Alps Explorer (8 days)
The Highlights of the Albanian Alps

Explore the Accursed Mountains at your own pace. Gorgeous hikes in Theth and Valbona with road book, map and GPS support, transfers and luggage transport, private ensuite rooms at guesthouses and hotels in lively Shkodra and modern Tirana.

Prefer to go with a guide? Make it a private trip or join the Albanian Alps group tours. Want to go in spring or autumn? See the Hidden Valley Trek in Southern Albania.

7x overnights with hiking up to ▲ 750 ▼ 1,125 m
Classic Circuit: Koman Lake, Theth & Valbona National Park
Introduction

Highlights of the Alps Explorer
☆ Boat across the fjord-like Komani Lake to reach amazing Valbona NP
☆ Hike the best routes of the Valbona and Thethi National Parks
☆ Set a foot across to Montenegro and reach a panorama above 2.000 meters
☆ Stay at family-run small hotels and guesthouses in private ensuite rooms
☆ Have everything taken care of, accommodation, transfers, luggage transport...

self-guided trip
8 days (7 nights) including one arrival & departure day
late May to early October (best period)
1 to 12 persons
briefing in Shkodra, pick up from Tirana or Podgorica
6 hikes with up to 6 h walking time (Ø 5:00 h) and 1,125 m ▼▲
for those in good health and with reasonable fitness (see next page)
city hotels and mountain guesthouse (all with private rooms)
luggage transport: one piece up to 15 kg in soft bags only*

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Is this trip for me?

6 hikes up to 6h walking time (Ø 5:00h) and 1,125 m altitude difference.

Difficulty  
2/4 Moderate
A moderate tour includes either easier, medium-duration walks or harder, shorter walks. While experience is not necessary, it is desirable. Good health and reasonable fitness are more important. Some walking on loose underfoot, steep sections and occasional longer/harder days may be involved, still general conditions will be fair. A walking day is normally three to five hours and daily ascents will likely be around 300m to 700m, perhaps with an odd day ascending around 800m to 900m.

Comfort  
3/4 Comfortable (FIT)
That means: city hotels and mountain guesthouse (all with private rooms)
Breakdown: 7 night(s) in private room(s)

<table>
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<th>Asc VS Desc</th>
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<td>1,125</td>
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<td>15</td>
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<td>750 1,125</td>
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<td>10</td>
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<td>150 400</td>
<td>275 275</td>
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<td>8. Tirana - Departure</td>
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"Take only pictures, leave only footprints"
Visitors are expected to respect nature, dispose of their waste properly and be considerate of local culture and people.

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Overview
Click to open an interactive map

Included
- materials for a self-guided trip
- accommodation: 2x hotel(s), 5x guesthouse(s),
- meals: all breakfasts, 6 lunches and 5 dinners
- transfers as foreseen by the itinerary including airport pick-up
- luggage transport: one piece up to 15 kg in soft bags only*
- entrance fees, trekking and border crossing permits (on guided tours only)
* limited by luggage transport on horse, take a duffel or rucksack, hardcases are not suitable

Excluded
- meals not listed above as well as drinks other than table water
- personal expenses such as gratuities and souvenirs
- flights: all Zbulo tours are ground-service only
- overseas health insurance* is compulsory to offer best possible care
* 99% of European travel insurances cover this already

Outline
1. Arrival - Shkodra: hotel (-/-/-)
2. Shkodra - Koman - Bajram Curri - Valbona: guesthouse/hotel (B/L/D)
3. Valbona - Kukaj - Valbona: guesthouse/hotel (B/LP/D)
4. Valbona - Valbona Pass - Theth: guesthouse (B/LP/D)
5. Theth - Peja Pass / Denelli - Theth: guesthouse (B/LP/D)
6. Theth - Nderlysa: guesthouse (B/LP/D)
7. Nderlysa - Blue Eye - Shkodra - Tirana: hotel (B/LP/-)
8. Tirana - Departure: - (B/-/-)

Have questions?
Click to visit our knowledge base
or write us at welcome@zbulo.org
Welcome to Albania!
Arrival to Shkodra - Historic Capital & Gateway to the Alps

Pickup from Tirana/Podgorica | Meeting in Shkodra at 3-5 pm

Welcome to the Balkans! You’re met by a driver at Tirana (TIA) or Podgorica (TGD) airport/city for the two hour transfer to Shkodra. Meet Zbulo staff in the afternoon to receive materials (road book, maps, GPS & SIM card), get a walk thru of the trip and all your questions answered. Arriving early, go swim in the Balkans largest lake and visit the Rozafa Castle to learn about its legend and enjoy the fabulous views of the Alps. Immerse in the buzz of the bazaar, at the Marubi photo library in the town's past or enjoy an espresso with the locals. In the evening bars bust with locals flocking for the evening stroll into the pedestrian zone. Lined with bourgeoisie town houses, reminder of the cities rich past, it has a certain Italian atmosphere to it. When daylight fades you can choose between restaurants that offer carefully crafted traditional meals. We are wish you a good night after an interesting first day in Albania. Tomorrow you start early into the Albanian Alps! (6:15 am departure)
2. Journey into the Accursed Mountains

A Boat Ride on Koman Lake and Warm Up Walk in the Valbona National Park

An early start affords a scenic drive through the Drin Gorges and to the Komani Lake (55km/1.5h). The picturesque reservoir loops similar to a Norwegian fjord through sheer rock walls and makes for the most attractive route into the Albanian Alps. You’re in for a surprise by the custom-made “boat”, which stops several times to pick up talkative locals from remote villages before arriving at Fierze (46 km/3h). After lunch, you’re taken by car further into the highlands of the Valbona National Park into a traditional village composed of imposing tower houses. The afternoon warm-up walk follows a crystal clear stream through ancient beach forests speckled with the sweetest strawberries. Along the way, you can enjoy a swimming break at the river or a secluded pond. The walk ends at a cozy accommodation in upper Valbona and there’s opportunity to explore the vicinity further. The jagged peaks towering high above leave you with itchy feet, tomorrow will be the day! Tonight we enjoy a hearty home-cooked meal and well earned rest after this impression packed introduction to the Accursed Mountains.

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3. Heights of Valbona – Queen of the Mountains
Hike to Hamlet Kukaj, Colorful Meadows & Meet Hospitable Shepherds

_refreshed you start the hike to Kukaj, an isolated hamlet where only two families reside. Below bunkers that once protected the border are now scattered in the riverbed. The windy path takes you over lush meadows ablaze with the colors of a wide variety of spring flowers to a shepherd hut on 1.650m. In the communist period, when this was a no-go area, the building used to be a military barrack. Admire the wild and romantic jagged mountain scenery, sample fresh milk products with shepherd s present or opt to climb higher to an ancient crossing at the Montenegrin border. At 2.045m a weathered border pyramid is the only reminder of the isolation Albania once endured, from here views reach to the most dramatic parts of Montenegrin Prokletije. Catching a last glimpse at the Alps highest peak Jezerc (2.694m) you descent on a different path to the accommodation. When daylight fades you admire the alpine glow over dinner in the idyllic garden. No surprise many local women are named after the beautiful valley.

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Another highlight and with with the highest point of the journey await today. After a short ride over a rough road, you meet the mule porter who carries the main luggage and set out for the hike across Valbona Pass (1.811m). Above the village Rragam few steep segments need to be tackled. Pause regularly near springs and on colorful meadows to take a breath of herb filled aromatic mountain air and enjoy the splendid views. Reaching the pass, the surrounding peaks appear on par and sweeping views of both national parks fascinate even the seasoned traveler. Enjoy the picturesque landscape during a lunch break ahead of the descent to Theth, where the fairy-tale beech forest provides cover from the sun in the afternoon. Close to the village the woods thin out, Mt. Arapi (2.217m) becomes more dominant and soon the upmost houses of the village are reached. Spread below are the valleys many hamlets and a broad path takes you through the village to another inviting guesthouse in the center.
The Peja Pass or Meadows above the Clouds
Two Scenic Hikes or a Relaxed Day in the Village

Choose for today's hike between the route to Peja Pass at the northern end of the valley below the Matterhorn of Albania or the panoramic trail to the Meadows of Denelli. Both are return routes and you stay for a second night at the same guesthouse.

For the first sun exposed option an early start and optional transfer to the trailhead, 4 km drive or one hour walking time each way, are recommend. From where the trail starts near the source of the Thethi River, the wall still looks impenetrable. The ancient caravan path is hidden in the sheer 900 m drop below Mt. Arapi and named after the Kosovarian city Peja, where the route connected to. On top is a little lake where you cool down your feet.

The Denelli walk starts from the guesthouse, leads through green Ulaj neighborhood and ascends after a river crossing in light forest to a path in the cliffs & football field sized plain in the middle of the mountains. You find shepherds here in July & August.
6. Explore Theth – The Heart of the Albanian Alps
Learn about Kanun & Blood Feud, Hike to Grunas Waterfall & Nderlys

A walk through the village and green fields reveals the full extent of Theth. Visit the iconic church and dive into the history of the “kanun” at the lock-in tower that offered protection to those affected. It is the perfect place to learn about the highland law code of Leke Dukagjini, its origins, impact and present day relevance. Onward along water channels the paths ascends to the Thethi waterfall and drops again to a cliff above the river where archeologists discovered stone aged terraces. Gaze into the adjacent 50m deep Grunas Canyon before starting the second part of the hike on a well-worn bridle path that leads along the river downstream to Nderlys. Tonight’s accommodation is a simpler, but very welcoming homestay in a much less visited hamlet. Use your free time to sample mulberries, grapes and plums in the garden, ask the your host about bee keeping, explore the surroundings or swim in the nearby pools.

Find this walk too short? Hike yesterday’s alternative option and transfer to Nderlys.

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7. The “Blue Eye” and Modern Face of Albania
Walk to a hidden Oasis, Scenic Drive and the Capital

The hike through a canyon leads to a karst spring called the “Blue Eye”. The bravest can take a dip in the icy, butterfly surrounded waters - truly a hidden oasis to relax at. Without mobile phone coverage, electricity and road access, busy everyday life feels completely forgotten. The walk can be a extended to a closeby abandoned hamlet. The public minibus collects passengers at around 1-2 pm, it’s a scenic drive across the Terthoria Pass into the Valley of Boge and along Lake Shkodra (3 h), riding with the locals certainly add some flavor. After refreshments and changing cars it takes another two hours to arrive at the central hotel in the early evening. Tirana represents the modern, very different side of Albania. Conclude your day with dinner and a drink out in chic “bloku” district, recall the past week of travel and celebrate the memorable journey through the Albanian Alps.

Want to combine yesterday and today's shorter hikes into one or just leave earlier for Tirana - opt for a private 4x4 transfer.

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Farewell from Albania!
Time to Say Goodbye | Options to Extend Your Trip

Airport transfer at your preferred timing

Stroll through town, visit the colorful bazaar and park that forms the green heart of Tirana. Two former nuclear shelters open their doors to visitors, the museum turned headquarters of the secret police, National History Museum and socialist period art gallery make up just a few of city's sights. The last day presents you yet another side of diverse Albania, one that stands in stark contrast to the rural areas visited in the past days. Your multi-faceted journey through Albania ends with an organized transfer to the airport.

Thank you joining for this adventure, we hope you had a great time and hope it's not your last visit to the country of warm hospitality, countless mountains and sun-kissed beaches.

Like to stay longer? Ask us about discounts on combined trips (up to 10%), transfers and extension nights in Tirana, Shkodra and elsewhere - plenty to explore that merits a full day in each town.