

ESCORTED TOUR IN ASSOCIATION WITH REALITY AND BEYOND

ALBANIA

21 - 28 September 2026



FROM
£2,995
PER PERSON

Tour Leader: Lucy Abel Smith


The Ultimate
TRAVEL COMPANY



Albania was the last country in the Ottoman Empire to gain her independence and was recognised by the Great Powers in 1914. It is one of the most ancient in Europe – Illyria – the Romans recognised Albania's importance in trade and began the Via Egnatia from her coast to Constantinople.

However, it must be one of the least known countries in Europe and one of the most exciting and unexplored, described so in the 19th century and so too in the 20th, isolated by its communist ruler Enver Hoxha. Less so today but it offers visual richness, friendly people, delicious food, wine and a real sense of the extraordinary, which Europe has largely lost.

Our journey starts in the capital, Tirana, where we spend two nights exploring the city and the nearby great castle town of Kruje, the scene of a great battle between the Ottomans and the Albanians in the 14th century and from there south via Elbasan and the beautiful city of Berat.

Berat, again fortified, but its Ottoman houses, churches and museums are one of the richest in Albania. From there we travel still further south to Gjirokastra where we will spend four nights. The city is the birthplace of Hoxha and perhaps because of that has retained its great towering fortified houses built in tiers up the mountain side, of the very materials of the mountains themselves. There is a fine Bazaar, mosques, churches and tekės – home to the Dervishes.

From here we will visit Tepelene where Lord Byron was entertained by the despot Ali Pasha with mutual admiration. From there into the mountains to visit Bylis abandoned by the Byzantines but an ancient site. There will be other village visits not normally on a tourist route where we receive a real sense of the hospitality of the Albanians.

From Gjirokastra further south to Butrint where Lords Rothschild and Sainsbury set up the Butrint Foundation in the early nineties to help restore this extraordinary site inhabited by various peoples from the Illyrians to the Venetians. It is of great beauty and complexity. We then leave this wonderful country for the crossing at Saranda to Corfu where we will spend one night with further visits in the town including the spectacular archaeological museum. Albania is a land that has always attracted real travellers as Byron, Edward Lear, Edith Durham and the Lawrence of Albania, Baron Nopcsa. Come and join us!



Ethem Bey Camisi

8-DAY ITINERARY, DEPARTING 21 SEPTEMBER 2026

21 September London / Tirana

Suggested flight (not included in the cost of the tour) British Airways BA 380 departing London Heathrow at 08.15 hrs arriving Tirana at 12.15 hrs. Group transfer to the Hotel Intercontinental Tirana where two nights are spent.

Lunch at a local restaurant. Orientation tour of Tirana with visits to include the Mosque of Ethem Bey and Clock Tower, dating from 1793, the National Museum and the British Cemetery. Dinner at Golosa Restaurant (or similar).

22 September Tirana & Kruja

Continue the tour of Tirana including Tirana National Archaeological Museum and the House of Leaves Museum formerly the headquarters of secret surveillance during the communist era.

Lunch at Villa Era. Visit the medieval hill-town of Kruja, which became a symbol of popular resistance against the Ottoman Empire. Walk through the restored Bazaar to the museum of the national hero, Skanderbeg, in the restored Castle. Return to Tirana. Dinner under own arrangements.

23 September Tirana / Elbasan / Berat / Gjirokastra

Check out and depart for the historic city of Elbasan. Visit Elbasan Ethnographic Museum and the magnificent Elbasan Castle for stunning views of the surrounding

area. Continue to charming town of Berat, with its collection of white Ottoman houses climbing up the hill earning it the title of 'town of a thousand windows',

Lunch at the White House in Berat. Explore the medieval citadel, untouched by time, including the Onuri Iconographic Museum in Berat Castle and the 13th-century Byzantine Church of St Mary of Blachernae. Walk down to the Berat Ethnographic Museum showcased in a restored Ottoman mansion (subject to reopening following restoration). Continue to Gjirokastra and check into the simple but comfortable Kalemli Hotel where four nights are spent. Dinner at the hotel.

24 September Gjirokastra

Tour of Gjirokastra, an austere hill town with cobbled streets and fortified Ottoman houses, set in wooded hills overlooking the Drinos Valley. Visit Gjirokastra Castle and its recently opened History Museum. Walk to the Bazaar and visit its specialist craftsmen.

Lunch at a local restaurant. Concert in Skenduli House (subject to confirmation). Visit Gjirokastra's Ethnographic Museum. Dinner under own arrangements.

25 September Gjirokastra / Tepelene & Bylis

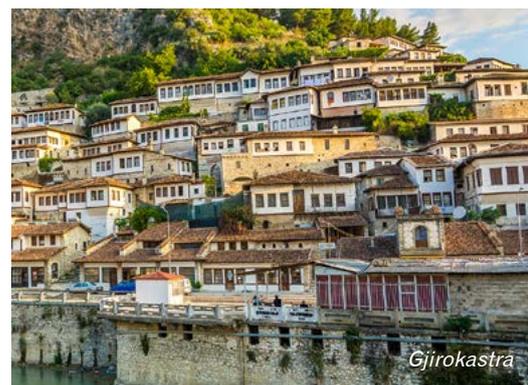
Depart for the mountain town of Tepelene for a photo stop at the place where Byron stayed as a guest

of the Ottoman ruler Ali Pasha. Continue to the classical site of Bylis for a visit to the remains of this ancient city, an important settlement during the Hellenistic and Roman periods.

Lunch at a local restaurant or picnic. Return to Gjirokastra. Dinner under own arrangements.



Berat Castle



Gjirokastra



Butrint

26 September Gjirokastra & Countryside

Visits in the countryside surrounding Gjirokastra including a Teke (Sufi monastery) and local Orthodox churches.

Lunch at a local restaurant or picnic. Evening visit to Libohove overlooked by its imposing castle built by Ali Pasha. Dinner at Sedat Ismailat Restaurant or similar. Return to Gjirokastra.

27 September Gjirokastra / Butrint / Siranda / Corfu

Check out and depart for the archaeological site of Butrint which occupies a wooded headland overlooking the Straits of Corfu. One of the most romantic sites in the Balkans, it encompasses ancient, Illyrian, Greek, Roman, Byzantine and medieval remains. It has been excavated and safeguarded by The Butrint Foundation, founded by Lord Rothschild and Lord Sainsbury and is a World Heritage Site. See the immense walls, the elegant 4th-century theatre, part of a Byzantine Palace and the well-preserved Baptistery, where a 6th-century mosaic pavement was discovered, and the small museum. Visit Lekuresi Castle (if accessible) for views and continue to Saranda to walk along sea promenade and visit the ruins of the old town.

Lunch at a local restaurant or picnic. Take the ferry from Siranda to Corfu. Transfer to the Divani Palace Hotel where one night is spent. Dinner at a local restaurant.

28 September Corfu / London

Check out and visit the Archaeological Museum of Corfu.

Lunch at a local restaurant. Group transfer to Corfu Airport for suggested flight (not included) British Airways BA 645 departing Corfu at 17.30 hrs arriving London Heathrow at 18.55 hrs.

NB: Please note that accommodation outside Tirana is basic but the best available locally.



Castle of Gjirokastra



Archaeological park of Butrint

TOUR PRICES PER PERSON

Tour Price	£2,995
Single Supplement	£378

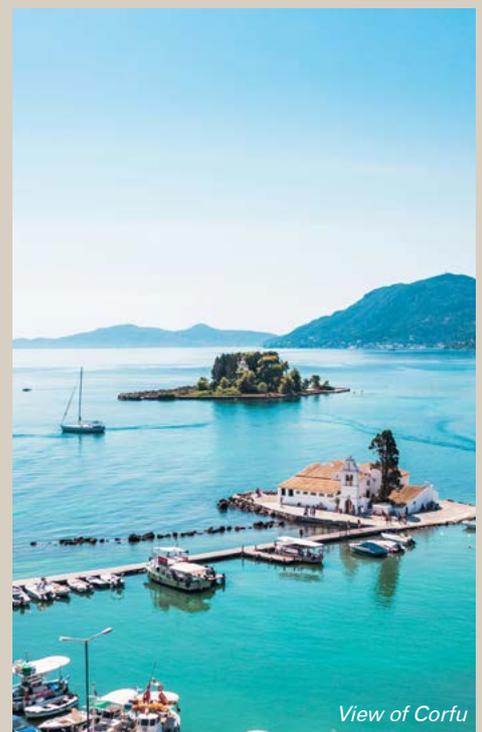
Please note we have not included the cost of the flights in the tour price. Please contact us for prices should you wish to book them through us.

PRICE INCLUDES

- Accommodation throughout as shown in the itinerary
- Breakfast daily; 8 lunches; 3 dinners
- All entrance fees, visits, excursions
- Group transfers and transportation as per the itinerary
- Gratuities in restaurants for included meals
- Gratuities to guides/s; gratuities to driver/s; portage
- The services of your tour leader throughout

PRICE EXCLUDES

- International flights
- Travel insurance
- Meals indicated as 'under own arrangements'
- Items of personal expenditure (e.g. telephone calls / laundry etc.)
- Government levies or taxes introduced after costing and publication of this programme on 02/12/2025



View of Corfu



YOUR TOUR LEADER

Lucy Abel Smith

Lucy is an art historian who specialises in Central Europe and the Balkans. After many years working as a tour organiser and lecturer, she set up her independent travel company, Reality and Beyond Ltd to concentrate on this most fascinating part of the world. She first visited Prague in the early 1970s and wrote a *Walking tour of Prague* published by John Murray in 1991.

She lives in Gloucestershire and founded the successful contemporary sculpture show Fresh Air in 1992. She has restored a house in Richis, Transylvania where she launched the Transylvanian Book Festival in 2013. She wrote the *Blue Guide to the Greater Tarnava Valley* in 2016 which is now in its second edition. Any spare time is spent researching the patronage of the 17th Century Duke and Duchess of Beaufort. She is a patron of the Gloucestershire Gardens and Landscape Trust.

Lucy will be accompanied in Gjirokastra by local guide Viola Sherifi.