

ZBULO! DISCOVER ALBANIA

Hidden Valley Trek (8 days)

Homestay Trekking in Southern Albania



Discover the beauty of the hidden Zagoria Valley. Hike between off the beaten path villages, swim in warm springs, meet friendly hosts and enjoy home cooked meals at homestays. Visit the magical stone city of Gjirokaster & modern capital Tirana.

Looking for a trip in summer? See the Alps Explorer in Northern Albania.

7x overnights with hiking up to ▲ 750 ▼ 1,250 m
Zagoria Valley and Permet

Intro

Follow in the footsteps of caravan travel, cross historical Ottoman stone bridges, marvel about medieval frescoes and explore the inside of the city of stone's finest mansion. This individual adventure combines trekking in a little-visited mountain valley where locals and villages remain untouched by mass tourism with the highlights of Southern Albania's cultural sights. First-time visitors will be amazed by the hospitality of the small homestays and indulge in local cuisine, returnees who have seen the Albanian Alps enjoy the stark contrast in landscape and having the secluded trails all to themselves.

This tour starts from Tirana (or Saranda/Corfu) and caters to both those on a weeklong trip to Albania as well as others planning for an extended trip alike - ask us about extensions!

This is a Zbulo Original, in cooperation with the NGO CESVI we created a network of routes in Zagoria and around Permet, trained homestays and local guides to promote the region.

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Highlights of the Hidden Valley Trek

- ☆ Trek through the little visited villages of hidden Zagoria Valley
- ☆ Enjoy snow topped peaks and blossom in spring and sweet harvest season in autumn
- ☆ Feel warm hospitality and taste home cooked meals as authentic homestays
- ☆ Visit the stone city of Gjirokastra and modern Tirana, Albania's capital
- ☆ Peace of mind with accommodation, transfers and luggage transport taken care of

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8 days (7 nights) including one arrival & departure day



5 hikes with up to 7 h walking time (Ø 5:30 h) and 1,250 m ▼▲



1 to 12 persons



starts and ends in Tirana, on request from Saranda (Corfu ferry)



April to early June, September to late October



for those in good health and with reasonable fitness (see next page)



self-guided trip



hotels with private ensuite rooms & guesthouse with shared rooms



luggage transport: one piece up to 15 kg in soft bags only*

Is this trip for me?

5 hikes up to 7h walking time (Ø 5:30h) and up to 1,250 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 **2/4 Welcoming**

That means: hotels with private ensuite rooms & guesthouse with shared rooms
- participants share a room with 2-5 other travelers from the group

Breakdown: 3 night(s) in private ensuite, 4 night(s) in shared room(s)

Overview	Time	Dist	Asc VS Desc	Asc	Desc
TOTAL	Ø 5:30	54		3,050	3,150
1. Tirane - Peshtan	0:00	0		0	0
2. Peshtan - Limar	5:00	11		750	425
3. Limar - Hoshteve	6:30	15		725	575
4. Hoshteve - Sheper	5:00	13		600	550
5. Sheper - Permet	7:30	10		625	1,250
6. Permet - Gjirokaster	3:00	6		350	350
7. Gjirokaster - Tirane	0:00	0		0	0
8. Tirane - Departure	0:00	0		0	0

"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.

Overview

[Click to open an interactive map](#)

Included

- materials for a self-guided trip
 - accommodation: 3x hotel(s), 1x guesthouse(s), 3x homestay(s),
 - meals: all breakfasts, 4 lunches and 4 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. Tirane (Saranda) - Peshtan: guesthouse (-/-/D)
2. Peshtan - Limar: homestay (B/LP/D)
3. Limar - Doshnice - Hoshteve: homestay (B/LP/D)
4. Hoshteve - Sheper: homestay (B/LP/D)
5. Sheper - Permet: hotel (B/LP/-)
6. Permet - Sopot - Benje - Gjirokaster: hotel (B/-/-)
7. Gjirokaster - Tirane: hotel (B/-/-)
8. Tirane - Departure: - (B/-/-)

Have questions?

[Click to visit our knowledge base](#)
or write us at welcome@zbulo.org

1. Welcome to Albania! Travel into Southern Albania from Tirana or Saranda (Corfu)



Briefing in Tirana

Welcome to the Balkans! Zbulo staff meets you in town or at Tirana Airport (TIA) to hand over materials (road book, maps, GPS & SIM card), walk you through the trip and answer all your questions. Depending on your booking, you're either taken to the bus station for public transport towards the overnight location, where you can catch a taxi to the hotel, or depart on a private transfer directly to the doorstep. Driving yourself, this can also be accommodated. The transfer into Southern Albania takes up to four hours, it leads past the coastal plain's colorful produce stands and along the mountain backed Vjosa River to the outskirts of Tepelena. There, a bold bridge is followed by a narrow road that meanders into the small village right at the starting point of the hike. Our hostess Mirela is proud of her impressive collection of relics from the conflicts of the last centuries.

After a round of introductions and an overview of the following days, we look forward to a hearty dinner and the start of the trek into the Zagoria Valley.



🍴 - / - / D



🏠 Guesthouse



🚌 3 h

2. Start Trekking into Hidden Zagoria Valley

Enter a Forgotten Mountain Realm where Time Stands Still



⇔ 11 km ▲ 750 m ▼ 425 m ⌘ 5:00 h

Our hike starts at the doorstep of the valley. Zagoria is not yet visible - Dhembeli, Nemercka, Lunxheria and Bureto, four mountain ranges, encompass and shield it from the outside world. Only an almost forgotten caravan route leads inside this hidden place. Through open woodland, the route ascends to a pass that reveals the full extent of the valley out of which mountains rise on both sides. Over terraced fields, the path leads to the almost deserted village Kala, where only three inhabitants remain, and down to the river. It's crossed via one of Ali Pasha's impressive Ottoman stone bridges and climbing up to Limar, remains of the cobbled caravan path are visible. The views to Mt Strakavec, remote feeling and vernacular stone architecture of Limar leave a lasting impression. A stroll through the village reveals its whole extent and you can learn more about life here from your hosts. Overnight in the teacher's house who takes care of the 3 pupils who remain in school regardless the seclusion.



🍴 B / LP / D

🏠 Homestay

🚌 -

3. A Life-Seeing Day in the Zagoria Villages

Stone Villages, Glory of Past Days and Shepherds Trails



↔ 14.5 km ▲ 725 m ▼ 575 m ✕ 6:30 h

Only footpaths connect the villages en route to the next overnight location, where your luggage is transported by horse. Passing several hamlets gives you the opportunity to experience rural lifestyle, meet locals and admire the mountain splendor above as well as Zagoria River below, where the cooling Doshnica Waterfall awaits. Depending on the river level, you continue along the stream or backtrack into the village and over grassy meadows before the reascent to Hoshteve marks the final stage. Animal husbandry, beekeeping and the collection of medical herbs have been the only sources of meager income, triggering mass emigration to Greece. Your hosts lived there for 17 years, skype almost daily with their children in the US and opened a B&B on their return. They're a good example of the returning diaspora, equipped with new skill sets and savings to invest. Don't miss out on the Church of the Holy Apostles, a fine example of Orthodox heritage.



🍴 B / LP / D

🏠 Homestay

🚌 -

4.**Follow in the Footsteps of Bill Tilman****Buried Layers of History, Friendly Encounters and Time to Relax**

↔ 12.5 km

▲ 600 m

▼ 550 m

⌘ 5:00 h

A shorter and easier route with views of Mt. Cajupi allows for a relaxed but rewarding walking day. The villages Vithuq, Koncka, Nivan and Sheper are connected by roads, their influence manifests in newer buildings that serve as weekend and retirement houses. Nivan served as the center of the commune - remains of military installations and storage depots are visible, while its central square is dedicated to William Tilman. Described as "the 20th Century's last true explorer", Tilman was a famed British mountaineer and sailor who, during WW2, fought based out of Zagoria with the resistance against German occupation. Only once more the trail takes us down to the river, monastery and (on an optional detour) to the last of Ali Pasha's stone bridges. After a shortcut across meadows you reach Sheper, where many nomadic Aroman shepherds were forced to settle here during communism. Time can be spent with the family or exploring the village, in particular the neglected museum and buildings adorned with weathered Marx and Lenin quotes. This is the last village overnight.



B / LP / D



Homestay



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5. Crossing over the Dhembel Pass (1.450m)

Walk the ancient Caravan Route and See Shepherd's Life



↔ 10 km ▲ 625 m ▼ 1,250 m ⌘ 7:30 h

The crossing of the Dhembel-Nemercke Range is the last stage of our trek and leads back into the outside world. As the drive around takes almost as long as the walk across, the challenging route remains in use by locals. Enver Hoxha's bunkers still protect the entrance to a crack that climbs with fabulous views of Mt. Cajupi to the top of the mountain. Shepherds come from as far as Konispol, the southernmost point of Albania, to these summer pastures. It isn't uncommon for flocks to travel two weeks to reach the fertile meadows. The alpine valley is bare of trees and flanked by steep slopes, the Dhembel Pass (1450m) sits at its end and offers views of the Eastern Mountains, across into Greece and to the city of Permet far below. The long rocky descent requires attention and leads into Leuse, another stone village with fresco-covered church - perhaps the most beautiful in Southern Albania? From here it's only a short walk to the centrally located hotel. Put up the tired leg and look forward to the city's cuisine, wines and raki.



🍴 B / LP / -

🏠 Hotel

🚌 -

6. Discover the little known Wonders of Permet

Hike up the Sopot Waterfall and swim in warm Springs of Benja



↔ 6 km ▲ 350 m ▼ 350 m ⌘ 3:00 h

The scenery alone is worth the 45 min drive to today's trailhead. Below, the turquoise waters of the Vjosa have dug deep into the rock, above the river towers the rugged Nemercka Range. From afar, the sheer, 650m high wall of Southern Albania's second highest summit looks impressive, but only a walk along water channels towards the Sopot Waterfall at the wall's base reveals its full extent. Returning from the hike, another unique nature gem at the nearby entrance of the Langarica Canyon waits to surprise. The warm thermal pools of Benje are said to have a healing effect on many ailments. They are a welcome treatment after the last days of hiking. Soak and relax in their sulfuric waters or explore the river canyon on foot. From here it takes a good 90 min to transfer to Gjirokaster, where you will stay at one of the vernacular Ottoman mansions in the old town. Start exploring the streets of the "City of Stone" and absorb the atmosphere in one of the many small cafes, tomorrow there's time for more.



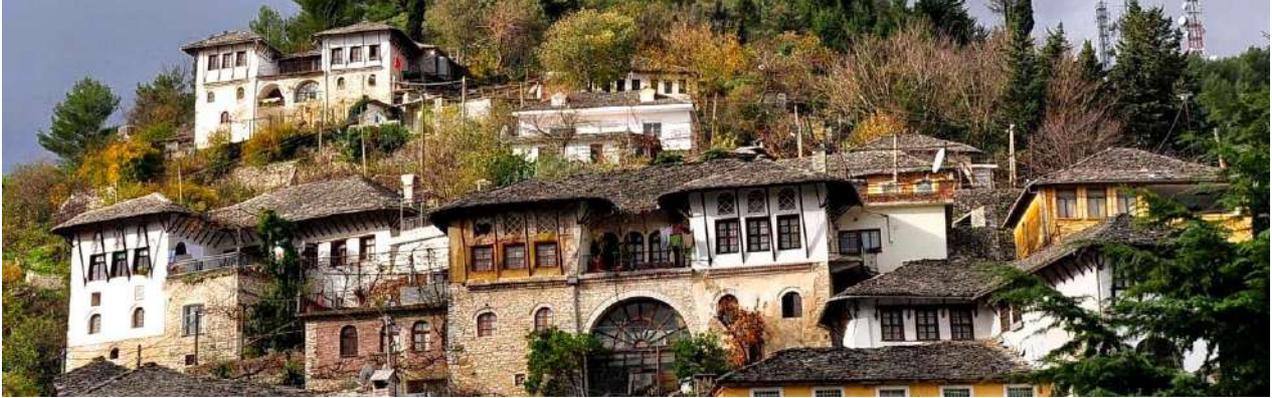
🍴 B / - / -

🏠 Hotel

🚌 3 h

7. Explore Historic Gjirokastra & Modern Tirana

See the "City of Stone", Ottoman Mansions and Vibrant Capital



Famed for its intricate Ottoman mansions, it's also known as the birthplace of dictator Enver Hoxha and Albania's most influential, Nobel-nominated writer Ismail Kadare. Protected by the status of "museum town", Gjirokastra survived socialist modernization campaigns and is today inscribed in the World Heritage List. Get lost in maze of narrow, cobbled streets, visit the ethnographic museum in Hoxha's birth house and climb to the towering castle above. Inside the walls oddities like an American "spy plane" sit on display, the city museum enlightens with insights and views from the iconic clock tower remind of the trekking days. One can easily spend more days walking through the neighborhoods or visiting nearby sites. Butrint, the Blue Eye (a karst spring) and beaches of the Albanian Riviera are also less than two hours driving from here. A private transfer or public transport takes you to the centrally located hotel in Tirana (up to 4h), the modern capital that wants to be everything but Albanian. Visit the Skanderbeg Square and trendy "Blloku" district to watch the city come to life at night.



 B / - / -

 Hotel

 3:30 - 4 h

8. Farewell from Albania! Travel Back Home or Extend Your Adventure



Airport transfer at your preferred timing

Time permitting, you can go on a stroll to explore the capital's heart. At the "New Bazar" you can find special treats to bring as edible/drinkable souvenirs, or simply sip an espresso in one of the charming bars and observe the flow of a busy morning. "Bunkart 2" and "House of Leaves", two of the most interesting museums dedicated to the communist era are only a 10 min walk away from the lively Skanderbeg Square. Your multi-faceted journey through Albania ends with an organized 30 min 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, the Riviera, Gjirokastra and elsewhere - plenty to explore that merits a full day in each town.



 B / - / -

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 ~ 30 min