

**ZBULO! DISCOVER ALBANIA**

## **Hidden Valley Trek (7 days)**

**Homestay Trekking & Southern Albania's Cultural Highlights**



Join us to discover the beauty of the hidden Zagoria Valley! Trek for four days between secluded villages, meet friendly hosts, enjoy home-cooked meals, hike to the mighty north face of Nemercka, swim in thermal waters and last but not least, visit the stone city of Gjirokaster. Return home enriched by memories, extend in Tirana or the Albanian Riviera.

**Also available as a self-guided tour and private departure with local amateur guides.  
Combine with the Mysterious South Coastal Trek to create a 15-day trip.**

6x overnights with hiking up to ▲ 750 ▼ 1,250 m  
An exclusive trip on a Zbulo Signature Trail

## 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 small group 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.

Our 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 for four days through the little visited villages of the 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
- ☆ Fall in love with the UNESCO city Gjirokastra on a private tour of a mansion
- ☆ Explore deep history crossing Ottoman stone bridges and visiting Byzantine churches
- ☆ Swim in rivers, under a waterfall and in the healing thermal baths of Benja

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7 days (6 nights) including one arrival & departure day



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



3 to 8 persons / guaranteed with three participants



Start: Tirana, Saranda (Corfu), Finish: Tirana, Gjirokastra, Albanian Riviera



late March to early June or from September into November



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



English-speaking tour leader



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, 3 night(s) in shared room(s)

Overview	Time	Dist	Asc VS Desc	Asc	Desc
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>Ø 5:30</b>	<b>54</b>		<b>3,050</b>	<b>3,150</b>
1. Tirane - Tepelene	0:00	0		0	0
2. Telepena/Gjirokaster -	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 - Extension?	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: 3x hotel(s), 3x homestay(s),
  - meals: all breakfasts, 5 lunches and 6 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) - Tepelene: hotel / agrotourism (-/-/D)
2. Telepena/Gjirokaster - 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/D)
6. Permet - Sopot - Benje - Gjirokaster: hotel (B/L/D)
7. Gjirokaster - Tirane / Extension?: - (B/-/-)

### Have questions?

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

## 1. Welcome to Albania!

Travel into Southern Albania from Tirana or Saranda (Corfu)



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

The transfer into Southern Albania takes around three hours, it leads past the coastal plain's colorful produce stands and along the mountain backed Vjosa River to the outskirts of the tiny city of Tepelena. Our small family-run agrotourism sits surrounded by nature on a terrace overlooking the river and offers seasonal swimming opportunities. If you're looking for a few quiet days before or after the trip you may consider additional nights here. The group transfer collects participants from Tirana city center, the bus station or airport. Departure is 15:00 at the latest, earlier if party members' arrival times allow for that. To those getting in early, we recommend to head to Tirana for a city tour or spending the night prior in the capital, there's also public transport to Tepelena. For arrivals from Saranda (Corfu) we can organize a private transfer.



 - / - / D

 Hotel / Agrotourism

 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

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, 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

🚌 30 min

### 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

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**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 a 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 / D

🏠 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 stay at one of the vernacular Ottoman buildings in the old town. Start exploring the streets of the "City of Stone" and absorb the atmosphere in one of the many small cafés, tomorrow there's time for more.

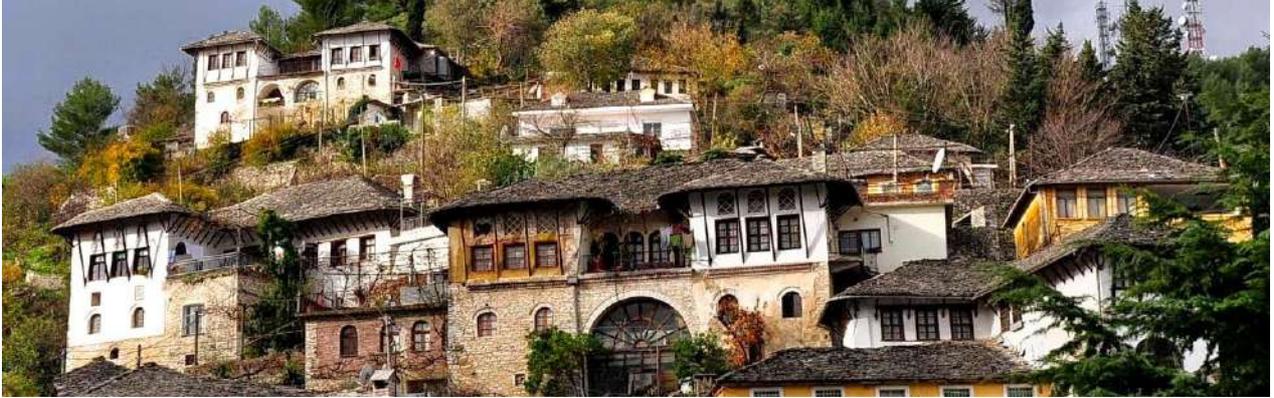


🍴 B / L / D

🏠 Hotel

🚌 3.5 h

## 7. Gjirokaster and onward to Tirana or the Riviera See the "City of Stone", Ottoman Mansions and continue your adventure



**Take the group transfer to Tirana or ask us about individual transfers & extensions**

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 - his *Chronicles in Stone* is a must-read. Protected by the status of "museum town", Gjirokaster survived socialist modernization campaigns and is today inscribed in UNESCO's world heritage list. Get lost in a maze of narrow, cobbled streets, visit the insight of one of the Ottoman mansions and climb to the towering castle above. One can easily spend more days exploring the area or visiting nearby sites: The archaeological highlight Butrint, Blue Eye (a karst spring) and beaches of the Albanian Riviera are a mere two hours drives from here. To Tirana, it's a 3.5 hour drive - plan your flight accordingly or add an overnight in the modern capital that wants to be everything but Albanian, where you can visit the Skanderbeg Square and trendy "Blloku" district to watch the city come to life at night. We're happy to assist with arrangements.



 B / - / -

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 3.5 h