

Albania - Southern

Tour Manager: Neil Wheadon

Friday 13th to Tuesday 24th June 2025

Albania is a fantastic country for cycle touring especially in late spring/early summer. Road surfaces are in the main excellent and there is very little traffic outside of the main towns. This tour will start at the capital Tirana and explores the country to the south, including a short visit to North Macedonia, to visit a World Heritage site, along with three others that we will visit in Berat, Gjirokastra and Butrint. There are stunning views to enjoy at the top of mountain roads, as well as the coastal scenery of the Albanian Riviera. The tour will be fully supported.

Itinerary

Friday 13th June 2025 Arrive in Tirana

Arrive in Tirana to meet at the hotel at 18:00

- No cycling
- Accommodation: Hotel
- Meals: (D)

Saturday 14th June 2025 Cycling from Tiranë to Pogradec

Our tour will start with a transfer to the north of Lake Ohrid which borders both North Macedonia and Albania. This will be an easy cycling day to start our tour. We start with a descent, followed by relatively flat roads along the shore of the lake. After arriving at our accommodation for the day we will visit the monastery at St Naum in North Macedonia.

- Route distance: 29.0km
- Route altitude gain: 70m
- Accommodation: Hotel
- Meals: (B, L, D)

Sunday 15th June 2025 Cycling from Pogradec to Korçë

Leaving Lake Ohrid, we climb to a high plateau surrounded by mountains. We continue following the gorge for a while until the hills open up, leading to a colourful patchwork of individual farms. Our day ends with a short walking tour of Korçë, the Paris of Albania

- Route distance: 51.0km
- Route altitude gain: 512m
- Accommodation: Hotel
- Meals: (B, L, D)

Monday 16th June 2025 Cycling from Korçë to Sotirë

We leave behind the agricultural plateau of Korçë, ascending steadily into the border mountains through a landscape of barren rock interspersed with wild flowers. Numerous cols and valleys lie ahead, climbing into the heart of the Grammoz Mountains and over the Barmash Pass at 1,159m. We will stop for lunch in the town of Ersekë, the highest city in Albania at about 1000m above sea level. Our overnight is at Sotirë farm, nestled in its own tranquil valley.

- Route distance: 72.0km
- Route altitude gain: 1170m
- Accommodation: Cabin
- Meals: (B, L, D)

Tuesday 17th June 2025 Cycling from Sotirë to Bënjë

We climb to a high pine forested plateau surrounded by soaring peaks, before descending through a spectacular gorge to Leskovik. We cycle along the River Aoos, one of the last totally untamed rivers in Europe. After this there is a 17km descent to Çarshovë. Having reached Bënjë and our accommodation, we can visit the thermal pools at Langarica.

- Route distance: 66.0km
- Route altitude gain: 680m
- Accommodation: Guesthouse
- Meals: (B, L, D)

Wednesday 18th June 2025 Cycling from Bënjë to Gjirokastrë

We continue along the valley towards Këlcyrë along a beautiful road that winds its way through the gorge. The last 20km is along a busier road which will involve a vehicle transfer to our finish at Gjirokastrë.

- Route distance: 70.0km
- Route altitude gain: 427m
- Accommodation: Hotel
- Meals: (B, L, D)

Thursday 19th June 2025 Rest day in Gjirokaštër

A chance to explore the 'stone city' featuring a castle, Zekate House and Skenduli House.

- No cycling
- Accommodation: Hotel
- Meals: (B)

Friday 20th June 2025 Cycling from Gjirokaštër to Sarandë

The day starts with a brief transfer to start cycling at the top of Muzina pass towards Sarandë. There follows a very short ferry ride to the UNESCO Heritage site of Butrint where we will have a chance to explore the ancient ruins. We finish the day heading north along the coast.

- Route distance: 70.0km
- Route altitude gain: 525m
- Accommodation: Hotel
- Meals: (B, L, D)

Saturday 21st June 2025 Cycling from Sarandë to Himarë

A steep climb from Sarandë, takes us to a rocky plateau. The ride then climbs again with lovely views of the mountains to the right and the Mediterranean sea to the left. Descending to Shkallë and along the coast, there is the opportunity to visit Port Palermo Castle, before arriving at the coastal resort of Himare, where we will spend two nights.

- Route distance: 52.0km
- Route altitude gain: 1064m
- Accommodation: Hotel
- Meals: (B, L, D)

Sunday 22nd June 2025 Rest Day in Himarë

A chance to relax for a day by the sea, go for a walk into the hills to old Himarë or take a boat trip.

- No cycling
- Accommodation: Hotel
- Meals: (B)

Monday 23rd June 2025 Cycling from Himarë to Vlorë

Today's ride is not only the most challenging but also the most spectacular. We will gradually climb from sea level up to 1,000m through forests, gorges and hairpin bends. After lunch in the beautiful national park of Llogara we will descend towards Vlorë for an afternoon's relaxation by the Ionian coast.

- Route distance: 64.0km

- Route altitude gain: 1590m
- Accommodation: Hotel
- Meals: (B, L, D)

Tuesday 24th June 2025 Departure and transfer

After breakfast there will be a two and a half hour transfer to Rinas Airport in Tirana, where the tour finishes.

- No cycling
- Accommodation: None
- Meals: (B)

Dates and Prices

Cost

- Land only price: £1350

Payment Schedule

A deposit of £350 per person is payable upon booking, with the final balance of £1000 per person to be paid by 31st March 2025 (10 weeks before departure)

Price includes:

- 12 nights accommodation on a twin share basis
- 11 breakfasts, 8 lunches and 9 dinners
- Rental bike
- English speaking cycling guide
- Tips for our support crew
- Support vehicles and 1 driver
- All transport described in the itinerary

Price does not include:

- Travel to and from Albania
- Any other meals or refreshments
- Single supplement £250 (if available)
- Entry fees at any attractions
- Any other personal expenses
- E-Bike supplement (£150)
- Travel Insurance

The price of £1350 is based on a minimum number of 8 people taking part in the holiday and is calculated at a rate of £1 = 117.72 Albanian Leke to £1 Sterling (based on exchange

rates published <https://www.xe.com> on Wednesday 30th October 2024; please note Booking Conditions). If there are insufficient bookings by Friday 04th April 2025, we will contact you and return all monies paid.

Holiday Information

Grade and Area Covered by the Holiday

This Holiday is classed as Moderate Energetic. However don't forget that there is always a back up vehicle to support you.

The terrain varies between flat and hilly with farmland, pastureland, valleys and mountain views to enjoy

We will be travelling through the Southern part of Albania.

Travel and Communication

The tour starts at our first night hotel in Tirana, and finishes at Tirana International airport (Nënë Tereza)

Travel to the start and from the finish is not included in this holiday. It is very important that you note that neither your Tour Manager nor Bikexplore are responsible for you in any way until the appointed time at the designated meeting point. Should you fail to arrive at the appointed time for whatever reason, we will not be responsible for any additional expenses you may incur in order to meet up with the tour group. Before finalising travel arrangements, you should ensure that the tour is definitely going ahead.

Should there be insufficient bookings or pandemic travel restrictions are re-imposed, we reserve the right to cancel the tour at any time. It is therefore recommended that you book fully flexible and refundable transport and accommodation or wait until you have

been told the tour will go ahead. In the event of the tour being cancelled we will not be responsible for any losses incurred outside what you pay us.

The holiday ends with a transfer to Tirana International airport. If you don't wish to take this transfer then you need to arrange your own transportation.

On several days, there will be a need to transfer bikes to the start or from the finish and this is included.

We will use WhatsApp to communicate details like café stops, meal arrangements, places of interest and any emergencies on route. Ideally everyone will bring a smart phone and be happy to be included in the group.

If you are unable to join the WhatsApp group I can only communicate with you in an emergency.

Accommodation

The maximum number of participants will be 15 including the Tour Manager.

For the majority of our holiday we will stay in hotels that are a good standard. One night we stay in cabins on a farm which are not en-suite. On another night we will stay in a guesthouse.

Rooms are en-suite, except in the cabins. Rooms will be allocated on a first come, first serve basis. If you are a single person and wish to not share a twin room, please indicate this on the booking form and pay the supplement.

Prices are based on two people sharing a room.

When booking with a partner, the default position is to supply a double bed. However if you would prefer to sleep in twin beds please tell the Tour Manager and we will do our best to provide this. In some cases twin beds are normally provided.

Only a few single rooms are available. Please note single rooms can be of a lower standard than twin or double rooms even though they may incur a supplement.

Meals, Health and Diet

On 2 rest days in Gjirokaster and Himare, breakfast will be provided for us at our accommodation. We will source and pay for lunch and dinner ourselves.

On the cycling days breakfast, lunch and dinner will be provided for us.

We will frequently be travelling through rural areas and will stop at cafes during the rides whenever possible but you should buy and carry sufficient food and drink in case of emergencies.

Check which meals are provided in the Payment Schedule and ensure you have access to sufficient monies to cover any meals you will need to buy.

Check that you have informed the Tour Manager of any dietary requirements in your Booking Form.

Please remember to pack any medications that you need to take regularly.

Health – please check the current Foreign Office advice for Albania:

<https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/albania>

In particular note To enter Albania, you must have a certificate to prove you've had a yellow fever vaccination if you're coming from a country listed as a transmission risk.

Cycles and Equipment

Cycle hire is included in the tour price. You are advised to bring your own helmet, pedals, shoes, gloves, eye protection and cycle clothing: A medium sized Ortlieb pannier is provided.

Allocation of individual bikes with correct frame sizes will take place closer to the tour departure date.

Tool kits, pumps and mechanical assistance will be provided. Helmets are advised, though are not mandatory; if you do not intend to wear one, please check that your insurance will cover you in the event of a claim.

Rides, Rest Days and Fitness

The holiday is for 12 days and has 2 rest days.

This is a moving on holiday staying in a different location each night.

Most of the roads are minor and used by rural/tourist traffic and will be hilly in parts. We may need to use some busier roads at times, but avoid them as much as possible.

Most of each cycling day may be spent cycling. People will be expected to ride at their own pace and often in loose groups, at around 10-12 mph on the flat, slower up hills, usually meeting up at cafes for lunch and refreshment breaks. You will be notified of the two or three available or recommended refreshment stops each day.

It is expected that you may want to stop for photographs, look at the view or explore, this is okay. You are on holiday.

It is essential to get out on your bike and do some 60km rides before the tour starts.

There may be steep descents too, so you should be able to negotiate these safely.

Please note it may not always be possible to follow the itinerary exactly due to road works or weather etc, as things do not always go as planned. In these circumstances, you will be advised of alternative arrangements.

The Leader will not always be at the front of the group but may be anywhere within it, as circumstances require, so you will need to be aware of the route and likely stopping places each day.

Weather, Clothing and Culture

Lightweight clothing, suitable for a range of temperatures is needed and possibly smarter, warmer clothing for the evenings.

Lightweight waterproofs/windproofs will be needed.

Sun cream, lip balm and sun glasses are recommended along with insect repellent and bite cream.

The temperature in June is likely to be between 17 and 27 degrees. On average some rainfall can be expected on some days of the tour.

The weather can be variable, with a possibility of both heat waves and cold, wet weather, so be prepared for all possibilities including storms.

The best protection from the sun is to cover up. Daytime temperatures are likely to be cooler in the hills - and there should be little or no rain (best to bring a light rain jacket just in case). You may need a windproof/thermal for evenings and for early morning descents from hill stations as it can feel cool.

Culture- please check current Foreign Office advice for Albania:

<https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/albania/safety-and-security>

Maps and Guides

A gpx, of each day's route will be provided before the start of the tour.

I will also supply a tour booklet that describes each day with maps and places of interest along the way.

If you are running a GPS device, I would recommend acquiring a local map of the area. I can provide one for you for Garmin devices

Travel Insurance and Vaccinations

For UK nationals traveling abroad, travel insurance is essential. Please check if your insurer has requirements for cyclists eg wearing a helmet.

Current Covid and Influenza vaccinations are recommended for participants of 75 years of age and over and those deemed medically vulnerable.

It is recommended that you are vaccinated against hepatitis A and tetanus. You should contact your doctor at least 3 months prior to travel to obtain these vaccinations and the latest advice for travelers.

See https://travelhealthpro.org.uk/country/2/albania#Vaccine_Recommendations

Passport, Visa and Monies

UK citizens must hold a passport that is still valid for at least three months at the end of the tour.

Holders of non-UK passports are advised to check whether they require a visa.

You can visit Albania without a visa for up to 90 days in a 180-day period, for tourism or business.

The local currency is the Lek. If you wish to take a secondary currency, the Euro is the currency of choice.

Tour Manager Contact Details

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I have led over 80 tours for CTC Holidays and now Bikexplore to many countries all over the world