

**ZBULO! DISCOVER ALBANIA**

## **Peaks of the Balkans (8 days)**

**Hike Beyond Borders in Albania & Montenegro**



Trek one of the Balkans (and Europe) must-do routes and experience the best of Albania and Montenegro. Marvel about the panorama of awe-inspiring Grbaja Valley, climb the three-border peak Trekufiri and experience shepherd lifestyle first hand.

**Looking for the complete circuit? See the extended 12-day trek.**

7x overnights with hiking up to ▲ 1,250 ▼ 950 m

One of Europe's Top Treks

## Intro

Arrive from Podgorica or Tirana to our meeting point in Northern Albania's Shkodra and start the journey into the Albanian Alps with a scenic boat ride on the picturesque Koman Lake. From remarkable Valbona Valley, we trek through the wild Gashi River Reserve to the remote pasture Doberdol for a memorable overnight in a shepherd's hut. On Mt. Trekufiri, the point where the borders of three countries meet in one point, the concept of hiking beyond borders becomes tangible and panoramic views are rewarding. We cross over into Montenegro's beautiful Prokletije National Park, swim in tranquil Lake Hrid and ascend the double peaks of Taljanka and Popadija above awe-inspiring Grbaja Valley. An ancient caravan route leads us through the heart of the Accursed Mountains back to Albania, where we attempt the climb of Mt. Arapi. In Theth you learn about the Kanun and lifestyle of the highlanders, stop by a magical spring called „Blue Eye“ and conclude the journey in Shkodra.

Flights to Tirana or Podgorica Airport (Dubrovnik is further out)

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### Highlights of the Peaks of the Balkans

- ☆ Boat across the fjord-like Komani Lake to reach amazing Valbona NP
- ☆ Hike beyond borders through the Accursed Mountains of Albania & Montenegro
- ☆ Go back to the roots with a memorable overnight in a shepherd's hut
- ☆ Scale the three border peak Trekufiri for views of three countries
- ☆ Marvel across awe-inspiring scenery in Grbaja & Ropojana Valley

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



6 hikes with up to 7 h walking time (Ø 6:00 h) and 1,250 m ▼▲



3 to 12 persons / guaranteed with three participants



meeting in Shkodra, pick up from Tirana (city or airport)



late May to early October



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



English speaking tour leader (for more than 8 participants plus assistant)



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?

**6 hikes up to 7h walking time (Ø 6:00h) and up to 1,250 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 **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  
 - includes at least one overnight at a basic accommodation

Breakdown: 2 night(s) in private ensuite, 5 night(s) in shared room(s)

Overview	Time	Dist	Asc VS Desc	Asc	Desc
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>Ø 6:00</b>	<b>75</b>		<b>3,925</b>	<b>3,900</b>
1. Arrival - Shkodra	0:00	0		0	0
2. Shkodra - Valbona	3:30	7		250	50
3. Valbona - Doberdol	7:00	16		1,250	650
4. Doberdol - Polje	6:00	13		600	850
5. Vusanje - Vusanje	6:30	12		950	950
6. Vusanje - Theth	6:45	11		650	900
7. Theth - Shkodra	5:30	16		225	500
8. Shkodra - 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

- English-speaking guide(s)
  - accommodation: 2x hotel(s), 4x guesthouse(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. Arrival - Shkodra: hotel (-/-/D)
2. Shkodra - Koman - Bajram Curri - Valbona: guesthouse (B/L/D)
3. Valbona - Cerem - Doberdol: shepherd huts (B/LP/D)
4. Doberdol - Trekufiri - Lake Hrid - Babino Polje: guesthouse (B/LP/D)
5. Vusanje - Grbaja - Mt. Taljanka - Vusanje: guesthouse (B/LP/D)
6. Vusanje - Peja Pass - Theth: guesthouse (B/LP/D)
7. Theth - Nderlyse - Blue Eye - Shkodra: hotel (B/L/D)
8. Shkodra - Departure: - (B/-/-)

### Have questions?

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

## 1. Welcome to Albania! Arrival to Shkodra - gateway to the Alps



**Pickup from Tirana (city & airport) | Meeting in Shkodra at 7 pm**

Welcome to the Balkans! You can join the group transfer in Tirana (city center, 14:00) or later on at the TIA airport, at 15:00 the latest. In the afternoon you reach Shkodra (84km/2.5hr) and the centrally located hotel. Time permitting, stop at the Rozafa castle at the entrance of Shkodra and enjoy the fabulous views, a foretaste for the upcoming days of travel through the Albanian Alps. Afterwards, the city calls for a stroll through the pedestrian area lined with bourgeoisie townhouses, a reminder of the city's prestigious past. Immerse yourself in the city's Italian flair, join the buzz of the bazaar to buy dried fruits and other snacks. After a delicious dinner, there's time to thoroughly discuss what's to come in the following days. Why not round it up with a celebratory toast in one of the close-by bars? But don't stay up too long, tomorrow's transfer starts before sunrise!

Arriving early? Ask us about extension nights in Tirana & Shkodra, as well as recommendations on places or activities in both cities.



 - / - / D

 Hotel

 2.5 h

## 2. Journey into the Accursed Mountains

A boat ride on Lake Koman and warm-up walk in Valbona NP



↔ 7 km   ▲ 250 m   ▼ 50 m   ⌘ 3:30 h

An early start is followed by a scenic drive through the Drin Gorges to the Komani Lake (58km/2h). The picturesque reservoir loops similar to a Norwegian fjord through sheer rock walls and is the most attractive route into the Albanian Alps. You're in for a surprise by the peculiar ferry, which stops several times to pick up talkative locals from remote villages before arriving at Fierze (46 km/3h). By car you continue further into the highlands of the Valbona National Park, stopping for a light lunch in the small-city Bajram Curri. In the early afternoon, you reach the Valbona Valley and its tower-houses made of stone. The warm-up walk follows a crystal clear stream through ancient beech forests, speckled with the sweetest wild strawberries. Along the way, the brave will stop for a swimming break at the ice-cold river or a secluded pond. The jagged peaks towering high above you give itchy feet for tomorrow's trek into the highlands. Tonight, you enjoy a delicious, hearty dinner and a well-earned rest after this impression-packed introduction to the Accursed Mountains.



🍴 B / L / D

🏠 Guesthouse

🚌 3 h + 3 h boat

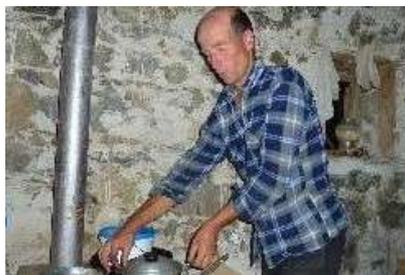
### 3. High Route into the Remote Border Triangle

Eastern Alps and Seasonal Life on the Summer Pastures of Doberdol



⇔ 16 km    ▲ 1,250 m    ▼ 650 m    ✕ 7:00 h

After a 45 min drive to Cerem, the path leads across flower carpets towards the first border triangle. Along the way you can enjoy forest fruits, admire plant life, and the views of Mt. Kolata (2.534m). Reaching the rim of the deep cut river canyon and following the high route through a conifer forest, you notice just how much the relief changes between the Western and Eastern Alps. Slopes are speckled with alpine pastures, where one can meet the herdsmen over coffee and raki. In the glacial-shaped valley of Doberdol (1.750m), animals roam the grazing grounds freely and time appears frozen. Locals still live in harmony with nature, as humankind did many years ago. This archaic place helps set the inner compass and grounds the soul. In the simple shepherd's huts, you relinquish comfort for one night in return for hospitality. The family prepares your meals and you learn more about the seasonal lifestyle of the shepherds at the campfire.



 B / LP / D

 Shepherd Huts

 45 min

## 4. Via the Three Border Peak into Montenegro

A Panoramic View of the Balkans Borderlands and Visit at Lake Hrid



⇔ 13 km

▲ 600 m

▼ 850 m

⌘ 6:00 h

Wishing farewell to our hosts, we climb out of the valley towards Mt. Trekufiri (2.366m). On the very top, the borders of three countries merge in sweeping vistas of the borderlands. The blueberry covered border trail leads us into Montenegro, around Bogicevica (2.374m) and to secluded Lake Hrid. The tranquil pond reflects the mountains, is shrouded in legends and provides habitat for newts, salamanders and fireflies. After a refreshing dip above 1.900m, we continue on a trail encompassed by a dense pine forest towards a hamlet of seasonal huts called "katund". Further down an unmade road, we reach the scattered settlement of Babino Polje. Here we overnight at the rim of the wilderness at simple but welcoming mountain huts.



B / LP / D



Guesthouse



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## 5. Grbaja Valley – The Culmination of Prokletije

Ridge Hike to the Double Peaks of Mt. Popadija & Taljanka (2.056m)



⇔ 12 km    ▲ 950 m    ▼ 950 m    ⌘ 6:30 h

The Grbaja Valley is one of the most awe-inspiring in the Balkans. A 30 min transfer leads into a narrow valley, wedged between the karst towers of Karanfili (2.461m). Arguably one of the most rugged and dramatic peaks in the Prokletije, it's a dream of many climbers. Ascending through a shaded fairy tale beech forest, a last steep climb takes you to the double peak of Popadija and Taljanka (2.056m). Here the hostile walls across seem almost within our reach and views gaze across the border into the Kelmend region of Albania. Choosing the most suitable route, traverse the narrow spine to a series of panoramic viewpoints back onto the shaded forest path, where the balloon hike closes. At a beer garden on the valley floor, you can celebrate the adventure with a cold drink before traveling back to the guesthouse in Vusanje. The nearby waterfall invites for a stroll, but views from the house are equally beautiful.



 B / LP / D

 Guesthouse

 30 min + 30 min

## 6. Through the heart of the Accursed Mountains

The caravan route to Albania with optional climb of Mt. Arapi (2.217m)



⇔ 11 km    ▲ 650 m    ▼ 900 m    ⌘ 6:45 h

Traveling up the Ropojana Valley, formed by a 26 km long glacier, you visit the pupil-shaped karst spring on the way, where an ice-cold river is born from the melting snow high up in the mountains. At the trailhead, a weathered border stone is the only reminder of the once tightly sealed borders of former Communist Albania. The mountain-framed corridor takes you past a dry lake, shepherd huts, and an abandoned military post into the heart of the Albanian Alps. Here, the canine tooth of Mt. Arapi (2.217m) stands high above the Thethi National Park, forming the highest wall in the Balkans. Arriving at Peja Pass (1.711 m), your guide determines whether the summit can be tackled. The ones who take a pass on the challenging peak, suitable for experienced and sure-footed hikers only, rest at the pass or start descending with the horsemen. A steep, well-trodden caravan path leads to the local watering hole, followed by a short ride to a guesthouse in the center of the lively, iconic village of the Albanian alps.



🍴 B / LP / D

🏠 Guesthouse

🚌 30 mi

## 7. Theth – Tradition in the Albanian Highlands

Learn about the Kanun & blood feud, hike via the Grunas waterfall to Nderlysa



⇔ 16 km

▲ 225 m

▼ 500 m

⌘ 5:30 h

Only a walk through the village and its lush green fields reveals the full extent of Theth. Visit its iconic church and dive at the lock-in tower into the history of the "Kanun". The "kulla" offered protection to those affected by the Blood Feud and is the right place to learn about the former highland law code; it also marks the trailhead to Nderlysa. Following water channels, the path ascends to the Grunas Waterfall, drops again to a cliff above the river and the 50 m deep Grunas Canyon. A well-worn bridle path leads you along the river downstream to Nderlysa. Arriving there in the hot midday sun, the Kaprea river and its stone pools invite for a swim. The scenic transfer across the Thorja Pass (1.630 m) into the Valley of Boge and along the Lake of Shkodra (2 h) takes you back to the hotel of the first night in Shkodra. At night it's time to celebrate the eventful trek over a somewhat different atmosphere than that of the previous days. With all the party in mind, please also double-check tomorrow's departure details.



 B / L / D

 Hotel

 3 h

## 8. Farewell from Albania!

Departure day from Shkodra



**Group transfer to TIA/Tirana, 10:00 AM**

After breakfast, there's time for a walk in the pedestrian area and for any last-minute souvenir shopping fever. You can join the group transfer to Tirana (airport or city). For the ones wishing to extend their travels, you can explore the town, head to the nearby beaches in Velipoja and Ulcinj (Montenegro), experience Albania's modern side in the capital Tirana or spend your beach holidays at the Albanian Riviera (5-7 h travel time).

Thank you for joining us on 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 (up to 10%) on combined trips, transfers and extension nights in Tirana, Shkodra or elsewhere - plenty to explore that merits a full day in each town.



 B / - / -



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 2.5 h