

REPUBLIC OF ALBANIA, Tirana

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Total Area of Albania is 28.748 sq km , an the populations 3,500,000 , Languages are Albanian (official) Italian, English, Greek (other) , The religion is Sunni Muslim (50%), Bektashi Muslim (20%), Albanian Orthodox (20%), Roman Catholic (10%)



Weather wise

Albania has hot, dry summers and cool, wet winters. Summers along the coast are lovely, with days usually averaging around

30°C (85°F), moderated by sea breezes and comfortably cooling down at night. Things can get quite bleak in winter, as spring rains tend to hang around and





Berat Citadel

Berat is Albania's most charming medieval town, and the citadel is its best preserved quarter. Surrounded by ancient stone walls, the citadel protects over a dozen churches and many wonderful old houses. The citadel's biggest church, St Mary's, has been converted into the Onufri Museum, honouring Albania's greatest painter of Christian icons. Just wandering around the citadel quarter reveals glorious views over the rest of Berat towards holy Mt

Tomorri, glimpses into the courtyards of traditional houses and a sense of what Albania might have been like before the stolid hand of Communism fell on it.

Butrint

The ancient ruins of Butrint lie 18km (11mi) south of Saranda and are a real gem if you have a fascination for the ancient world. The remains are from a variety of periods, spanning 2500 years. The poet Virgil claimed that the Trojans settled Butrint, but the

site has been pored over by archaeologists and no evidence of this has been found.

Greeks settled Butrint during the 6th century BC, although the area had been settled long before by the Illyrians. Within a century of the Greeks arriving, Butrint had become a fortified trading city with its own acropolis, the ruins of which you can still visit. Just below the acropolis in the forest is the 3rd century BC theatre, also used for performances by the Romans. Nearby are public baths with

geometrical mosaics, and deeper into the forest is a wall with Greek inscriptions and a 6th-century baptistry decorated with colourful mosaics of animals and birds. Butrint is accessibly by road from Saranda, which is linked to Tirana and Vlora by bus and minibus.

Skanderbeg Square

Nothing captures the history of 20th-century Albania quite like Tirana's vast central square. On one side is a horseshoe-shaped ensemble of government





buildings built by Mussolini in the 1930s, when fascist Italy practically owned its little neighbour. The former headquarters of Albania's dreaded Communist-era secret police, the Sigurimi, lies just behind them.

In front of the buildings is an equestrian statue of Albania's greatest hero, Gjergj Kastrioti (Skanderbeg), with sword held rigidly upright and beard jutting magnificently. On the other side of the square is the vast Soviet-built National History Museum,

complete with an enormous mosaic of Albanian liberators throughout the centuries. A high plinth in front of the museum used to host a golden statue of Albania's Communist dictator, Enver Hoxha. The quaint little Et'Hem Mosque to the side of the square was one of the few religious buildings to survive the 1967 cultural revolution, and is covered in delicate paintings. Skanderbeg Square is Albania is a nutshell - or one big piece of real estate, at least.

Flights to Albania are limited and generally rather expensive. Albatros Airways is a cheap local carrier with flights to and from 10 or so destinations in Italy. Flying on a budget airline to Italy and then catching an Albatros flight or a ferry across the Adriatic is probably going to be the cheapest way to reach Albania from beyond the immediate region. Land crossings are possible from Montenegro, Kosovo, Macedonia and Greece, and there are regular bus services to and from these countries. There's also a quick, short ferry from Corfu in Greece

to Saranda in Albania. Most Albanians travel the country in private minibuses (furgons) or state-owned buses, and they are frequent, cheap and comfortable. The roads are often poor and badly maintained in rural areas, but the main highways are being rapidly improved. A decrepit and limited railway network operates, with daily passenger trains leaving Tirana for Shkodra, Fier, Ballsh, Vlora and Pogradec. Cycling is possible but you would need to take into account the freewheeling local driving habits.

