

Winter Trail

Weight limit: 90kg
Nearest airport: Tirana
8 days / 7 nights / 4 riding days



Experience winter in the South of Albania. This trail combines 4 horse riding days in a changing landscape of valleys, hills, small forests and rivers, with another 2 days of culture, hospitality, monuments, thermal baths, archaeological sites and Ionian coasts. This trail offers real moments in the saddle and some dynamic off road experiences to explore the very unspoiled parts of the South. Riders can interact, participate and live part of the Albanian local life.

The Riding

Take in the dramatic, mountainous views and trust your sure-footed steed to take you safely across the narrow, unknown paths. Enjoy the exhilarating canters through the river valleys and dive deep into the heart of rural Albanian culture, staying as a guest in the homes of local families.

Guides & Group sizes

The guides are professionals with many years of experience in guiding trails through the Albanian mountains. They are adventurous, knowledgeable about the history and nature, and most of all, passionate about their horses.

The group size is 4- 10 riders. A departure date will confirm for 3 riders for a supplement.

Horses and Tack

The horses used on this ride (Albanian horses) are local breed mix of Tarpan and Arab horses. They are small but perfectly suited to the rocky terrain being surefooted and accustomed to trekking long mountainous routes, in all kind of weathers, allowing riders to feel confident, relaxed and free to enjoy the stunning views.

Level of riding and fitness

This trail is suitable for intermediate and experienced riders with a good, balanced seat. You will be riding over challenging mountainous terrain and enjoying long trots and canters in the valleys and where the terrain allows faster riding.

Good riding fitness is required as you'll be spending 4-6 hours in the saddle on riding days.

Accommodation & Dining

You will be accommodated in local or family guesthouses every night where your host families will provide a delicious local meal and conversation is enjoyed by all over dinner. Most of the dishes are homemade while fruits, vegetables and meat come from local gardens and farms.

Itinerary

Day 1

Transfer from Tirana airport to your hotel accommodation in Gjirokstra. Enjoy a visit to the new Bazaar, and if there is daylight left you can also see Enver Hoxha's house, Gjirokastra castle, the church of the Old Bazaar, the mosque of the Bazar and Skenduli house before dinner, which will

be at a traditional restaurant. During dinner your guides will be able to speak to you about the trail; possible requests or needs, advice and things which are good to know. We recommend that you buy a map of the area before dinner in order to gain a good understanding of the itinerary.



Day 2

After breakfast at the hotel and allocation of horses, you will start to ride through the countryside towards the small town of Libohova, nestled at the foot of the Bureto Mountain. The route to Libovoha is of intermediate difficulty and combines hilly landscapes, valleys, small water streams, cliffs and many chances to canter. You will ride to your evening's accommodation spot, and after settling the horses in for the night you will be driven to the center of the town (10 minutes) to a small traditional restaurant where you will enjoy lunch. Sample the local food, wine and Raki.

During the afternoon you will take a long walk to visit Libohova's castle, a Bektashi cult object and the tomb of Ali Pasha's sister, Shanisha. The archaeological evidence indicates a very ancient settlement which reached its zenith in the 17th-century when the town of Libohova became an important commercial centre. After your visit, feeding the horses and taking care of

them is part of your evening activity. You will overnight at the local family farm and will be treated to delicious local food, which you can help prepare if you wish.

Riding hours: 3-4 hours

Day 3

This morning you will ride through rolling hills, Drino's valley and a few streams before climbing a steep hill to reach Antigonea National Park where we will stop for a visit. Antigonea was built by King Pyrrhus in 295 BC and named after his first wife Antigona, daughter of King Ptolemeus of Egypt. After the break you will ride for one more hour to the stables. Lunch will follow in a closeby village. Your night's accommodation will be at the same hotel in Gjirokastra. After lunch you will visit the cold war tunnel in Gjirokastra, a building of communism defence paranoia that has a lot to tell. Before dinner you will visit a painter's studio and learn about local art and traditions, and ideological art during communism. Dinner will take place at a small local restaurant in the historical area. A well-known iso-polyphonic group will be invited to talk, sing and explain about the UNESCO protected world heritage.

Riding hours: 3-4 hours

Day 4

This morning after a fresh cooked breakfast you will be taken by car towards Butrint, a UNESCO protected archaeological park, through a challenging off-road path. The driving experience will be exceptional with some beautiful views. Small remote villages, old houses, windy roads, small gardens, very few animals, old churches and the sense of time stopping somewhere in the past is the impression this driving day offers. You will stop to visit the ruins of the church of Leshnica and will have a coffee stop by Cerkovica village. A local person will give a short presentation on how this area lives, their past, and what they expect from the future. When you arrive in Butrint a visit the archaeological park awaits. Originally part of an area called Epirus, Butrint has been occupied by the Greeks, the Romans, the Byzantines and the Venetians, and according to mythology was also where many escaped to following the fall of Troy. As a result, Butrint offers a wealth of incredible archaeological structures, including a well preserved theatre and Roman public baths, inside which lies a paleo-Christian baptistery and a 9th century basilica. The sanctuary of Asclepius, the god of medicine, sits on its hill or "acropolis" and dates back to the fourth century.

Lunch will be in Saranda in a restaurant next to the sea, with plenty of food cooked the local way. Before returning back to Gjirokastra for dinner you will visit the local art gallery and be given a presentation by the manager who is also a very good painter. Dinner will take place in a restaurant in the old bazaar.

Driving hours: Total 5 hours

Day 5

After breakfast and the views of a wonderful sunrise in the mountains you will head back to the Drinos valley by car to the thermal baths of Benja in Pwrmnet. Along the river there are splendid warm water human-made pools to soak on a cool day. It is believed that the baths have healing

properties. The pools are off the beaten path, and during winter months you can have some privacy. Kadiu bridge, a monument of culture built in 1760 during the Ottoman period, offers a stunning view of the Langarica river. Throughout the day there are chances to explore the canyons by hiking and swimming. Lunch will take place in Pwrmet, the city of roses, where you can enjoy the local raki and the local sweets. Later on you will drive to a remote area close to Ballaban village to visit another unique farm that will be your accommodation for the evening. Dinner and wine tasting to be enjoyed this evening.

Driving hours: Total 3 hours



Day 6

After breakfast you will be driven back to Gjirokastra to the stables for another horse riding day. Today's route passes through a rural environment; beautiful steep hills, small valleys, traditional farmland, bush areas, small lakes, small water streams and cliffs and old defence infrastructure from communist time. The view of Drino river remains during the morning ride. Drino is the most important water basin in the area and part of ancient pagan beliefs. On your way you will meet the ruins of the castle of Santa Triada, reconstructed during 1809-1810 by Ali Pasha, a strategic move to control all the mediaeval caravan routes. The castle ruins were later used by the military during the time of socialism.

You will stop for a picnic lunch near the village of Erind. After around 4-5 hours riding we will reach Karjan village where a traditional dinner and accommodation will be hosted at a local

farm. In the afternoon you can visit the village and be part of the family activities, and also help to feed, clean and water the horses.

Riding Hours: 4-5

Day 7

After having breakfast with the family and packing your picnic you depart on your horse at 9am.. You are riding first to Nokova village to visit both of the medieval churches, and later through the Lunxheria area with a picnic stop in Dhoksat village. It has a unique architecture and is famous for its stone and beautiful doors. A local expert will be invited to talk about the characteristics of life, tradition, folklore, costumes and ethnography of the area. The ride after lunch heads takes you to cultivated land, gardens and meadows.. You will have another short stop by Qestorati lake to enjoy the view and return back to the stables from another direction. The last part of the ride before reaching the stables in the afternoon is the most beautiful as the landscape allows several canters and the hill climbs are stunning. After the ride you will be driven back to Gjirokastra to your hotel. You can have a walk around the historical area before the farewell dinner. Later in the evening enjoy a drink in a popular bar.

Riding hours: 5 hours

Day 8

After breakfast at the hotel you will be transferred to Tirana airport for your flight.

Price includes

- Accommodation
- Meals from dinner on day 1 to breakfast of day 8
- English speaking guide
- Water and drinks during the meals
- Luggage transport by car during the trail

Not included

- Flights
- Entrance tickets to monuments and parks
- Lunch on day 1
- Extra drinks
- Other services or expenses during free time.



International flights & Airport transfers

Tirana airport to Gjirokastra: €70 return per person, duration 3-4 hours.

You need to have landed and be ready for the transfer by 3pm. Departing flights should be after midday.

What to bring

- Normal riding clothes: riding hat, long sleeved shirts (please avoid packing your favourite or expensive clothing due to risk of damage) , riding trousers and chaps, gloves.
- Good mountain shoes - with a grip for walking but not too thick as you will need to ride in them too. Normal riding boots with a smooth sole are not recommended as they can be slippery when walking on foot.
- Waterproof raincoat
- Casual clothes for the evening
- Sun cream
- Sunglasses
- Hat
- Swimming clothes, shoes to walk on a rocky beach, and a beach towel.

- Anti-allergy medicine for possible insects bites
- Camera - please bring small cameras as large professional ones are very difficult to transport on horseback.
- Copy of passport
- Personal saddlebags are welcome if riders would like to bring their own. Small saddlebags are provided by the ride but just for food and water.

Climate

Albania has a high number of climatic regions relative to its landmass - the coastal lowlands have a typically Mediterranean climate; the highlands have a Mediterranean continental climate. This ride takes place in southern Albania which is around 5 degrees warmer than the rest of the country.

Albania has a relatively mild winter. You can expect rain on most days, which means that the itinerary is flexible and will change in accordance to the weather. Temperatures in November and December vary between 10 - 20 degrees. January and February can be from -2 to 10 degrees and March is similar to December. There are normally a maximum of 3-4 days of snow each winter which is quite spectacular.

Health

For health and vaccine recommendations, please consult your healthcare provider at least 8 weeks before your trip.

Country specific information can also be found at National Travel Health Network and Centre website: <https://travelhealthpro.org.uk/countries>.

Travel documents

For entry requirements to Albania for UK citizens, please visit the Foreign Travel Advice website:

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

For any other nationalities, please contact your local embassy to check entry requirements.

Having the correct travel documents is entirely your responsibility.

Currency & Tipping

The local currency in Albania is Lek, although euros are widely accepted. We recommend not bringing too much currency as the trail is fully inclusive, but just enough for personal items, souvenirs etc.

Tipping your guide is at your discretion.



Cancellation policy

Payment & Cancellation Terms

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Holidays are confirmed with a 20% non-refundable deposit. The full balance is due 56 days before the start date.

If you cancel your booking less than 56 days before the start date of your trail we are entitled to receive full payment, less refunds as follows:

42 days or more before booking date - 50%

30 days or more - 30%
less than 30 days - nil

Book with confidence – Covid Guarantee:

If the ride operator is closed or you are unable to travel due to lockdown:

1/ The deposit is reissued as a rebooking voucher to rebook anytime.

2/ Any balance payment will be refunded to you in full within 1 week of departure date.

Insurance

All saddletravel.com customers are required to take out appropriate travel insurance that covers horse riding and holiday cancellation. Proof of insurance details will be required during the booking process.

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