

**Women's Travel Group: Private Tour to Albania**  
**Tirana • Durres • Kruja • Berat • Apollonia • Vlora • Saranda •**  
**Gjirokastra • Butrint • Corfu**

April 15-22, 2019  
(as of November 20, 2018)

**Overview Daily Itinerary**

Day 1, Mon, Apr 15	Arrive Tirana, Albania
Day 2, Tue, Apr 16	Tirana • drive to Durres via Kruja
Day 3, Wed, Apr 17	Durres • day tour to Berat
Day 4, Thu, Apr 18	Durres • Apollonia • Vlora • Saranda
Day 5, Fri, Apr 19	Saranda • day trip to Gjirokastra
Day 6, Sat, Apr 20	Saranda • Butrint • Corfu, Greece
Day 7, Sun, Apr 21	Corfu
Day 8, Mon, Apr 22	Depart Corfu



## **Descriptive Daily Itinerary**

### **Day 1, Mon, Apr 15      Arrive Tirana, Albania**

Upon arrival to Tirana, your private vehicle, driver and guide will meet you. Enjoy an introductory afternoon tour of Albania's capital before dinner and overnight.

#### **Tirana City Tour**

Tirana was a small 17th century town before becoming Albania's capital city in the 1920s. Urbanization efforts began in the 1950s and the city has flourished since the collapse of Albania's communist government in the early 1990s.

#### **Skanderbeg Statue**

In the heart of the central square is an impressive bronze equestrian statue of Skanderbeg, the Albanian national hero who led the rebellion against the Ottoman Empire in the 15th century. Created in 1968 by local sculptor Odhise Paskali, the statue was inaugurated on the 500th anniversary of Skanderbeg's death.

#### **Clock Tower**

Located in Skanderbeg Square, the Clock Tower was built in 1822 by Et'hem Bey, whose mosque is nearby. You can climb its 90 stairs for great views from the top.

#### **Et'hem Bey Mosque**

The Et'hem Bey Mosque was built in 1789. Its frescoes depict rarely allowed natural features such as waterfalls and trees.

#### **Martyrs of the Nation Boulevard**

Bulevard Dëshmorët e Kombit, or "Martyrs of the Nation Boulevard," runs 1 km from Skanderberg Square to Mother Theresa Square and was created during the Italian occupation of Albania between 1939 and 1941. Tirana's Presidential Palace, the Prime Minister's Office, and the Palace of Congress, as well as colorful communist-era apartments that Tirana is known for line the Boulevard.

#### **Boulevard Walk**

Stroll central Tirana, admiring the government buildings, brilliantly-painted apartments and observe daily life at street side cafes and shops.

*Meals: D*

*Overnight – TBD, Tirana*

### **Day 2, Tue, Apr 16      Tirana • drive to Durres via Kruja**

Transfer to Durres today by private vehicle. En route enjoy privately led touring in Kruja. Kruja is located about 40km from central Tirana and will be about an hour drive.

#### **Turkish Bazaar**

Browse the wooden stalls of the medieval Turkish bazaar, a great place to shop for handicrafts

such as alabaster jewelry, silver filigree, hand-carved wooden items and hand-loomed carpets.

### **Kruja Fortress and Skanderbeg Museum**

The Kruja Fortress marked the last stand before Albania fell to the conquering Ottoman Turks in 1478. Albania's rebel forces, led by Gjergj Kastriot Skanderbeg, withstood years of battle, and the castle now serves as a historical landmark and a symbol of the fierce national pride Albanians feel. A museum inside the castle allows visitors to learn more about Skanderbeg, Albania's national hero.

Enjoy lunch at a local restaurant before continuing on to Durres this afternoon. Durres is located on the Albanian coast, about 45k from Kruja and about an hour drive.

### **Durres City Tour**

Durres, Albania's second largest city, grew around a natural harbor on the Adriatic across from southern Italian ports. Founded in 600 BC by Illyrians, the harbor was coveted and fought over since its discovery, changing hands over 30 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.

### **Byzantine Walls & Venetian Tower**

Cutting a north-south axis through the city center are the remains of Durres' 6th century Byzantine walls, created under orders of Emperor Anastasius I after the Visigoth invasion of 481. These walls made Durres into one of the most heavily fortified cities in the Adriatic during the early medieval period. Damaged by wars and earthquakes over the centuries, today the old brick and stone ramparts measure 1,600 feet - about a third of their original circumference. The north end of the walls leads to the ruins of the old Roman amphitheater, built in the first half of the 2nd century, while the south end features a well-preserved Venetian round tower, a later addition from the Middle Ages used to strengthen the existing battle fortifications.

### **Archeology Museum**

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

*Meals: B, L, D*

### ***Grand Blue Fafa Resort or similar***

*Outside of Durres on the Adriatic coast, the modern Grand Blue Fafa Resort offers waterfront views and access to a private beach. This four-star features a restaurant, two outdoor bars, a fitness center, spa with sauna, and two outdoor pools. Rooms include air-conditioning, minibar, complimentary WiFi, satellite TV, in-room safe, and hair dryer.*

### **Day 3, Wed, Apr 17      Durres • day tour to Berat**

Today will be a full day tour to Berat led by your private guide. Berat is located about 90km and a 1.5 hour drive each way from Durres.

### **Berat City Tour**

UNESCO-listed Berat has been habituated since prehistoric times. The 13th-century Berat castle is one of the best-preserved medieval citadels in the Balkans. The dramatic architecture of Berat reflect mixing Ottoman roots and Albanian heritage and 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.

### **Old Town & Mangalem Quarter**

Highlights of the old town include the sprawling Berat Castle that once housed 20 churches and a mosque;; several beautiful medieval Christian churches; the 15th century Red Mosque; and National Ethnographic Museum, located in an 18th century Ottoman house.

Walk through the traditional Muslim neighborhood, the Mangalem Quarter. Mangalem houses the Bachelor's Mosque, intended for the town's unmarried shop assistants, and the 1782 Halveti Teke prayer hall, today listed as a Cultural Monument of Albania.

### **Citadel**

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. The Church of Shen Todhri stands inside the walls of the medieval citadel and is decorated by 16th century frescoes.

### **Sultan's Mosque**

This mosque is the center point for Muslims in Berat. Used as a Koranic school, its ceiling is painted with intricate Islamic designs.

### **Cobo Winery**

Sample fine Albanian wines at Cobo Winery, reputedly the best winery in the country. Visit the vineyards, the traditional stone kulla house and wine making facilities and taste examples of some of the Cobo wines and raki, made from Albanian grapes.

*Meals: B, D*

### **Day 4, Thu, Apr 18            Durres • Apollonia • Vlora • Saranda**

Today you will transfer to Saranda, with touring en route. Begin the day in Apollonia, about 90km and a 1.5 hour drive from Durres.

### **Ancient Ruins of Apollonia**

In a peaceful part of the Krygjata Valley along the Vjoses River stand the ruins of the ancient town of Apollonia, built in 558 BC. Surrounded by a Roman wall near the Adriatic coast,

Apollonia was mentioned by both Aristotle and Cicero, and was an important center of trade. The beautifully preserved 13th century Byzantine church and monastery of Shen Meri rise from a low hill overlooking the ruins of a Roman bath, a small acropolis, a Roman library and the Odeon. Take a walking tour of some of Apollonia's most important sites, including the old terraced city walls; the 2nd century BC monuments of the Agonothetes, where the city council used to hold meetings; and the 3rd century BC House of Mosaics.

### **Archeological Museum of Apollonia**

The Archeological Museum of Apollonia is housed in the 13th century former Monastery of St. Mary. The museum building was restored and modernized with help from UNESCO. Today it exhibits some of the finest artifacts from the excavation of Apollonia and explains the history, cultures and civilizations of the multi-layered site.

Break for an independent lunch before continuing on to Vlora along the Ionian Coast. The distance is about 48km and the driving time will be about 1 hour.

### **Vlora City Tour**

Vlora has been an important maritime city since it's founding as Greek port in the 6th century. Beaches, olive groves and palm trees are features of this Adriatic coastal town, where Ismail Qemel declared Albanian independence in 1912. Vlora is a place where 14th century minarets exist in tandem with bronze memorials to Albanian freedom fighters.

After Vlora, continue on to Saranda for dinner and overnight. The drive will be about 125km and 3 hours.

*Meals: B, D*

### *Demi Hotel or similar*

*The Demi Hotel enjoys a waterfront location overlooking the Old Town and the Adriatic. The hotel features a seaside restaurant, lounge bar and a private beach for guests to swim or sunbathe. Rooms include individual climate control, satellite TV, minibar, and free WiFi.*

### **Day 5, Fri, Apr 19                      Saranda • day trip to Gjirokastra**

Today will be a day tour to Gjirokastra. The town is located about 60km and a 1.5 hour drive from Saranda.

### **Gjirokastra City Tour**

The UNESCO-listed Old Town of Gjirokastra is a well-preserved Ottoman town. Its 13th century citadel and typical stone-roofed tower houses, called kule, make up an ensemble characteristic of the Balkan region.

### **Gjirokastra Castle**

The Gjirokastra Castle has seen various forms since before the 12th century. Extensive renovations were made by Ali Pasha of Tepelene in 19th century. 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 National Military Museum 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.

### **Ethnographic Museum**

The Ethnographic Museum is located in a typical Gjirokastra style home. The museum's four floors are decorated with household items, folk costumes and artifacts that reflect the town's Ottoman heritage.

### **Zekati House**

Visit the tall stone 19th century Zekati House to enjoy wonderful views of the town.

Drive back to Saranda at the end of the day.

*Meals: B, D*

### **Day 6, Sat, Apr 20                      Saranda • Butrint • Corfu, Greece**

Transfer this morning to Butrint. The city is located about 42km and a 1 hour drive from Saranda.

### **Butrint City Tour**

The UNESCO World Heritage Site of Butrint 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.

### **Asclepios Temple**

The temple of the Greek god of medicine, Asclepios, sits near the amphitheater. The Greeks, who began a colony here in the 7th century BC, worshiped Asclepios among their pantheon of gods.

### **Old Amphitheater**

Dating from the 3rd century BC, the ancient Greek amphitheater was built of huge stone blocks to seat an audience of 1,500. 23 rows of stone seating have been preserved, situated at the foot of the acropolis.

### **Roman Portico & Public Baths**

A 1st century BC Roman forum can be visited at the southern end of the site. The forum once contained a large roofed portico, with ancient Greek inscriptions embedded into the eastern walls. Further beyond are a series of public baths, which included a heated bathing pool known as a caldarium, as well as steam-heated floors and walls.

### **The Baptistry**

The circular 6th century AD baptistry was only discovered in 1928. Surrounding the baptismal font in the center and covering the round floor are brilliant mosaics of animals birds and fish.

### **Byzantine Basilica**

The Byzantine basilica on the east end of the site dates back to the 6th century, when Butrint became the seat of an early Christian bishopric. It was once among the largest churches of its kind for the time, and while the original wooden roof has since deteriorated over the centuries, the archways and foundational structure have been impressively preserved.

### **City Walls**

Some of Butrint's fortification walls were built in the 6th century BC and some in later centuries. The acropolis hill is circled by a wall constructed of huge stone blocks fitted together without mortar and with graceful gates fit into them.

A packed lunch will be provided while you wait for the ferry. Catch the ferry from Saranda to Corfu (timetable of the ferry will be available March 2019).

### **Island of Corfu**

The island of Corfu, just off the northwest coast of Greece, is the second largest, and the greenest, of the Ionian islands. Corfu was ruled by the Venetians from 1386 to 1797, and the three forts they built defended it from the Ottoman Empire for four centuries. The UNESCO-listed Old Town, cut through with narrow Venetian lanes, is crowded with neoclassical houses, some from the Venetian period and some from the 19th century.

Upon arrival to Corfu, transfer to the hotel for overnight.

*Meals: B, L, D*

*Overnight in Corfu – Hotel TBD*

### **Day 7, Sun, Apr 21      Corfu**

Mornings tour in Corfu led by your private guide.

### **Achillion Palace**

About 7 miles outside of Corfu, the neoclassical Achillion Palace was built in the 1890s as a summer retreat for Empress Elisabeth of Austria. Surrounded by lush garden terraces, and decorated with frescos and statuary inspired by Greek mythology, Elisabeth chose to dedicate her palace to the legendary Greek hero Achilles, a symbol of grief and escapism, and a particularly significant figure for the empress, who at the time was deeply saddened by the loss of her only son. The interior of the palace contains favorite items of Elisabeth during her last years here and personal items from Kaiser Wilhelm II, who purchased the property in 1907.

### **Mon Repos**

Just south of the Old Town is the secluded estate of Mon Repos, a 19th century neoclassical

villa that served as a summer home to the Greek royal family until the monarchy ended in 1967. Built on the grounds of an ancient settlement called Palaeopolis, Mon Repos was the birthplace of Prince Philip, husband to Queen Elizabeth II, as well as Princess Alexia of Greece and Denmark. Today, the villa and its lush gardens function as an archaeological museum and display some of the old Greek ruins found on the property, which include sanctuaries dedicated to both Hera and Apollo and a nearly intact Doric temple that dates back to the 7th century BC.

Enjoy an independent afternoon. Suggested independent visits:

**Option 1 - Archaeological Museum**

Corfu's Archaeological Museum was built between 1962 and 1965, and houses ancient Greek artifacts found on the island that range from the Prehistoric to the Hellenistic eras. Bronze statuary, clay oil lamps, pottery, and terracotta artworks are among some of the items that can be found within the museum's collection, but perhaps its most important highlight is a massive gorgon pediment uncovered during excavations of the Temple of Artemis on nearby Kanoni Peninsula.

**Option 2 - Corfu Museum of Asian Art**

Founded in 1928, Corfu's Museum of Asian Art is the only museum of its kind in Greece, showcasing more than 15,000 fantastic examples of Chinese, Korean, Japanese, and Indian art and antiquities. Among the most stunning highlights in the museum's collection are magnificent Greco-Buddhist statues, prehistoric bronze pieces, Chinese jade carvings and snuff bottles, samurai armor, and gorgeous Japanese woodblock prints. The venue where the museum is currently housed, the Palace of St Michael & St George, is a work of art in itself, with sumptuous interior decor and a "Throne Room" covered in trompe l'oeil murals.

Gather in the evening for dinner at a local restaurant.

*Meals: B, D*

**Day 8, Mon, Apr 22      Depart Corfu**

The tour ends today with transfer to the airport for international departures.

*Meals: B*