

**This is a special departure for only 6-10 women
It is accompanied by Phyllis Stoller**
Women's Travel Group: Private Tour Albania & Corfu
Tirana • Durres • Kruja • Berat • Apollonia •
Vlora • Saranda •
Gjirokastra • Butrint • Corfu



April 15-22, 2019

**\$2999 until Dec 15 then \$3199 Land only
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Overview Daily Itinerary

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

Daily Itinerary

Day 1, Mon, Apr 15 Arrive Tirana, Albania • Durres

Upon arrival in Tirana, our private vehicle, driver and guide meet us. Transfer to Durres and enjoy an introductory city tour. **Durres City Tour**

Durres, Albania's 2nd largest city, grew around a natural harbor on the Adriatic across from Italy. Founded 600 BC by Illyrians, the harbor was fought over, changing hands 30 times in 900 years. The Romans conquered Durres in the 2nd c BC, and the city became the start of a most important Roman road to Constantinople. Visit the largest Roman amphitheater in the Balkans and Roman baths, dating from the time of Emperor Hadrian.

Byzantine Walls & Venetian Tower

Cutting a north-south axis through the center are the remains of 6th century Byzantine walls ordered , by Emperor Anastasius I after Visigoth invasions of 481. As part of a trifold defensive structure, these walls turned Durres into one of the most heavily fortified cities in early medieval times. Damaged by wars and earthquakes, the brick and stone ramparts are about a third of the original circumference. The north end of the walls leads to the Roman amphitheater, built in the first half of the 2nd century, while the south end features a well-

preserved Venetian round tower, from the Middle Ages used to strengthen the fortifications.

Archeology Museum

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

Meals: 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, fitness center, spa - sauna, and 2 outdoor pools. Rooms include air-conditioning, minibar, complimentary WiFi, satellite TV, in-room safe, and hair dryer.

Day 2, Tue, Apr 16 Durres • Kruja • Tirana • Durres

Today is a full day tour around Durres. **Kruja City Tour** 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 army defeated an Ottoman army of 100,000. Visit the restored castle and citadel, with its Skanderbeg Museum and bazaar.

Turkish Bazaar

Browse the wooden stalls of the medieval Turkish bazaar, or shop for traditional handicrafts such as jewelry, silver filigree, hand-carved wooden items and carpets.

Kruja Fortress and Skanderbeg Museum

Withstanding numerous attacks from Ottoman Turks, the fortress in Kruja marked the last stand before Albania fell to the conquering empire in 1478. Albania's rebel forces, withstood years of battle, and the castle now serves as a historical landmark and a symbol of national pride. A museum in the castle is about Skanderbeg, Albania's national hero. A particular highlight of the fortress is the Dollma Tequ, a house of prayer for the Bektashi sect of Islam. A mystical sect with roots in Sufism, the Bektashi order was prevalent in the Ottoman Empire and spread throughout Anatolia and the Balkans.

Lunch at a local restaurant. Enjoy a meal of traditional favorites.

Tirana City Tour

Tirana, Albania's capital, is 20 km from the Adriatic on the Ishm River. Until it became the capital in the 1920s, Tirana was a small 17th century town. Urbanization efforts began in the 1950s, and Nikita Khrushchev laid the first stone of the Palace of Culture in 1959. Since the collapse of the 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. Centering on Skanderbeg Square, in honor of the national hero responsible for defeating the Ottomans, the town is easiest to explore on foot.

Skanderbeg Statue

In the heart of the central square is an impressive bronze equestrian statue of Skanderbeg. Created in 1968 by local sculptor Odhise Paskali, the statue was inaugurated on the 500th anniversary of Skanderbeg's death.

Et'hem Bey Mosque

The Et'hem Bey Mosque in the center of Tirana was begun in 1789. Its frescoes depict rarely-allowed natural features such as waterfalls and trees. **Clock Tower** Located in Skanderbeg Square in the center, the Clock Tower was built in 1822 by Et'hem Bey, whose mosque it is near. You can climb its 90 stairs for great views from the top.

Martyrs of the Nation Boulevard

Bulevard Dëshmorët e Kombit, or "Martyrs of the Nation Boulevard," was created during the Italian occupation 1939-1941, and runs 1 km in length connecting Skanderbeg Square to Mother Teresa Square. Many of Tirana's most important administrative buildings are here, including the Presidential Palace, the Prime Minister's Office, and the Palace of Congress, as well as some of the colorful communist-era apartments that Tirana is known for.

Boulevard Walk

Stroll the boulevards in the center of Tirana, admiring the government buildings, brilliantly-painted apartments and observing daily life at the street side cafes and shops.

Meals: B, L, D

Day 3, Wed, Apr 17 Durres • Berat • Durres

Today will be a full day tour to Berat led by your private guide. **Berat City Tour** UNESCO-listed Berat sits on one of the oldest continuously inhabited sites in Albania, with settlement since prehistoric times. One of the best-preserved medieval citadels in the Balkans – the 13th-century Berat Castle – is located 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, 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.

Highlights include the sprawling Berat Castle that once housed 20 churches and a mosque; Onufri Museum with impressive 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; National Ethnographic Museum located in an 18th-century Ottoman house, with rooms displaying home life using traditional Berat clothing, furnishings and tools; and the 1782 Halveti Teke prayer hall, also listed as a Cultural Monument of Albania.

Old Town & Mangalem Quarter

Also take a walk through the Mangalem Quarter, which traditionally was known as the Muslim

quarter of the city. Mangalem houses three grand mosques, including the Bachelor's Mosque, which was 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.

Church of Shen Todhri

The Church of Shen Todhri (St Theodore) stands inside the walls of the medieval citadel. It contains 16th century frescoes by Onufre the Great.

Sultan's Mosque

This mosque - also called the King's 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 the fine Albanian wines at Cobo Winery, reputedly the best winery in the country. Visit the rolling 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 will be a full day tour led by our private guide.

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 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.

Fier City

Fier is a city of some 85,000 located about 7 miles away from Apollonia. Founded in the 6th century BC, Fier has long been known for its rich deposits of natural gas, oil, and bitumen, which were first noted by the ancient Greek physician Pedanius Dioscorides in his seminal work, *Materia Medica*. Communists turned the city into a major industrial center during the 20th century, building dozens of factories and power plants that produced fertilizers and generated

thermal and chemical energy reserves for the country. Many of these old buildings were abandoned after the fall of the Soviet Union, and allowed to fall into disrepair. Today, Fier's natural gas deposits are once again seeing renewed economic interest with the construction of a new transport pipeline called the Trans Adriatic, which will run through the city and is expected to be completed by 2020.

Walking Tour

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 (Saint Mary) 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 Archaeological 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.

Monastery and Church of Shen Meri

The 13th century Byzantine church and monastery houses the Apollonia Museum, with information about the ancient city.

Lunch is independent today.

City Tour

Since its founding as a Greek port in the 6th century, Vlora has remained one of the most important cities of the region, at the forefront of maritime trade and industrial development. Beaches, olive groves and palm trees are features of this Adriatic coastal town, where Ismail Qemel declared Albanian independence in 1912. Though its pleasant situation has begun to draw sun-seeking tourists, its storied history as a strategic military base for Greece, Rome, Sicily, Byzantium, the Ottoman Empire, the Soviet Union and others is its biggest draw. Vlora is a place where 14th century minarets exist in tandem with bronze memorials to Albanian freedom fighters.

Drive to Saranda along the Ionian Coast

Travel along the breathtaking Ionian coast, passing the beautiful villages of Lukova, Qeparo, Borsh and Dhermi. Make a stop at Porto Palermo, once a submarine base and at Llogara National Park, a lovely natural forested area on the north side of Llogara Pass. Sample a traditional dish of sheep yogurt topped with honey and nuts.

Drive to Vlora along the Ionian Coast

Travel along the breathtaking Ionian coast, passing the beautiful villages of Lukova, Pigeras, and Vuno. Make a stop at Porto Palermo, once a submarine base and at Llogara National Park, a lovely natural forested area on the north side of Llogara Pass.

Llogara National Park

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

Fortress of Ali Pasha/Porto Palermo

The beautiful bay of Porto Palermo 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 and has walls 20 meters high.

Meals: B, D

Demi Hotel or similar

Located steps from the beach, Demi Hotel enjoys a waterfront location overlooking the Old Town and the Adriatic. Enjoy Mediterranean specialties at the seaside restaurant, and the hotel offers a lively lounge bar and a private beach to swim or sunbathe. Rooms are outfitted with modern furnishings, and include individual climate control, satellite TV, minibar, and complimentary WiFi. (Climate control is not the same as air conditioning but our season is not hot).

Day 5, Fri, Apr 19 Saranda • Gjirokastra • Saranda

Today will be a full day tour led by our private guide.

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 has had 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.

Ethnographical Museum

The Ethnographic Museum 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 meant as shelters in case of attack. A follower of Stalinist

thought, Hoxha built prisons and labor camps as well, and used 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.

Zekati House

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

Meals: B, D

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

Today will be a full day tour led by our private guide.

City Tour

The UNESCO World Heritage Site of Butrint has been inhabited for millennia. Colonized 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, 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 are preserved.

Roman Portico & Public Baths

Located at the southern end of the site are the remains of a Roman forum dating back to the 1st century BC. 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.

Packed lunch.

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

Located about 7 miles outside of Corfu, the elegant neoclassical Achillion Palace was built in the 1890s as a summer retreat for Empress Elisabeth of Austria. Surrounded by lush garden terraces, and intricately decorated with panoramic 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 some favorite mementos from Elisabeth during her last years here, as well as 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 1962 -1965, and houses ancient Greek artifacts found on the island from the Prehistoric to Hellenistic eras. Bronze statuary, clay oil lamps, pottery, and terracotta artworks are some, 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 are magnificent Greco-Buddhist statues, prehistoric bronze pieces, Chinese jade carvings and snuff bottles, samurai armor, and gorgeous Japanese woodblock prints. The museum is housed in the Palace of St Michael & St George, a work of art in itself, with sumptuous interiors and a "Throne Room".

Gather in the evening for dinner at a local restaurant. **Meals: B, D**

Day 8, Mon, Apr 22 Depart Corfu

The tour ends with transfer to the airport for international departures. **Meals: B**

Meals included are:

Day 1: D

Day 2: B, L, D

Day 3: B, D

Day 4: B, D

Day 5: B, D

Day 6: B, L, D

Day 7: B, D

Day 8: B

- *Grand Blue Fafa hotel in Durres • Bougainville Bay hotel in Saranda • TBA hotel – in Corfu*
- Private vehicle transfer for one group arrival and one group departure transfer at airports/railway stations per itinerary (if additional extra transfers are needed we can provide them for an extra cost)
 - Transportation per itinerary and between cities by minibus with AC, and tickets from Saranda to Corfu by ferry on Day 6
 - Sightseeing and excursions including entrance fees per itinerary
 - English speaking local guides for touring per itinerary
 - Special cultural features as stated
 - Meals as listed in itinerary, breakfast daily, 2 lunches, and 7 dinners
 - Special Wine tasting in Berat
 - Bottled/purified water with meals
 - Bottled water on vehicle during touring
 - Baggage handling at hotels where available
 - Destination preparation information packet
