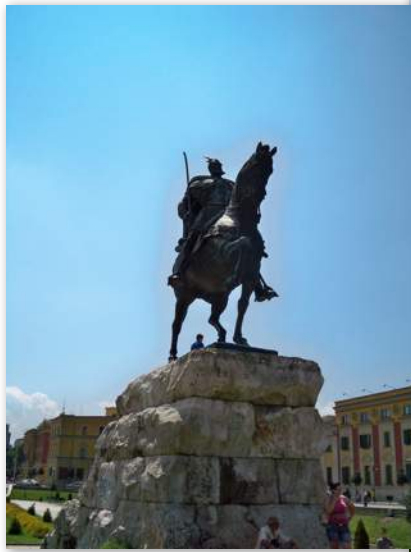




Essential Albania 2020



Essential Albania

Up, Down and Around Albania

Flexible Essential Trip – Classic Private Journey – 9 Days

Your choice of dates, start on a Thursday

Country cousin of Greece and Italy, little-known Albania has 225 miles of coastline, Greek and Roman ruins and vestiges of Ottoman heritage. Beginning in the capital, Tirana, travel overland up and down the lovely Adriatic coast, finding medieval fortresses, Byzantine churches, mosques and monasteries. Inland, visit the first Albanian school, the Museum of Weapons in Gjirokastra Fortress and the most important mosque in the country. Take a comprehensive look at an unfamiliar little country.



Daily Itinerary

Day 1, Thursday	Arrive Tirana, Albania
Day 2, Friday	Tirana
Day 3, Saturday	Tirana • day trip to Kruja and Shkodra
Day 4, Sunday	Tirana • Elbasan • Pogradec • Korce
Day 5, Monday	Korce • Permet • Gjirokastra
Day 6, Tuesday	Gjirokastra • Saranda
Day 7, Wednesday	Saranda • Apollonia • Berat
Day 8, Thursday	Berat • Durres • Tirana
Day 9, Friday	Depart Tirana



Tour Highlights

Tirana	Skanderbeg Square, Et'hem Bey Mosque, cable car to Dajti Mountain, Bunk'Art atomic shelter, authentic Albanian village including dinner
Kruja	Fortress, Skanderbeg Museum, Ethnographic Museum, medieval Turkish bazaar
Shkodra	Fortress ruins, Venice Ar Mask Factory
Elbasan	Ancient city walls, St. Mary's Orthodox Church
Pogradec	Ancient Illyrian fortress
Korce	Museum of Medieval Art
Permet	Old Quarter
Gjirokastra	Old Town, 13th Century Citadel, Museum of Weapons, Ethnographic Museum
Saranda	Blue Eye, Butrint (UNESCO World Heritage Site)
Apollonia	Ancient ruins, 13th Byzantine church and monastery of Shen Meri (Saint Mary)
Berat	UNESCO-listed, Berat Castle, Onufri Museum, Bachelor's Mosque, National Ethnographic Museum, Halveti Tekke Prayer Hall, medieval stone fortress, Cobo Winery
Durres	Roman amphitheater, Roman baths, Archaeological museum

Daily Itinerary

Day One, Thursday Arrive Tirana, Albania

Arriving in Tirana, check in to the hotel for overnight and to prepare for your upcoming adventures in Albania.

Dinner tonight is independent.
Meals: Independent/en route –
Hotel Opera or similar

Day Two, Friday Tirana

After breakfast, head out for a full-day tour of the capital of Albania.

Tirana is located 20 km from the Adriatic Sea on the Ishm River. Until it became the capital in the 1920s, Tirana was a small 17th century town with no more than 12,000 people living here. Urbanization efforts began in the 1950s, and Nikita Khrushchev laid the first stone of the Palace of Culture in 1959. Since the collapse of Albania's communist government in the early 90s, many of the grim Soviet-type buildings have been repainted in bright colors, and new restaurants and cafés are springing up. The city is centered on **Skanderbeg Square**, named in honor of the national hero responsible for defeating the Ottomans.



Located on the eastern edge of Tirana, **Bunk'Art** is housed inside one of the capital city's most fascinating and unusual sites: a massive, five-story underground atomic shelter. Secretly built in the 1970s to accommodate late communist dictator Enver Hoxha and Albania's political and military elite in the event of a nuclear attack, the bunker was a sprawling maze of hallways and more than 100 fallout rooms, with living quarters and apartments, meeting rooms, and offices. More than two football fields in length, the presidential shelter is just one of some 750,000 bunkers built across Albania under Hoxha's orders.

In 2014, the Albanian government and a nonprofit arts group took over the presidential atomic shelter, transforming 24 of the 100 rooms into a contemporary arts and culture center called "Bunk'Art." There's also an Albanian history museum with rooms just as they were in the 1970s, including Enver Hoxha's office with his original furniture, desk, radio, phone, and maps. Special exhibits, photographs, and artifacts tell the story of Albania's dark communist past and history of repression.

Next, take the 2.6-mile **cable car** from the outskirts of Tirana up to **Dajti Mountain** for fabulous views of the city and the surrounding wooded national park. The 14-minute ride ascends to the "Balcony of Tirana," 3,445 feet above sea level.

Return to the city center to visit the **Et'hem Bey Mosque**. Construction on the mosque was begun in 1789 and finished by Et'hem Bey, the great-grandson of Suleiman Pasha Bargjini. Its frescoes depict rarely-allowed natural features such as waterfalls and trees.

This evening, visit an **authentic Albanian village** outside Tirana to meet with local villagers in their private home. Learn firsthand about life in rural Albania with two generations who share their personal stories with you over a home-cooked dinner. There is no better way to learn about Albania's past and present.



Return to the city for overnight.
Meals: B, D – *Hotel Opera or similar*

Day Three, Saturday

Tirana • day trip to Kruja and Shkodra

Depart this morning for a day trip to the nearby towns of Kruja and Shkodra.

On the side of a hill at the foot of limestone peaks, the **citadel of Kruja** looks down on the town. From here, in 1450, the charismatic leader Skanderbeg

and his small hand-picked army defeated the Ottoman Sultan Murad II's army of 100,000. Visit the restored castle and citadel, with its Skanderbeg Museum and bazaar.

Withstanding numerous attacks from the Ottoman Turks, the **Kruja Fortress** marked the last stand before Albania fell to the conquering empire in 1478. Albania's rebel forces, led by Gjergj Kastriot Skanderbeg, withstood years of battle, and the castle now serves as both a historical landmark and a



symbol of the fierce national pride that Albanians feel. A **museum inside the castle** allows visitors to learn more about Skanderbeg, Albania's national hero.

A particular highlight of the fortress is the **Dollma Tekke**, a house of prayer for the Bektashi sect of Islam. A mystical sect with its roots in Sufism, the Bektashi order was prevalent in the Ottoman Empire and spread throughout Anatolia and the Balkans.

Next, take a tour of the fascinating **Ethnographic Museum**, in the large traditional home of an 18th century general. The house is filled with period furnishings and implements, such as a built-in butter churn, a loom, a flour mill and wonderful rugs and embroidered fabrics.

Touring in Kruja ends as you browse the wooden stalls of the medieval **Turkish Bazaar**, a great place to shop for traditional handicrafts such as alabaster jewelry, silver filigree, hand-carved wooden items and hand-loomed carpets.



Continue on to **Shkodra**. Resting on the shores of Lake Skadar near the Adriatic Coast and the border with Montenegro, Shkodra's appeal comes from both its striking setting and its multifaceted history. Though most of its inhabitants are Muslim and Shkodra was once known as a center of Islamic scholarship, the city retains close ties to Italy through its Roman Catholic minority. A walk through town reveals Albanian patriotic statues, a clocktower built by an eccentric Englishman, several large mosques and a large citadel on the south side of the city that offers views out across the lake.

Rising above the city on a rounded hill, the **ruins of the fortress of Shkodra** mark where the city's history began, back in the Bronze Age. The remaining citadel dates mainly from the 15th century, but inside the structure you can find a part of the Illyrian's 350 BC "Cyclopean" wall, built of huge cleverly



stacked stones. 14th century St. Stephen's Church was updated in the 15th century by the Venetians. The panoramic views of Shkodra and its rivers from the fortress are breathtaking.

Pay a visit to the **Venice Art Mask Factory**, where exquisitely detailed Venetian masks are fashioned by renowned Albanian artist Edmond Angoni and his team of master artisans. Angoni studied the art of mask-making in Venice, and upon his return to Albania in 1996 opened this factory to showcase his creative original designs, each one crafted by hand using traditional techniques. Angoni's designs have been featured in theater and film productions all over the world, famously appearing in Stanley Kubrick's 1999 film, *Eyes Wide Shut*. Take a tour of the shop and learn more about the process behind making these imaginative pieces of art.

Return to Tirana this evening for overnight.

Meals: B – *Hotel Opera or similar*

Day Four, Sunday

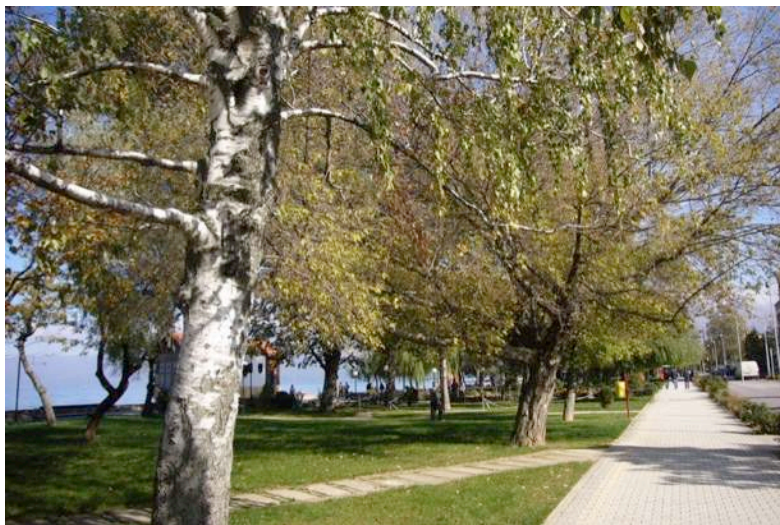
Tirana • Elbasan • Pogradec • Korce

Check out of the hotel this morning and depart for Korce, with en route stops for touring in Elbasan and Pogradec.

An important trade center in Roman times known as Mansio Scampa, **Elbasan** was situated near the point where the two routes of the Via Egnatia met. Destroyed by the Bulgars from the 6th to the 8th centuries and rebuilt by Sultan Mehmet in the 15th century, Elbasan received its new name, meaning "strong place" in Turkish. Admire the **ancient city walls** and **St. Mary's Orthodox Church**.

This afternoon, arrive in **Pogradec**, a town of about 30,000 on the shores of the deepest and oldest lake in the Balkans, Lake Ohrid. The town was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1977. An ancient **Illyrian fortress** overlooks the town.

Continue on to **Korce**, a town situated on a plateau in southeastern Albania on the border with Greece. A culturally diverse place, Korce has been important for both Orthodox Christians and Muslims. The most important mosque in Albania, the Mirahori Mosque, is found here as well as the seat of an Orthodox metropolitan, or bishop.



Pay a visit to the **Museum of Medieval Art**, where thousands of icons saved from destruction are displayed along with paintings by Albanian masters.

This evening, check in to your hotel for overnight.

Meals: B – *Life Gallery Hotel or similar*



Day Five, Monday

Korce • Permet • Gjirokastra

Following breakfast at the hotel, set off toward Gjirokastra via Permet today. The small town of **Permet**, set along the Vjose River in southern Albania, serves as the capital of its district. Known for its roses and its tradition of folk music, Permet is also a local producer of wine and *raki*, a fiery distilled grape beverage. Its **Old Quarter** hosts a notable Orthodox church, Shen Nicolle.

Following touring in Permet, continue on to Gjirokastra. The **UNESCO-listed Old Town of Gjirokastra** is a well-preserved Ottoman town. Its castle and typical stone-roofed tower houses, called *kule*, make up an ensemble characteristic of the Balkan region.

The **13th century citadel** is one of the largest castles in the Balkans; the stunning views from its hilltop location bely its darker history as a prison for political dissidents in Communist times. Today it is home to the **Museum of Weapons** featuring captured artillery and memorabilia of the Communist resistance against German occupation, as well as a captured United States Air Force plane to commemorate the Communist regime's struggle against the "imperialist" western powers. (*Note, the visit to the Museum of Weapons will be done as schedules permit.*)

Check in to your hotel and enjoy an independent dinner this evening.

Meals: B – *Hotel Kalemi or similar*

Day Six, Tuesday

Gjirokastra • Saranda

Touring today begins with a visit to the **Ethnographic Museum**, which is situated on the site where Enver Hoxha, socialist dictator of Albania from 1944 to 1985, was born. Hoxha is responsible for the 750,000 concrete bunkers dotted across the country and intended as shelters in case of attack. A follower of Stalinist thought, Hoxha built prisons and labor camps as well, using his security forces to murder political opponents.



His original house burned in 1966 and another was built in its place in the typical Gjirokastra style. The museum's four floors are decorated with household items, folk costumes and artifacts that reflect the town's Ottoman heritage.

Following touring in Gjirokastra, depart for **Saranda**. This resort and port city, a favorite of Albanian honeymooners, is located on the Ionian Sea within sight of Corfu. Daily ferries ply the waters between the two places and there are nice shops in which to find Albanian handicrafts.

Located just east of Saranda on the road from Gjirokastra, stop by the **Blue Eye**, a



beautiful natural spring with clear blue waters descending to a depth of over 165 feet. It's a popular spot with locals who come here during the hot summer months for a cold – but refreshing – swim.

Visit the the **UNESCO World Heritage Site of Butrint**, which has been inhabited for millennia. Colonized in succession by Greece, Rome and Byzantium, the site still guards the remains of examples of all these eras. The 6th century BC fortifications, the 3rd century BC amphitheater, temples, public baths and houses, covered in mud and marsh vegetation, were preserved until excavations began in 1944. This is one of the last unspoiled historic areas in the Mediterranean region.

This evening, check in to the hotel for overnight.
Meals: B – *Bougainville Bay Hotel, or similar*



Day Seven, Wednesday **Saranda • Apollonia • Berat**

After breakfast, depart for Berat, stopping along the way to visit Porto Palermo, Llogara National Park, and Apollonia.

The first stop is the beautiful bay of Porto Palermo, which is guarded by the island **fortress of Ali Pasha**, built in the late 18th century by the notorious Albanian ruler. The dark and moody stone edifice is built in the Ottoman style, with walls 20 meters high.

Next, stop by the **Llogara National Park**. Established in 1966, the park encompasses parts of the Ceraunian Mountains along the Ionian coast in southwest Albania. Its 2,500 acres include forest, alpine meadows, rock-faced mountains, and seacoast – all within the diverse subtropical Mediterranean climate zone.

In a peaceful part of the Krygjata Valley along the Vjosa River stand the **ruins of the ancient town of Apollonia**, built as far back as 558 BC. Surrounded by a Roman wall near the Adriatic coast, Apollonia was mentioned by both Aristotle and Cicero, and in its day was known as an important center of trade. The beautifully preserved **13th century Byzantine church and monastery of Shen Meri (Saint Mary)**, rise from a low hill overlooking the ruins of a Roman bath, a small acropolis, a Roman library and the Odeon.

After touring the ruins of Apollonia, continue on to Berat. Upon arrival, check in to your hotel for overnight. Dinner tonight is included and will be at a local restaurant.
Meals: B, D – *Mangalemi Hotel or similar*



Day Eight, Thursday

Berat • Durres • Tirana

This morning, meet your driver and guide to tour the wonders of **Berat**. This UNESCO-listed city sits on one of the oldest continuously inhabited sites in Albania, with settlements here since prehistoric times. One of the best-preserved medieval citadels in the Balkans – 13th-century Berat Castle – is located directly above the old town, in the shadow of the Tomori Mountains. The dramatic architecture of Berat reflects both its Ottoman roots and its Albanian heritage; the whitewashed houses that sit above the Osumit River give the city its nickname, "Town of a Thousand Windows." On the other side of the river, the Orthodox church of Shen Spyridon dominates the Gorica Quarter, historically a Slavic settlement.



Highlights of the town include the sprawling **Berat Castle** that once housed 20 churches and a mosque; **Onufri Museum** with its impressive collection of 16th-century icons and religious paintings as well as a massive 19th-century gilded iconostasis; **Bachelor's Mosque**, intended for the town's unmarried shop assistants and now listed as a Cultural Monument of Albania. The **National Ethnographic Museum** is located in an 18th-century Ottoman house, with rooms displaying home life using traditional Berat clothing, furnishings and tools; and the 1782 **Halveti Tekke prayer hall** is also listed as a Cultural Monument of Albania.

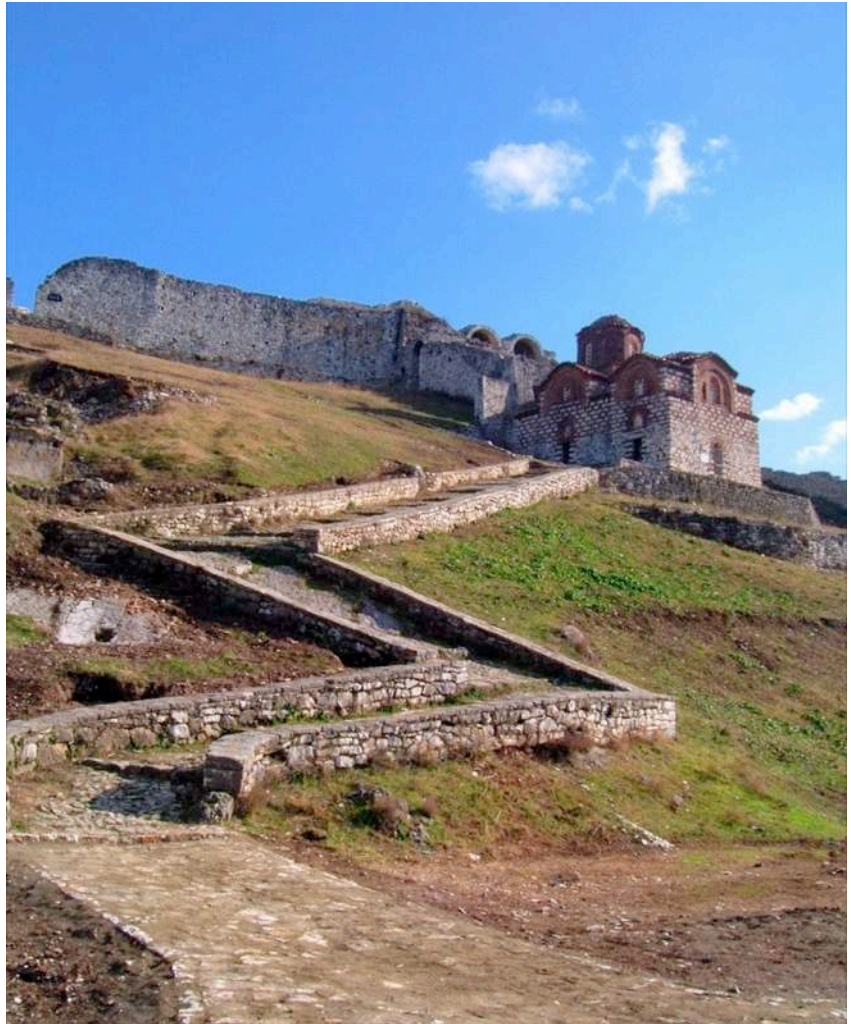


Dominating the Osum Valley, Berat's **medieval stone fortress** stands mostly unchanged today despite the region's numerous conflicts. It can only be approached by a broad, paved road up a steep hill, and the 200 families who live inside its thick walls still walk or ride donkeys up to their homes. In the center of the citadel, one of the old churches hosts a museum dedicated to the 16th century icon painter Onufri, who created a unique color of red that has not faded over the centuries. Scientists are still unable to discover his formula.



For our final stop in Berat, we sample the fine Albanian wines at **Cobo Winery**, reputedly the best winery in the country. The owner welcomes you and shows you around, explaining how they produce the wines according to family tradition. Visit the rolling vineyards, the traditional stone *kulla* house and winemaking facilities, and taste examples of some of the Cobo wines and *raki*, made from Albanian grapes.

Depart to return to Tirana, stopping along the way in Durres. As Albania's second largest city, **Durres** grew around an excellent natural harbor on the Adriatic across from important southern Italian ports. Founded around 600 BC by Illyrians, the harbor was coveted and fought over since its discovery. It has reportedly changed hands more than 33 times in the last 900 years. The Roman Empire conquered Durres in the 2nd century BC, and the city became the starting point of one of the most important Roman roads, the Via Egnatia to Constantinople. Visit the largest **Roman amphitheater** in the Balkans as well as the **Roman baths**, dating from the time of Emperor Hadrian.



Founded in 1951, the Durres **Archaeological Museum** displays a vast collection of ancient Greek, Roman and Byzantine artifacts, most of them discovered in the region. Of note is an abundance of small statues of Venus, showing that the area was a center of goddess worship.

Following touring in Durres, set off for Tirana for our final night in Albania.

Upon arrival check in to the hotel and enjoy a free evening to rest or explore independently.
Meals: B – *Hotel Opera or similar*

Day Nine, Friday
Depart Tirana

The journey ends this morning with a transfer to the airport for departure.
Meals: B



Tour Days of Operation

Private departures of this land itinerary can begin on the Thursday of your choice in 2020. Please note you will need to depart the U.S. at least one day prior to your tour start date due to airline flight schedules.

Private Journey Prices - 2020

2 traveler minimum, from \$3,695 per person, twin share

Single supplement, from \$595

Solo traveler rate on same hotel basis, inclusive of single supplement, from \$6,395

Hotel Upgrade Prices

Upgrade to four-plus and five-star hotels in select cities. Upgraded properties: Rogner Europark Hotel in Tirana, and Butrinti Hotel in Saranda, or similar in both cases. Other properties remain as on the standard program.

2 traveler minimum, from \$3,895 per person, twin share

Single supplement, from \$695

Solo traveler rate, inclusive of single supplement, from \$6,695

Flexible Essential trip prices may vary by season and are subject to hotel availability for your travel dates.

Extensions and additional nights are available on request. Contact us at 1-800-424-7289 for more information.

Your Private Journey Includes

- Shared accommodations in well-located superior tourist class hotels throughout the itinerary. See **Hotel Upgrade Prices** above for upgraded accommodations.
- Breakfast daily, per the itinerary, and two dinners. Other lunches and dinners are independent to allow for exploration.
- Local guides in each city.
- One arrival and one departure transfer. (Additional arrival and departure transfers are available at additional cost.) MIR arranges for travelers to be met on arrival and seen off on departure whether we make your airfare arrangements or not.
- Transportation throughout itinerary by private van or car (type of vehicle depends on the size of your party).
- Guided sightseeing tours and entrance fees as outlined in the itinerary.
- Complete pre-departure information including detailed packing list and reading list.
- Assistance booking your custom flight arrangements (on request; please note that international airfare is not included in the land tour cost).
- *Touring with MIR* handbook with country-specific information, maps, and travel tips.
- Final document packet including luggage tags, final updates, and more.

Not Included

- International airfare or taxes/fuel surcharges.
- Meals not specified as included in the itinerary.
- Single supplement charge, if requested or required.
- Baggage handling.
- Items of a personal nature (phone calls, email, laundry, alcohol, excess baggage, etc).
- Gratuities to local guides and drivers.
- Visa/passport fees, airport departure fees.



- Expenses incurred as a result of delay, modification or extension of a tour due to causes beyond MIR's control.
- Travel and trip cancellation insurance.

Interested in travel insurance?

To learn more about all the benefits of purchasing a Travel Guard travel insurance plan, please visit www.travelguard.com/mircorp or contact Travel Guard at 1.877.709.5596.

Start Planning Next Year Now

2021 Flexible Essential Trip – Classic Private Journey – 9 Days

At the time of writing, the land itinerary for this program next year is projected to be generally as depicted for this year. Please call if you're ready to book now.

Private departures of this land itinerary can begin on the Thursday of your choice in 2021. Please note you will need to depart the U.S. at least one day prior to your tour start date due to airline flight schedules.

Private Journey Prices – 2021

2 traveler minimum, from \$3,795 per person, twin share

Single supplement, from \$650

Solo traveler rate on same hotel basis, inclusive of single supplement, from \$6,495

Hotel Upgrade Prices

Upgrade to four-plus and five-star hotels in select cities

2 traveler minimum, from \$3,995 per person, twin share

Single supplement, from \$795

Solo traveler rate, inclusive of single supplement, from \$6,795

Flexible Essential trip prices may vary by season and are subject to hotel availability for your travel dates. Extensions and additional nights are available on request. Contact us at 1-800-424-7289 for more information.

Flexible Essential Trips – Classic Private Journeys

Flexible Essential Private Trips are compact, well-designed private tour itineraries – researched and ready to book on the dates you choose. They work perfectly as brief overviews of a country or as effortless extensions to group tours – great for solo travelers, couples, or private parties who prefer to travel independently but appreciate a savvy pre-designed program.

Important Notes: Is This Trip Right For You?

While the accommodations are designed to be comfortable for travel in this part of the world, they will vary from small, moderate three star to four star hotels, some quite small with basic amenities and services. (Please see **Hotel Upgrade** pricing section above if interested in upgrading hotels.) It is



important to keep in mind that Albania may not be up to the standards North American travelers expect. Services are improving in the region; nevertheless you may encounter problems with plumbing, bureaucratic service, road conditions, unpaved sidewalks, uneven surfaces and steps and availability and quality of public restrooms. Some areas, relatively speaking, have seen few travelers, and the infrastructure is not yet fully developed.

While this program is designed to be the most comfortable possible for travel in this region, this is an adventuresome trip. It is rated as **rigorous touring** due to the daily walking involved, some long driving days, the conditions of some roads, and the overall shortcomings of the tourism infrastructure. This itinerary features a significant amount of touring on foot. Many streets are of cobblestone, and some attractions are only accessible via steep staircases. Museums rarely have elevators. In the hotels, you may find that showers/baths have steep steps up or ledges, which can become slippery and require extra caution. Handrails will not usually be present indoors or outdoors, and care and caution are required to avoid a fall. Flexibility and a sense of humor are essential components of the enjoyment of your trip.

Every effort has been made to ensure that the information in this schedule is accurate. However, trip itineraries are always subject to change. We do our best to inform you in advance of any changes, but due to the nature of travel in Albania, this may not always be possible.

Are You Prepared?

A Travel Guard travel insurance plan can help cover your vacation investment, offset expenses from travel mishaps and provide you with emergency travel assistance. To learn more about all of the benefits of purchasing a Travel Guard travel insurance plan, please visit www.travelguard.com/mircorp

Please read the U.S. State Department's Travel Advisory regarding travel to Albania here: <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/traveladvisories/traveladvisories/albania-travel-advisory.html>

If you are not already enrolled in STEP, Smart Traveler Enrollment Program, a free service to enroll your trip with the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate, please consider enrolling. For more information: <https://step.state.gov/step/>

Weather

Albania enjoys a transitional maritime/continental climate, with warm summers and fairly mild winters. Spring and summer are the best times to travel here, particularly when driving overland. In May and June, temperatures throughout typically range from lows in the mid 50s to highs in the mid- to upper 70s. In July and August highs generally get into the 80s and above, with September and October bringing cooler temperatures again, and the possibility of more rain.

Please remember, weather at all times of year has an element of the unpredictable. This information comes from weatherbase.com and is based on data from previous temperatures on record. It is always advisable to check with weatherbase.com closer to your departure date for current conditions and forecasts for the specific region you will be visiting.

International Airfare

MIR's in-house, full-service air department is available to assist with your air travel needs. Check with MIR before booking air on your own, as we are happy to research and compare the best fares available through multiple channels. Airfare varies depending on a wide variety of factors, such as dates of travel and seasonality, seat availability, special airline promotions, how restrictive ticket changes are, how long the fares can be held without purchase, routing considerations such as stopovers, and more. Tour dates



are based on the land tour only. Our preferred carriers for this tour are Lufthansa and Austrian Airlines, as they offer convenient itineraries and competitive rates from multiple cities across the U.S. to Albania.

Please call us at 800-424-7289 to discuss air options and routings for this program, and to request a quote for your specific plans and dates of travel. We will be happy to put together a no-obligation suggested air itinerary and estimate for you at your request.

Visas

U.S. passport holders do not require visas for Albania. Citizens of other countries may require visas; please contact us for more details.

Pre- and Post-Tour Extensions

You may want to do a pre- or post-tour in nearby Balkan countries such as Macedonia and Montenegro. Extensions can also be crafted to Bulgaria or Romania, Ukraine, Belarus, or Western Russia. Call us at 1-800-424-7289 for more details.

Also Nearby...

For more tours in Eastern Europe and Western Russia, you may want to check out the following:

Flexible Essential Trips – Classic Private Journeys

Essential Balkans, 14 days. Visit seven Balkan countries in 14 days on this compact overland journey through history. A remarkably complex region, the mountainous Balkan Peninsula is fascinating, diverse and incredibly beautiful.

Essential Baltics, 7 days. Take an overland survey of the Baltic capitals – Vilnius, Riga and Tallinn – exploring their UNESCO-listed Old Towns, featuring cobbled streets and red-tiled roofs. Visit important rural sites such as Lithuania's Hill of Crosses and Latvia's baroque Rundale Castle.

Essential Ukraine, 8 days. Ukraine is the new borderland between Europe and Russia. Explore this resilient region influenced by Polish princes, Cossack *hetmen*, Turkish khans, Russian communists and Ukrainian poets and nationalists.

Essential St. Petersburg, 7 days. St. Petersburg, home of the czars and their courts, is a rich repository of extravagant palaces, brilliant museums and renowned theaters overflowing with music and dance. Its fashionable boulevards and serene canals glisten in the "White Nights" of summer and dazzle on sunny winter days.

Essential Russia, 7 days. A compact and compelling survey of Russia's political capital, Moscow, and its cultural capital, St. Petersburg, this tour communicates the character of Western Russia in a succinct and meaningful series of experiences.

Small Group Tours

Balkan Odyssey: Crossroads of Cultures, 16 days. From low-lying Belgrade up through the Dinaric Alps, down to the Dalmatian Coast of Croatia and back up to mountainous Macedonia, this overland journey ties together seven wildly divergent Balkan countries – Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro, Albania, North Macedonia, and Kosovo.



Bulgaria & Romania: Frescoes & Fortresses, 16 days. Explore the complex history and fascinating culture of Bulgaria and Romania, two Balkan countries whose rugged terrain and consequent isolation have helped preserve their heritage. Discover the luminous frescoes of the painted monasteries, breathe in the fragrance of the Valley of the Roses, and spend an afternoon visiting with villagers in a tiny Transylvanian town.

Belarus, Ukraine & Moldova, 14 days. Traverse a little-known region that has changed hands from its earliest history. Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova are three of the least-frequented and least familiar countries in Europe. Time slowed drastically here after the devastation of World War Two, but these beautiful countries are emerging from the shadows.

Russia's Imperial Capitals & Ancient Villages, 11 days. Discover where Russian art, architecture and culture began. In between the urban centers of Moscow and St. Petersburg, experience the Russian countryside. The oldest and loveliest churches in Russia, Sergiev Posad's wooden crafts and Fedoskino's glowing lacquer boxes all put a shine on Russia's Golden Ring.

Kaliningrad & The Baltics, 13 days. This overland journey roves the countryside and urban centers of four distinct nations: the three independent Baltic countries – Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia – and Kaliningrad, an exclave of Russia.

Conditions of Participation

Your participation on a MIR Corporation trip is subject to the conditions contained in the 2020. Tour Reservation Form and Release of Liability and Assumption of Risk Agreement. Please read this document carefully and contact us with any questions.

Cancellation and Refund Policy

Payment Terms: Non-refundable deposits are accepted by check, Visa, MasterCard or American Express. Final land payments may be made by check or credit card for reservations made directly with MIR. If booking through a travel agent, please contact your agent to find out what form of payment they accept. (MIR can accept final payment from travel agents by agency check only.) Airfares are subject to change until ticketed; payment policies vary by carrier.

If you cancel your trip, please notify MIR in writing. Upon MIR's receipt of notice the following charges apply to land tours (policies for air tickets, custom group trips vary):

Flexible Essential Tours

Cost of cancellation, if received:

61 or more days prior to departure, deposit due or paid in full of \$750;

31-60 days prior to departure, 50% of land tour cost;

30 days prior to or after trip departure, no refund.

References

We encourage you to speak directly with satisfied past travelers. Please request a list of references.

Why MIR?

Regional knowledge is crucial to the success of any trip to our corner of the world. MIR combines detailed information about geography and infrastructure, history and art, language and culture, with the



depth of knowledge that comes only from decades of regional experience. You may wonder how we differ from other tour operators...

Destination Specialization

MIR focuses exclusively on the exceptional region at the crossroads of Europe and Asia. This area has been our overriding passion since 1986; we don't do the rest of the world. Our hard-earned expertise gained over the last three decades can take you from end to end of the largest country in the world – Russia – and to all of its neighbors. We specialize in travel to Siberia, the Silk Route, St. Petersburg & Beyond. Our destinations include: Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, the Baltics (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania), the Balkans (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Slovenia), Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan), the South Caucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia), Turkey, Mongolia, China, Tibet, and Central/East Europe (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia).



30 Years of Experience

A travel company doesn't last more than 30 years in the business without a solid track record. MIR has helped thousands of individuals achieve their travel goals. Our dedication and experience have earned us their trust and the trust of many well-respected institutions. Today MIR is the preferred tour operator for museum, alumni and special interest organizations across the country.



Recommended & Respected

MIR has twice been rated one of the “Best Adventure Travel Companies on Earth” by *National Geographic Adventure*. Several of our tours have won awards in top travel publications, such as *Outside* magazine and *National Geographic Traveler*. Our trips have been featured in books such as *Riding the Hula Hula to the Arctic Ocean* and *1,000 Places to See Before You Die*.


More Questions?

Please feel free to call us with questions at 1-800-424-7289, 8:30am-5:30pm Pacific Time.

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