

ZBULO! DISCOVER ALBANIA

Albania's Mysterious South (8 days)

Trek the Coastal Mountains & Albanian Riviera

Albania's beaches get crowded during the summer but for many the Ceraunian Mountains are only a memorable backdrop. Our trek between the mountains and Ionian Sea, hinterland villages and olive groves, homestays and family run hotels shows you what most others are missing out on.

**Prefer shorter walks, more comfort and swimming? Write for a personalized tour.
Combine with the Hidden Valley Trek to create a 15-day trip.**

7x overnights with hiking up to ▲ 1,250 ▼ 1,000 m
Part of the Zbulo Originals Series of Exclusive Trips

Introduction

The two thousand meter high Ceraunian Coastal Mountains separate the Albanian Riviera from rarely visited hinterland villages. Our trek starts at the Adriatic but soon leaves the sea behind to visit the remote Shushica Valley. From here the high route across the Balcony of the Riviera leads to the Ionian Sea. Hikes take you from beaches at sea level to tranquil olive groves and the highest peaks of the South. En route we explore old stone villages, swim at the country's best beaches, learn about Labeat pastoral culture and sample a wide range of Albanian dishes. Not enough? Stay a little longer to enjoy the beaches or continue visiting the cultural highlights of Southern Albania.

This is a Zbulo Original, in cooperation with GIZ we created a network of routes in the back country and along the Albanian Riviera known as the "Mysterious South", the goal is to offer an alternative to seasonal beach tourism.

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Highlights of the Albania's Mysterious South

- ☆ Trek for four days through the back country and sleep at homestays
- ☆ Walk in the Ceraunian Coastal Mountains and Llogara National Park
- ☆ Get to see and swim at the best beaches of Albania
- ☆ Enjoy a diverse range of landscapes between high mountains and the sea
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8 days (7 nights) including an arrival day, final overnight in Tirana optional



7 hikes with up to 7 h walking time (Ø 6:15 h) and 1,250 m ▼▲



2 to 8 persons (guaranteed from the first two participants)



Start: Tirana | Finish: Tirana or the Albanian Riviera (beach extension)



late March to early June or from September into November



for fit hikers, preferably with previous trekking experience (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?

7 hikes up to 7h walking time (Ø 6:15h) and 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

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

Overview	Time	Dist	Asc VS Desc	Asc	Desc
TOTAL	Ø 6:15	93		5,500	5,500
1. Tirana - Vlore	0:00	0		0	0
2. Vlore - Terbac	6:15	13		875	700
3. Terbac - Vranisht	6:00	13		675	925
4. Vranisht - Pilur	7:30	15		1,250	850
5. Pilur - Himare	7:00	20		475	1,000
6. Himare - Llogara	5:30	15		600	600
7. Llogara - Llogara	6:15	7		1,000	1,000
8. Llogara - Tirana	4:30	11		625	425

"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: 4x hotel(s), 3x homestay(s),
 - meals: all breakfasts, 7 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. Tirana - Bay of Vlore: hotel (-/-/D)
2. Vlore - Dukat - St Georg's Pass - Terbac: homestay (B/LP/D)
3. Terbac - the Table of God - Vranisht: homestay (B/LP/D)
4. Vranisht - Kallarat - Pilur: homestay (B/LP/D)
5. Pilur - Kudhes - Qeparo - Himare: hotel (B/LP/D)
6. Himare - Gjipe - Dhermi - Llogara: hotel (B/LP/D)
7. Llogara - Mt. Qorre (2.018m) - Llogara: hotel (B/LP/D)
8. Llogara - Karaburun Peninsula - Tirana: - (B/LP/-)

Have questions?

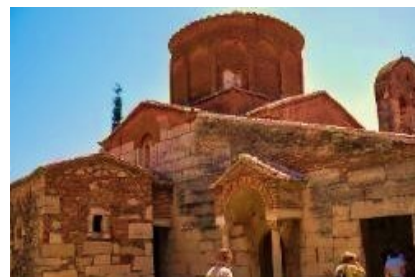
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1. Arrival in Southern Albania's Adriatic Port Vlorë The Amphitheater of Durres and Apollonia Archaeological Site




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

Welcome at the Tirana Airport, to reach the sea-side town of Vlorë will take about 3h (150km). Depending on your arrival time we may stop along the route in Fier and Durres, Albania's largest harbor and bridgehead of the Via Egnatia that connected Rome with Constantinople. We may stretch our legs on a short walk to visit the large amphitheater and remaining fortifications before we continue into the coastal basin. Before the agricultural revolution of the 60s this was a malaria stricken wetland, most of the lagoons were drained and turned into the fertile farmland the Myzeqe Plain is now known for. Fier boasts not only the largest onshore oilfield of Europe but also the remains of the ancient city Apollonia, the Temple of Agonothetes is a delight and exhibits on display within the museum. Soon we drive past salt pans into the quite Adriatic port in the Bay of Vlorë, a savory seafood dinner awaits us at the family run pension. After the failure of a series of Pyramid scheme in 1997 the town played a major role in following uprising and unrest but today attracts holiday makers with its sandy beaches and pleasant evening stroll called the "xhiro".



 - / - / D

 Hotel

 2:30 - 3 h

2. In the Footsteps of Caravan Travel

Across the St. Georg's Pass into the Shushica Valley

↔ 12.5 km ▲ 875 m ▼ 700 m ✕ 6:15 h

The short drive (45min, 30km) along coves and pebble beaches offers views of Sazan Island and the Karaburun's spine. The peninsula separates the Adriatic from the Ionian Sea and forms the Street of Otronto, the narrowest passage with Italy. The village Dukat is our starting point and embedded in a small side valley at the foothills of the Llogara National Park. On a forgotten caravan route that connected the Roman harbor with inland colonies, now only used by goat herders, we ascend over meadows and through fir to the St. George Pass (1.132m). After lunch we turn a last time towards the sea before descending into the Shushica Valley and Southern Highlands. Panoramic views of the Ceraunian Range's (Greek for thunder-split peaks) highest tops accompany the descent on a donkey trail which leads us through ancient oak forest and the deserted village Pirgu to Terbac. In the afternoon you can explore the village and remains of communist buildings. Our first delicious homemade dinner and overnight at the modest home of a shepherd's family.

 B / LP / D

 Homestay

 45 min

3. The Laberia Highlands and their Culture

Transfer hike through the rolling hills and the Table of God Viewpoint

⇔ 13 km ▲ 675 m ▼ 925 m ✕ 6:00 h

Today an easier walking day takes us from Terbac along the valley floor to the next village. After the lower neighborhoods we descent into the small canyon of a turquoise stream that invites to a splash and rise again with the views of Mt. Kendervices (2121m) on the horizon. Meeting donkey riders along the way, we walk through orchards and light forest to Vranisht, a village situated at the foot of the highest coastal mountain, Cika (2044m). After a coffee (or raki?) break at our host's home, you can either remain here for a relaxed afternoon or continue to visit the so called "Table of God". The viewpoint sits 500 meters above the valley and offers views to yesterday's pass and across the valley. As in most of Laberia region's villages, monuments dedicated to the partisan's anti-fascist struggle can be found here and the locals still keep books and pictures of former dictator Enver Hoxha. Tonight we're tasting once more the pastoral community's cuisine.



4. The Grand Crossing of the Ceraunian Range

Panoramic Views from the Balcony of the Riviera

⇔ 14.75 km ▲ 1,250 m ▼ 850 m ⌘ 7:30 h

The longest and most challenging walk of this journey traverses the Coastal Mountains and takes us closer to the Ionian Sea. After a short transfer we make our way to the ruined village of Kallarat. Burned by Greek troops at the brink of World War I it is an eerie site. A long climb, partly in shade, partly on scree, takes us to a series of meadows that lie hidden on top of the plateau. Two groups of shepherds reside here for most of the year, in turns the men take care of the flock as wolves pose a constant danger for the animals. Our efforts are rewarded when we reach 1400m above the sea, locals have dubbed this place the Balcony of the Riviera. On clear days panoramic views reach from the Greek border and island Corfu over most of the Riviera's diverse coastline to the highland villages, rugged Ceraunian Range and in spring snow-covered Mt. Nemercka (2.482m). We descend to the village Pilur where we stay in a guesthouse with a Labeat family famous of the family's poets and singers.

 B / LP / D

 Homestay

 15 min

5. From the Mountains to the Sea

Descend through Stone Villages and Olive Groves to the Beach

↔ 20 km ▲ 475 m ▼ 1,000 m ⌘ 7:00 h

Still on 700 meters above the sea, we start descending on shepherds paths with views of peaks and into the river canyon towards Kudhes. While only five kilometers from the coast, no beach goer ever visits the village that climbs up a ridge towards the spine of the mountains. After a coffee break and chat with the remaining elders, we continue through tranquil olive groves and reascend towards a last pass. Behind the top, the turquoise Ionian Sea, island Corfu and eventually old town of Qeparo appear slowly. Time seems to stand still in the maze of stone houses and cobbled streets that overlook the seemingly endless olive trees from their hilltop position. After another break, we make our way to sea level and drive into the nearby Bay of Porto Palermo. It's the only safe harbor within a day's distance, used since ancient times by sailors and of such strategical importance that Ali Pasha constructed a castle here and the Soviets submarine pens to access the Mediterranean. In nearby Himare we stay at the sea front, time for a well earned swim before dinner of fresh fish.

 B / LP / D

 Hotel

 20 min

6. Coastal Trekking between Beaches

Hike & Swim at the Riviera's best Beaches

⇔ 15 km ▲ 600 m ▼ 600 m ⌘ 5:30 h

Instead of mountains and villages, today's route takes us across cliffs and through Mediterranean macchia from one beach to another. The 600 meters of altitude difference make clear that this by no means a flat walk, it can also be skipped in favor of leisure time at the sea. Our round-up includes Spile, Livadh, Aquarium, Jal, Gjipe and Dhermi, each beach has its own attraction and beauty: Aquarium was nicknamed for its crystal clear waters, Jal Albania's answer to Ibiza and Gjipe perched in a 70m high canyon refreshingly free of construction. After an extended break the last stretch leads us to the ruined monastery of warrior saint Theodore and the beach resort Dhermi. Time permitting, we can climb through little alleys to the top of the old town. From here pretty villages, citrus groves and olive terraces line the road that takes us in switchbacks more than a thousand meters up the Llogara Pass. Inside the national park we stay for two nights at a family-run mountain hotel that serves hearty meals.



B / LP / D



Hotel



1 h

7. Climbing the Coast's Highest Summits

Walk from Llogara Pass to Mt. Qorre / Kore (2.018m)

⇔ 7 km ▲ 1,000 m ▼ 1,000 m ✕ 6:15 h

The second highest point of the Ceraunian coastal mountains is now in our reach. Starting early at the Llogara Pass, a well-trodden donkey path zig-zags through pine forest up the mountain side. En route viewpoints look out across the glimmering waters and beaches at which Caesar landed to cross the very same mountain range in pursuit of his opponent. The panoramic Dhjopuri Saddle on 1.600 meters makes for a good rest point, the onward trail to the peak of Mt. Qorre (2.018m) is optional. Along the spine, we quickly reach the alpine line where between skeleton trees the paths peters out and terrain becomes very steep. The last meters are a challenge but offer stunning views towards Mt. Cika (2.045 m). Our summit towers equally high above the Ionian Sea and overlooks the Southern Highlands including Shushica Valley route. We return on the same route to a beer garden with a view for celebrative drinks. Nearby the hotel we can visit the ranger station or take a stroll to a viewpoint at "Caesar's Pass" prior to the last supper.

 B / LP / D

 Hotel

 2x 10 min

8. Across the Spine of the Karaburun Peninsula

Rainforest and Ridgehike with Views of the Ionian and Adriatic Sea

⇔ 11 km ▲ 625 m ▼ 425 m ⌘ 4:30 h

Our last walk starts just outside the hotel, on a shepherd route we hike through cold climate rainforest up the "Deep Pass" and Mt. Gjipali (1.446 m). Here the Karaburun Peninsula's western slopes plunge steeply into the blue Ionian Sea and panoramic views of the Bay of Vlora, yesterday's peaks and rugged Albanian Riviera accompany the walk along the peninsula's spine. We pause for an early lunch break and memorize the views of jagged peaks and turquoise waters before descending to the Llogara Pass. Those who like to return to the Riviera for more time at their favorite beach can catch a bus or taxi, else we return North for onward travels or an optional overnight in Tirana. The city itself is caught between its Eastern heritage and Western ambitions, between rising skyscrapers and old Communist monuments it looks for new identity. Your plans permitting, we together explore the modern metropolitan city that stands in stark contrast to our experience in rural Albania, join for dinner and head out to the capital's famous nightlife in one of the trendy late night bars of the "Block" district

