Planet ranked it number 1. Visit Albania as it emerges from its political constraints. This is a repeat of our September 2019 tour. After spending a night in Tirana and taking a short vehicle transfer, we will spend two days cycling to Puka and Shkodër before taking the scenic Koman ferry into the heart of the Accursed Mountains. Cycling south via Dardhe, Kukes and Peshkopi, two nights are spent at the UNESCO town of Ohrid in Macedonia. We continue on to the small lakeside resort of Otesevo before crossing back into Albania, cycling south alongside beautiful Prespa Lake to the buzzing town of Korce. From there, mountain roads following the river and through a spectacular gorge, will take us to the little visited town of Gramsh. After an easy ride, we will reach Berati, a World Heritage site and reputedly the most beautiful town in Albania. There will be time to explore the castle, town and ottoman houses and an optional out and back ride to Polican before returning to Tirana. Suitable for fit cyclists able to cycle up to 90km. Fly London Gatwick/Tirana.

HOLIDAY TYPE: Guided
TOUR MANAGER: Pat and John Ashwell
GRADE: Challenging
BOOKING STATUS: Places Available
ACCOMMODATION: Hotel
BOARD BASIS: Most Meals
TRAVEL ARRANGEMENTS: Air
ROAD / OFF ROAD: Road
HOLIDAY STYLE: Moving-on
VEHICLE SUPPORT: Full Vehicle Support
HOLIDAY REF NO: 03483

Holiday Itinerary

Friday 11th September
Fly from London Gatwick (South) to Nënë Tereza, Tirana on British Airways flight BA2648 departing 0810, arriving 1210. Vehicle transfer to hotel in Tirana. Assemble bikes. Stay 1 night. Meals: D

Saturday 12th September
Vehicle transfer to drop off near Reps. 85km (approximately 1½ hours). Cycle to the small town of Puka via a challenging, quiet, scenic road. At 838m above sea level, Puka is one of the highest in elevation in Albania and a well-known ski area. Sample a beer from the town’s own brewery. 50km (1,307m total ascent). Stay 1 night. Meals: B L D

Sunday 13th September
An easier ride. Cycle to Shkodër, one of the most ancient cities in the Balkans and the fourth most populous city in Albania. Geographically, the city of Shkodër sprawls across the Mbishkodra plain between the freshwater marshlands of Lake Shkodër and the foothills of the Albanian Alps. There will be time in the afternoon to explore the city. 56km (339m total ascent). Stay 1 night in a traditional hotel. Meals: B L D

Monday 14th September
Depart the hotel at 0600 for a 1½ hour minibus transfer to Koman. Picnic breakfast on the way. Board the Koman/Fierze ferry for a spectacular 2½ hour ferry ride. Along the way you are surrounded by beautiful green mountains and clear green waters. Then cycle to Dardhe via a mountainous road with lovely views of the dam below. 41km (1,103m total ascent). Stay 1 night. Meals: B L D

Tuesday 15th September
A challenging ride to Kukes in a dramatic setting, surrounded by mountains and overlooking the vast Lake Fierza, one of three interconnecting lakes which generate most of Albania’s electricity. The city was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize in regard to hospitality and for embracing thousands of refugees during the Kosovo War. It was the first time a city was nominated for the prize. 82km (1,433m total ascent). Stay 1 night. Meals: B L D

Wednesday 16th September
Today is the hardest ride as we continue through the mountains of Northern Albania. We ride to Peshkopi, set amid spectacular scenery. Peshkopi lies east of the Black Drin river. Mineral ores such as chromium, sulphur and marble have been discovered in the district. It is also an important industrial centre in Albania, particularly in relation to the food industry. 73km (1,874m total ascent). Stay 1 night. Meals: B L D

Thursday 17th September
A day to relax in the buzzing UNESCO town of Ohrid to explore the castle, museum, churches, pedestrianised shopping and cafes. Optional boat trips on the lake are available to St. Naum Monastery and the Bay of Bones museum (not included in the tour price). Meals: B

Friday 18th September
In contrast to buzzing Ohrid, today we cycle to Otesevo and a small hotel with its own private beach on the shore of tranquil Prespa Lake. Relax by the lake or hire a kayak (not included in the tour price). 53km or 54km (538m or 1,138m total ascent) depending on the weather and the route taken. Stay 1 night. Meals: B L D

Saturday 19th September
Leaving Macedonia, we cross the border back into Albania and cycle to the lovely town of Ohrid on the banks of Lake Ohrid. The town was made a UNESCO site in 1980. As well as its lovely setting, the town boasts architectural interest, open-air cafes and shops and the opportunity for boating on the lake. 92km (797m total ascent). Stay 2 nights. Meals: B L D

Sunday 20th September
Undulating steeply, the road follows the Drin river before entering a dramatic gorge and the dam near Gramsh. Some rough stretches. A challenging and scenic ride. Gramsh was one of the main military weaponry factories during the communist era but is now a quiet town set in a lovely location. 90km (1,084m total ascent). Stay 1 night. Meals: B L D

Monday 21st September
Continuing on an undulating but easier ride, we cycle to Berati via a scenic road overlooking the Drin river and dam. Berati is popular with tourists as it boasts a castle, many ottoman houses, mosques, cathedral, university of agriculture and cafes. It is reputedly the most beautiful town in Albania. 66km (442m total ascent). Stay 2 nights. Meals: B L D

Tuesday 22nd September
After a leisurely breakfast, we leave Berati by minibus and transfer to the hotel in Tirana (approximately 2½ hours). Pack bikes for the return journey to the UK. Afternoon at leisure for independent exploration of Tirana. Visit the Bunker museum, the attractive town square and shop for souvenirs. Our final dinner will be at a traditional Albanian restaurant in the old Communist quarter of the city. Stay 1 night. Meals: B D

Wednesday 23rd September
After a leisurely breakfast, depart at 1000 for vehicle transfer (approximately 40 minutes) to Nënë Tereza, Tirana airport for British Airways flight BA2649 to London Gatwick (South) departing 1300, arriving 1510 where the tour ends. Meals: B

Day 23rd September
After a leisurely breakfast, we leave Berati by minibus and transfer to the hotel in Tirana (approximately 2½ hours). Pack bikes for the return journey to the UK. Afternoon at leisure for independent exploration of Tirana. Visit the Bunker museum, the attractive town square and shop for souvenirs. Our final dinner will be at a traditional Albanian restaurant in the old Communist quarter of the city. Stay 1 night. Meals: B D

Thursday 24th September
Friday 25th September
Pack bikes for the return journey to the UK. Afternoon at leisure for independent exploration of Tirana. Visit the Bunker museum, the attractive town square and shop for souvenirs. Our final dinner will be at a traditional Albanian restaurant in the old Communist quarter of the city. Stay 1 night. Meals: B D

Meals: B = Breakfast  L = Lunch  D = Dinner

**Holiday Summary**

**Accommodation & Meals**
Accommodation will be in 2- to 4-star hotels of the Albanian Tourist Board grading system with en-suite facilities, based on two people sharing. Single occupancy may be available but please contact the Tour Manager before booking. 14 breakfasts and 12 dinners are included. A picnic or light lunch is included on all cycling days. Vegetarian/fish meals may be available if requested.

**Vehicle Support**
Transport will be provided for the transfer of the group and bikes from Nënë Tereza airport to the centre of Tirana, from Tirana to the start of the cycling, from Shkodër to the ferry at Koman, from Berati to Tirana and from Tirana to Nënë Tereza airport at the end of the tour. There will be a support vehicle for luggage, capable of carrying up to three riders and bikes if required, and a large trailer for carrying all bikes to the start of the tour and to Koman.

**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**

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 £1,660 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 3rd July 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**

- Return flights between London Gatwick and Nënë Teraza, Tirana
- 14 nights hotel, sharing room
- 14 breakfasts, 10 lunches, 12 dinners
- Vehicle transfers from Nënë Teraza airport to Tirana/return, from Tirana to the start of the cycling, from Shkodër to Koman ferry and from Berati to Tirana
- Support vehicle with English speaking driver/guide to carry luggage and up to 3 riders and bikes if required
- CTC Cycling Holidays and Tours costs

**Price Does Not Include**

- Travel to and from London Gatwick
- Dinner on 2 nights
- Lunches on non-cycling days or refreshments at morning/afternoon stops
- Gratuities for support crew
- Any other personal expenses
- Travel insurance
- Single occupancy supplement (£220, subject to availability)

**Payment Schedule**

A deposit of £165 per person is payable upon booking, with the final balance of £1,495 per person to be paid ten weeks prior to departure, by 3rd July 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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<th>Written notice received:</th>
<th>Cancellation charge:</th>
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<tr>
<td>Before 3rd July 2020</td>
<td>Deposit (£165)</td>
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<tr>
<td>From 3rd July 2020 through to departure</td>
<td>100% (£1,660)</td>
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**Additional Information**

**Area Covered By The Holiday**

The cycling starts to the west of Albania’s capital city, Tirana, and for the first two days the route winds west to Shkodër, before taking a short vehicle transfer to Koman and one of the world’s great boat trips to Fierze, a small town in the heart of the Accursed Mountains. Cycling south through Dardhe, Kukes and Peshkopi leads into Macedonia where two nights are spent in Ohrid, a UNESCO town, before cycling alongside Great and Small Prespa Lakes and crossing back into Albania.

After spending an evening at the buzzing town of Korce, the route continues via a spectacular road of mountains, rivers, dams and gorges to the little visited town of Gramsh. From here, we cycle to Berati, reputedly the most beautiful town in Albania with its castle, university, river and numerous Ottoman houses. There will be time for sightseeing and an optional last cycle ride into the hills and valleys to the south of Berati before returning by vehicle to Tirana.

**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 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, regrouping occasionally throughout the day. There will be rest days in Ohrid and Berati (with optional cycling).

**Accommodation & Meals**

Adequate breakfasts are provided and lunches on cycling days will be picnics or at local restaurants. Dinners in the north of Albania are mainly vegetarian with some fish or meat. Salads are usually served with cheese. Desserts are not normally served.

**Travel**
British Airways operate the only direct flights from the UK to Tirana, and they have limited the number of bikes carried on these flights to 15. As your Tour Managers will be travelling on these flights there will be 13 group seats available with bikes. Any further bookings will be sold either with flights from Gatwick without bikes or ‘land only’ (hybrid bikes and e-bikes are available for hire from the agent in Tirana).

**Group Information**
The maximum number of participants will be 18 excluding the Tour Managers.

**Weather & Clothing**
At this time of year the weather should be sunny and hot, 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 a 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, Giant Roam and Giant 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.

British Airways' current free checked-in baggage allowance is one bag (or bike) with a maximum weight of 23kgs. Your bike must be properly boxed or bagged, handlebars turned, pedals removed and tyres deflated. If you are taking an additional checked-in bag, there is a charge of £50 each way (payable at the check-in desk at Gatwick - price correct as at 15 September 2019). You will be able to avoid this cost if you pack some items with your bike and travel with hand luggage only. The current free cabin baggage allowance is 23kg, up to a maximum size of 56cm x 45cm x 25cm, together with one personal bag up to 40cm x 30cm x 15cm. The cost of an extra checked-in bag is not included in the tour price.

**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**
Before booking you should check the Foreign Office 'Travel Advice by Country' at [www.fco.gov.uk](http://www.fco.gov.uk) or on 0845 850 2829.

**Other Information**
In Albania the currency is the Lek (approximately 140 Lek = £1). Euros are accepted in some places. There are ATMs in Tirana and towns on the route. Credit cards are not always accepted.

In Macedonia the official currency is the denar (MKD) where credit cards are accepted in most hotels and shops, and ATMs increasingly accept international bank cards. You will not be able to exchange Scottish and Northern Irish bank notes.

**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.

**Pat and John Ashwell**

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