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
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

self-guided trip
8 days (7 nights) including one arrival & departure day
April to early June, September to late October (best period)
1 to 8 persons (ask us for details)
starts and ends in Tirana, on request from Saranda (Corfu ferry)
5 hikes with up to 7 h walking time (Ø 5:30 h) and 1,250 m ▼▲ for those in good health and with reasonable fitness (see next page)
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 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)

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Overview</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Dist</th>
<th>Ø 5:30 h</th>
<th>Asc</th>
<th>Desc</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Tirana/Saranda - Tepelena</td>
<td>0:00</td>
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<td>2. Tepelena/Gjirokatra - Limar</td>
<td>5:00</td>
<td>11</td>
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<td>750</td>
<td>425</td>
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<td>3. Limar - Hoshteve</td>
<td>6:30</td>
<td>15</td>
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<td>725</td>
<td>575</td>
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<td>4. Hoshteve - Sheper</td>
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<td>13</td>
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<td>600</td>
<td>550</td>
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<td>5. Sheper - Permet</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td>625</td>
<td>1,250</td>
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<td>6. Permet - Gjirokastra</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<td>350</td>
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<td>7. Gjirokastra - Tirana</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: 3x hotel(s), 4x 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. Tirana/Saranda - Tepelena: hotel (-/-/-)
2. Tepelena/Gjirokatra - Keclyre - Limar: homestay (B/LP/D)
3. Limar - Doshnice - Hoshteve: homestay (B/LP/D)
4. Hoshteve - Sheper: homestay (B/LP/D)
5. Sheper - Permet: homestay (B/LP/D)
6. Permet - Sopot - Benje - Gjirokastra: hotel (B/-/-)
7. Gjirokastra - Tirana: hotel (B/-/-)
8. Tirana - Departure: - (B/-/-)

Have questions?
Click to visit our knowledge base
or write us at welcome@zbulo.org
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 Tepelenë. The small family-run hotel sits on a terrace overlooking the river and is surrounded by nature. If you're looking for a few quiet days after the trip, consider an extension night here.
2. **Start Trekking into Hidden Zagoria Valley**

Enter a Forgotten Mountain Realm where Time Stands Still

A short transfer on a windy road with views of Europe’s last wild river leads to a small village clinging to the mountainside. Zagoria is not yet visible, Dhembeli, Nemercka, Lunxheri and Buretto, 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 extend 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 fewer than 10 pupils who remain in the school, but actually gather from three villages.
3. **A Life-Seeing Day in the Zagoria Villages**  
**Stone Villages, Glory of Past Days and Shepherds Trails**

Only footpaths connect the villages en route to the next overnight location, where 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 Doshnica waterfall waits to be visited. Depending on its water level, there’s the option to continue along the river or backtrack into the village and continue on grassy meadows before the reascent to Hoshteve. 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 Apostle, a fine example of Orthodox heritage.
4. Follow in the Footsteps of Bill Tilman
Buried Layers of History, Friendly Encounters and Time to Relax

A shorter and easier route with views of Mt. Cajupi allows for a relaxed but rewarding walking day. The villages Vuthuq, 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 and remains of military installations and storage depots are visible, 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 one more layer of history, only once more the trail takes us down to the river, a monastery and (on an optional detor) to the last of Ali Pasha’s stone bridges. A shortcut across meadows takes you into Sheper for a last village overnight with a family of Aroman roots, nomadic shepherds who were forcefully settled here during communism. Time can be spend with the family or exploring the village, in particular the neglected museum and buildings that are adorned with weathered Marx and Lenin quotes.
5. **Crossing over the Dhembel Pass (1.450m)**

*Walk the ancient Caravan Route and See Shepherd's Life*

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 is still 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 fertile meadows. The alpine valley is bare of vegetation 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 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 laks and look forward to trying the city's famous cuisine, wines and raki.
6. Discover the little known Wonders of Permet

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

The scenery alone is worth the 45 min drive to today's trailhead. Below us 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 walking the along water channels towards the Sopot Waterfall at the wall's base reveals its full extend. Returning from the hike, another unique nature gem at the nearby entrance of the Lengarica Canyon waits to surprise. The warm thermal pools of Benje are said to have a healing effect on many ailments. They are welcome treatment after the last days of hiking. Soak and relax in their sulfurous waters or explore the river canyon on foot. From here it takes a good 90 min to transfer to Gjirokaster one of the vernacular Ottoman mansion that houses guests in the oldown. 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.
Famed for its intricate, fortress-like Ottoman mansions, it’s also known as the birthplace of dictator Enver Hoxha and Albania’s most influential, Nobel-nominated writer Ismail Kadare (Chronicles in Stone is a must read). Protected by the status of “museum town”, Gjirokaster 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.
8. **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 at the Albanian Riviera, in Tirana or Gjirokastra - plenty to explore that merits a full day in each town.