

ALBANIA – THROUGH THE MOUNTAINS TO THE SEA

10-day / 9-nights **GUIDED** inn-to-inn **CHALLENGING** cycle touring

E-bikes available



Rarely do you get the opportunity to visit a country in Europe that is relatively unknown to tourists. Rarer still to find elevated rides through mountain villages and along a scenic Ionian Sea coastline with days of cycling open roads with often very little traffic. This may be one of the most memorable cycling tours ever, a circular route of the country of Albania between Greece and Macedonia – fully supported by English-speaking local guides and a back-up vehicle. A chance to discover Albania's UNESCO heritage, natural coast, and mountain landscapes. See the city and citadel of Gjirokastër, the ancient ruins of Butrinti with views to Corfu, ride beside one of the deepest lakes in Europe, through pine forests and national parks.

Taste authentic Albanian cuisine, be it fresh caught seafood or mountain trout or salad and vegetables from the local farms. Breakfast, lunch, and dinner are included most days at carefully selected venues. We offer accommodation to suit the location, from lake or beachside resort hotel rooms to city villas and mountain log cabins, all with bathrooms. We allow free time to relax and explore and to meet the many English-speaking locals.

Our bikes are well maintained and multi-gearred, ideal for the terrain, with a pannier, repair kit and helmet provided. They are usually Giant or similar and the Giant Explorer e-bikes will give the boost needed on some of the longer and more challenging rides. A support van and trailer will accompany the riders with fresh water and repairs or a rest from riding if needed. Whatever goes up must come down so you can look forward to some spectacular downhill rides with breathtaking mountain switchbacks.

Cost from: \$2165 per person (twin share) Single room supplement from: \$400

Departs: 5, 11, 21, 30 April, 12, 15, 20, 23 May, 1, 6, 16, 21 June, 1 July, 24, 31 August, 9, 19, 20, 27 September, 6, 8, 15, 17 October 2024

E-bike hire: \$455 (highly recommended)

Includes: 9 nights' accommodation in hotels and guesthouses; 9 breakfasts, 8 lunches, 9 dinners; hire of multi-gearred hybrid bike with panniers; transportation as per itinerary; English-speaking cycling guide; support vehicle with driver/guide; one-way transfer to Tirana airport.

Also available as a tailor-made, **SELF-GUIDED** tour from \$1800 per person twin share. Ask for more details.

Call OUTDOOR TRAVEL on 1800 331 582 for details and reservations



Suggested itinerary:

Day 1 Arrive Tirana

On arrival make your own way to your city centre hotel. Take time to explore the wide squares and boulevards of the city and discover the history and culture of Albania. Visits to the National Museum and the popular Bunkart are highly recommended. This is your chance to learn of Albania's history from ancient republic to Italian occupation, to communism to dictatorship and now a young democracy.

Tirana, the capital city of Albania offers a diverse mixture of financial institutions, culture, and entertainment. It is home to two distinct architectural styles influenced by the totalitarian regimes that lately oppressed not only the capital but the whole country – the Fascist regime of Benito Mussolini during the Second World War and the Communist dictatorship that followed it. The ministries surrounding the main square were all designed by Italian architects like Florestano di Fausto and Armando Brasini, buildings that stand to this day and have been internally reconstructed as government offices.

At 6.00pm this evening, meet your group for a visit to a typical Albanian restaurant where traditional food will be offered in a family style dinner. Here you will get the chance to try for the first time the exquisite cuisine that this amazing country has to offer.

Day 2 Tirana – Pogradec

cycling distance @ 40km (175m elevation gain)

After breakfast we take a two-hour transfer to the top of Qafë Thanë Pass, on the northern side of Lake Ohrid. Here we descend towards Lake Ohrid and our lakeside hotel accommodation for the night. We have lunch here before cycling across the border into Macedonia for a visit of the Monastery of St. Naum. Lake Ohrid is one of Europe's oldest lakes and is its deepest at 288m. Nestled between eastern Albania and southwestern Macedonia, it is said to contain a unique ecosystem with up to 200 endemic species.

The monastery was built in 905AD by Saint Naum of Ohrid. It was destroyed between the 11th and 13th Century and rebuilt in the 16th Century as the multi-domed Byzantine structure seen today. St. Naum of Ohrid (Sveti Naum in Macedonian), was a medieval scholar and writer, who together with Saint Clement helped spread Christianity among the Slavic speaking people of the region. In 1979 it was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Day 3 Pogradec – Korçë

cycling distance @ 51km (415m elevation gain)

Wake up to beautiful views of the mountains and the lake. After breakfast we start cycling towards Korçë, nicknamed the *Paris of Albania*. We ride through a typical rural landscape of farming villages, fields of corn and vegetables, open plains and high rocky escarpments. Upon arrival into Korçë we check-in to our accommodation and then take a guided city tour to see the cathedral, one of the largest Orthodox cathedrals in the country, the first Albanian school and the recently restored old Bazaar. Korçë received considerable funds from the European Union and underwent major restoration, making it one of the best cultural and historical cities in Albania.

Day 4 Korçë – Sotirë

cycling distance @ 72km (1170m elevation gain)

We leave the agricultural plateau of Korçë, climbing on an often-rugged road surface to remote villages near to the border with Greece. The Gramoz Mountains lie to our left as we climb towards the high peaks. After lunch at Erseke (at 1050m the highest town in Albania), we climb towards the Barmash Pass at 1160m above sea level. We arrive at Sotirë, a beautiful green alpine meadow with log cabins, a farm-style kitchen, and trout farm. Animals abound here. Pigs, turkeys, chickens, sheep, and cows wander apparently unfenced and unmolested. Dinner is served with local wine, usually a delicious trout freshly caught from the pond, followed by mountain tea.

Day 5 Sotirë – Bënjë

cycling distance @ 66km (665m elevation gain)

We leave Sotirë after breakfast, cycling through a pine forest and alpine meadows with views of the surrounding peaks. We reach the old town of Leskovik ahead of a fantastic 14km downhill run on a completely sealed, newly finished road. In the valley we meet the longest river in Albania, the River Vjosa, with its beautiful, crystalline blue waters. We follow the river for the next two days, contouring through the valley.

We reach our guest house for the night before the 4km ride towards the most famous natural thermal springs in Albania, the Bënjë Thermal Baths (Përmet). Here warm pools await you framed by the 18th Century Ottoman stone bridge. Time for a swim, to relax or take a hike towards the Langarica River that flows from the mountains through one of the most gorgeous canyons in Europe. Return to the guest house for a traditional dinner and perhaps a Raki tasting from the co-operative distillery across the road.

Day 6 Bënjë – Gjirokastër

cycling distance @ 70km (430m elevation gain)

As we leave Bënjë a, the soaring peaks of the Nemercka mountains appear in front of us again. We follow the Vjosa River to Kelcyre, where the river has carved a 20km gorge between the mountains of Trebeshina and Golika. Here we meet and follow the Drino River Valley through the Lunxheri mountains. Perched high above the valley is the UNESCO listed city of Gjirokastër. After we settle in to our hotel there is a city tour visiting the Citadel, the Bazaar, and the unique treasure that is The Skenduli House.

Built in 1823 and still family owned, Skenduli House is a museum once one of the richest houses in Gjirokastër. It has nine fireplaces, (the more fireplaces the richer the family); six bathrooms, twelve rooms, 44 doors, 64 windows, and four hammam (Turkish baths). Many rooms are preserved in their original condition and the surrounding fortified wall is 17 metres thick.

Day 7 Gjirokastër to Saranda

cycling distance @ 70km (525m elevation gain)

After breakfast we take a 30-minute transfer up the Muzina Pass (550m) for the beautiful downhill switchbacks and straights to sea level near Saranda, the first coastal city on the tour. We take a contoured ride with views of the Butrint National Park of Butrint and the Greek island of Capri. We reach the southern tip of Albania and take a small ferry across the Vivari channel, which connects the Ionian Sea with Lake Butrint. Here we have lunch under the shade trees near the UNESCO protected site of Butrint. After lunch there is the opportunity for a guided visit to see the ancient Greco-Roman ruins and protected wetlands, declared a World Heritage Site in 1992. We ride to Saranda with spectacular views of Corfu and the other Ionian islands to our beachside resort accommodation.

Day 8 Saranda to Himarë

cycling distance @ 52km (1065m elevation gain)

We have a rollercoaster ride waiting for us as we leave Saranda following the Albanian “*Riviera Road*”. We pass some beautiful villages and beaches with dazzling views, with mountains on one side and the sea on the other. We take lunch in Porto Palermo, in front of the Venetian Castle and end our day in Himarë, an old fishing village. There is time to relax or swim at the beach or walk into town for an ice cream.

Day 9 Himarë to Radhimë

cycling distance @ 64km (1590m elevation gain)

Today we have perhaps the most beautiful yet challenging day of the tour. We gradually climb through forests and gorges, passing ancient villages as the road leads to the most famous beaches in Albania, Jale and Dhermi. We reach the Llogara Pass and at the top there are stunning panoramic views of the mountains and Ionian islands. We descend through the National Park of Llogara to complete the tour in Radhimë. Here we find a perfect place to relax by the pool, swim in the sea and enjoy a sunset over the Albanian Peninsula of Karaburun.

Day 10 Tour ends with transfer to the airport

Depart after breakfast with a 3-hour transfer to Tirana International Airport to meet your onward flight, or central Tirana if you are staying longer in Albania.



This is just one of the many small group, guided or self-guided, inn-to-inn cycling tours **Outdoor Travel** offer in Europe. We offer famous cycling trails such as the river rides from **Passau to Vienna** along the Danube or along the **Inn Bike Trail** from Switzerland to Austria. Travel too from **Vienna to Budapest** through Austria, Slovakia and Hungary, from the mountains near **Bolzano to Venice** in Italy, or across **Tuscany** or **Umbria**. Other **Outdoor Travel** cycling destinations include Spain, France, Holland, Ireland, England and Scotland, Poland, in the Czech Republic, Romania, China, Vietnam, North America, South Africa, New Zealand and Australia.

We also offer group guided **Bike and Barge** cycling cruises in many destinations including along the canals & rivers of **France, Belgium, Holland and Germany**, the **Venetian Lagoon** in **Italy** or the **Dalmatian Coast** of **Croatia**, the many beautiful islands of **Greece**, the **Lycian coast** of **Turkey**, or in **Vietnam**.

Contact Outdoor Travel for more details and reservations:

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