

ZBULO! DISCOVER ALBANIA

High Scardus Trail (8 days)

The newest hiking trail of the Balkans



Get off the beaten path and become a pioneer on this new trek through the remote border region of Albania and North Macedonia including the highest peak of both countries. Stay overnight with shepherds and experience authentic Balkan hospitality.

7x overnights with hiking up to ▲ 1,475 ▼ 1,550 m
Remote trekking in Albania's highest mountain range
An exclusive trip on a Zbulo signature trail.

Intro

Join an adventure on the newest and wildest trekking route in the Balkans! This tour on the Albanian segment of the High Scardus Trail focuses on the remotest regions of the Eastern Highlands. The paths were originally built by Roman caravans in the 2nd Century BC, who after witnessing the spectacular colors of the landscape gave the mountains the name Scardus (later translated into slavic Šar, meaning colorful).

Demanding hikes through glacial valleys and alpine meadows reward with panoramas of the surrounding peaks. Reaching mighty Mt. Korab (2.764 m), both Albania's and North Macedonia's highest peak, is an absolute highlight. Experience the remarkable hospitality of friendly homestays, insights into local daily life and prepare to roughen it for one night staying among herdsmen on the Grama Alp. Our journey ends in the tranquil stone villages of Dibra, strong in tradition and rich in history, famous for their sweet cherries, apples and only the finest firewater.

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Highlights of the High Scardus Trail

- ☆ Become a pioneer, be among the first to trek this Via Dinarica segment
- ☆ Criss cross the now wide open border between Albania and Macedonia
- ☆ Get off the beaten path and into the highest range of the country
- ☆ Climb Mt. Korab (2.764m) - the highest peak of two countries
- ☆ Feel warm Balkan hospitality at authentic local homestays

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



6 hikes with up to 8 h walking time (Ø 7:15 h) and 1,550 m ▼ ▲



3 to 8 persons / guaranteed with three participants



starts and finishes in Tirana (Pristina)



early June to late September



for fit hikers, preferably with previous trekking experience (see next page)



English-speaking tour leader



basic, clean, foremost welcoming and authentic homestays



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

Is this trip for me?

6 hikes up to 8h walking time (Ø 7:15h) and up to 1,550 m altitude difference.

Difficulty **3/4 Challenging**

For treks in mountainous and alpine terrain fitness is important and previous trekking experience recommended. It is not vital as long you are confident of your physical condition and sure-footedness. Prepare to endure poor weather and to navigate rocky undefined routes, remoteness can also play a part. Walking days are usually between 5 and 8 hours, although they can be longer to cross passes or peaks (mostly optional). Daily ascents will likely be around 900m to 1.000m, perhaps with the odd day ascending around 1.100m to 1.300m.

Comfort **1/4 Basic**

That means: basic, clean, foremost welcoming and authentic homestays

- participants share a room with 2-5 other travelers from the group
- includes at least one overnight at a basic accommodation

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

Overview	Time	Dist	Asc VS Desc	Asc	Desc
TOTAL	Ø 7:15	92		5,725	6,425
1. Tirane - Kukes	0:00	0		0	0
2. Kukes - Caje	6:30	15		725	1,000
3. Caje - Radomire	7:45	17		1,000	1,075
4. Radomire - Radomire	8:30	17		1,475	1,475
5. Radomire - Alp	7:00	16		1,025	575
6. Grama - Rabdisht	8:00	15		800	1,550
7. Rabdisht - Tirane	5:15	12		700	750
8. Tirane - Airport	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

- English-speaking guide
- accommodation: 2x hotel(s), 2x pension(s), 1x guesthouse(s), 1x homestay(s), 1x hut(s)
- meals: all breakfasts, 6 lunches and 7 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 / Pristina - Kukes: hotel (-/-/D)
2. Kukes - Shishtavec - Cajë: homestay (B/LP/D)
3. Cajë - Radomirë: simple pension (B/LP/D)
4. Radomirë - Mt. Korab (2.764m) - Radomirë: simple pension (B/LP/D)
5. Radomirë - Grama Alp: shepherd's huts (B/LP/D)
6. Grama Alp - Grama Pass - Rabdisht: guesthouse (B/LP/D)
7. Rabdisht - Peshkopi - Tirane: hotel (B/LP/D)
8. Tirana - Tirana Airport

Have questions?

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

1. Welcome to Albania!

Travel into the Northeast



Group transfer from Tirana departing at the latest at 15:00

Welcome to the Balkans! You can fly into Tirana (TIA) and Pristina airport (PRN), best suited as they are both about 2 hours out from our meeting point in Kukes. Join the guide traveling by bus from Tirana or ask us for more details on public transport. We're also happy to arrange a private transfer for you, please let us know ahead of time where you wish to be picked up from. The group gathers at the hotel for an introduction round and tour briefing at 19:00, pending everyone's arrival. Note that luggage is best stored in Tirana/Prishtina as the trip doesn't return to Kukes.

Kukes is a small border town in north-eastern Albania, located at the confluence of Kosovo's White and North Macedonia's Black Drin Rivers. In a one of a kind case the city was nominated for welcoming and sheltering 450.000 Kosovar refugees in 1999 with the Nobel Prize. Views of towering Mt. Gjallica (2.489 m) raise our anticipation for the upcoming days.



 - / - / D

 Hotel

 2:00 h

2. Borderlands of Albania, Kosovo & N.Macedonia

On the Trail of Colors through the Gorani Highlands



↔ 15 km ▲ 725 m ▼ 1,000 m ⌘ 6:30 h

A 45 min. transfer takes us through the mighty Vanave Gorge and up a winding road into the gora (highlands). When nation states formed at the turn of the 20th century the formerly nomadic, Slavic-speaking Gorani community spread across the border triangle. Today's hike starts near the Gorani village of Shishtavec, from where a gradual ascent takes us to the rocky outcrop of Mt. Kallabak (2.174 m). It's the very first peak of the Sharr Massif that separates the three countries. Onward we walk through seemingly endless meadows along a panoramic ridgeline crisscrossing the border between Albania and Kosovo. A glimpse of Mt. Korab (2.764 m) creates pleasant anticipation of the days of adventure ahead of us. Descending into a deep cut alpine valley we reach the remote village Cajë, possibly the highest, year-round inhabited settlement of the country. Here we visit the "club", the nucleus of every Albanian village, for a chit-chat with the elders and a glass of strong raki (local firewater) at the end of our first day on the High Scardus Trail.



🍴 B / LP / D

🏠 Homestay

🚌 45 min

3. Pristine Nature in the Eastern Highlands

Flower Carpets and Wild Horses



⇔ 17 km ▲ 1,000 m ▼ 1,075 m ⌘ 7:45 h

Wishing farewell to our host family, we leave the simple homestay for our second, longer hike to the village of Radomire. Fairytale-like beauty awaits us at the alpine meadows covered by colorful flower carpets. With a bit of luck we may find the endemic Albanian lily or herds of semi-wild horses peacefully grazing here. Traversing a high ridgeline with minor ups and downs, the rocky peaks of Korab dominate the horizon. Every step takes us closer to the heart of the Korab-Koritnik Nature Park, with its high biodiversity and pristine nature a part of the Balkan Green Belt. New vistas open on our descent into the Field of Korabi, a hyperkarstic depression guarded by the infamous two-man bunkers rising from the ground like concrete mushrooms. Our destination Radomire is a lively village that shelters visitors aspiring to the heights of Korab. We greet our host and make ourselves comfortable in the simple pension for the next two nights. Time to put the tired feet up and snuggle down on the comfy sheepskin pads.



 B / LP / D

 Simple Pension

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4. Climbing Mt. Korab (2.764 m)

The Highest Peak of Albania & North Macedonia or Day at Leisure



⇔ 17 km

▲ 1,475 m

▼ 1,475 m

⌘ 8:30 h

We rise early, prepared for the highpoint of our trip, the mighty peak of Mt. Korab (2.764 m). It will be a long and demanding day with much elevation difference but no technical difficulty. The path sees shepherd huts and mixed terrain, rocky stretches and soft alpine meadows. Reaching the saddle at the border with North Macedonia, we circle the peak and approach it from the backside, where we're presented with another perspective of the rocky giant. Having reached a special milestone in our tour, we enjoy our picnic and the breathtaking views across both Albania and North Macedonia. Descending we take a slightly different route back to Radomire. Nonetheless, you may complete only part of the hike or skip it altogether to spend the day at leisure and explore the village. In the evening, we gather around the "oda", a room traditionally reserved for honored guests, and sitting in a circle, as old customs call for, share stories and impressions gathered in these two days around Korab. Tomorrow's overnight will be very different.



 B / LP / D

 Simple Pension

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5. A memorable Night on the Ladies Pasture

Back to the Roots Among the Herdsmen of Dibra



↔ 16 km ▲ 1,025 m ▼ 575 m ⌘ 7:00 h

We leave our base at Mt. Korab to head back into the highlands. Climbing up an old patrol route towards the border we see the “brezi i bute”, a stretch of sand created to detect footsteps. The peaceful surroundings we enjoy so carefree today hold a gloomy past. They were under strong surveillance during communism in Albania and trespassers, if not fatally punished on the spot, would be sent together with their families to forced labor camps. From the highest point of today's hike, we overlook the wide plain of the glacial shaped valley with flocks of thousands of sheep roaming freely. We pass by a glacial lake where we can dip our feet into the refreshing cold. Tonight the shepherds of the Kaloshi clan welcome us into their modest wooden huts on the so-called Ladies Pasture at 1.770 m altitude. There's no phone signal, electricity or a shower. Instead we receive warm hospitality and unique insights into their daily work and life - today's also your best chance to try milking a sheep. At night we sit under the endless night sky around a bonfire before falling asleep.



 B / LP / D

 Shepherd's Huts

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6. Crossing the Grama Pass to Rabdisht

From Alpine Pastures to Picturesque Stone Villages



↔ 15 km ▲ 800 m ▼ 1,550 m ✕ 8:00 h

Parting from the shepherds and this secluded alpine world, separated by time and high mountains, we may admire their happiness but understand the hardship of the modest lifestyle better. Grounded by the experience, we ascend on a mule path towards the Grama Pass (2.300 m) to face sweeping 360° vistas of the surrounding peaks. Looking behind, views of Korab and Grama Lake leave us appreciating the long way we have come and provide strength for the demanding descent. After zigzagging down the old border patrol path, a peek back up from some distance makes it hard to believe that we just descended the immense, rocky wall. Circling at ease along the rim of the valley and cluster of villages far below we soak in the panorama. Closing in through the mountain pastures of Rabdisht, we gain a bird's eye view of the village with scattered red-tiled roofs and smoke from chimneys - a signal of our return to civilization. Once down in the cobbled alleys, we reach our lovely guesthouse and join our hosts for a firewater or home-made juice toast in their idyllic garden.



🍴 B / LP / D

🏠 Guesthouse

🚌 -

7. Daily Life in the Remote Villages of Peshkopi

Albania - A World of Contrasts between Countryside and the Capital



⇔ 12 km ▲ 700 m ▼ 750 m ⌘ 5:15 h

Today's hike around the picturesque villages of Dibra makes for a smooth transition from the simplicity and rawness of alpine heights to the fast-paced life of the city. We walk across hills and pastures between those villages viewed from above yesterday. Lack of road access has seen the once prosperous area fall behind. Locals still live largely off their own harvest and, lacking opportunities, the youth leaves en mass. Visiting Zagrad, Cerjan and Bellove we take a closer look at traditional stone houses, meet locals and are surely invited for a coffee. In the early afternoon we continue by car to Tirana. The modern capital's turmoil is a stark contrast to what we have experienced on the trek, showing a very different, more contemporary side of the country. On an evening stroll along the main boulevard, we learn about the origins and influences that shaped the city. During our last dinner together we look back on an eventful week and the highlights on the Balkan's youngest long distance trail. Time to wish farewell to each other.



🍴 B / LP / D



🏠 Hotel



🚌 4 h

8. Farewell Albania! Travel back Home or Extend your Adventure



Take the group transfer in the afternoon or depart individually

Your flight permitting, there's time to explore Tirana's streets and sights. Sip an espresso in one of the charming bars while observing the flow of a busy morning and find special treats and edible/drinkable souvenirs at the lively "New Bazar". Don't miss out on "Bunkart 2" or the "House of Leaves", two of the most interesting museums dedicated to the communist area and only a 5 min walk away from Tirana's main Skanderbeg Square. Let us know about your departure time and we fetch you for the 30 min transfer to Tirana Airport or international bus station. Thank you for joining us on this adventure, we hope to see you again, there is always more to explore in the Balkans!

Not ready to leave yet? Ask us about possible extensions, be it more action in the mountains, exploring the cultural highlights of Albania's historic cities or a laid back beach extension - Albania has it all!



 B / - / -

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 ~ 30 min