

MAPS & METAPHORS / AN ILLUSTRATED FIELD GUIDE

Albania

A journey in three lengths

From the thousand windows of Berat to Vlorë's coast, the Riviera and the mountains beyond. One real road trip; many ways to make it yours.

03–04 DAYS | 07 DAYS | 10–14 DAYS

OCTOBER 2026 ROAD TRIP / UPDATED NOVEMBER 2026

01 / A NOTE FROM THE ROAD

Five days. Three places. A story.

Before the extended routes, this is the trip we actually made in October 2026 — with the small, imperfect moments that make travel memorable.

FIRSTHAND ROUTE

17–21 OCTOBER 2026

1 **The bicycle beginning**

We cycled from home to Eindhoven Airport with our bags, parked our bikes and flew to Tirana.

2 **Berat: a thousand windows**

Wandered around Berat and met the stacked white houses, cobbled streets and its unhurried old-town atmosphere.

3 **The road to Vlorë**

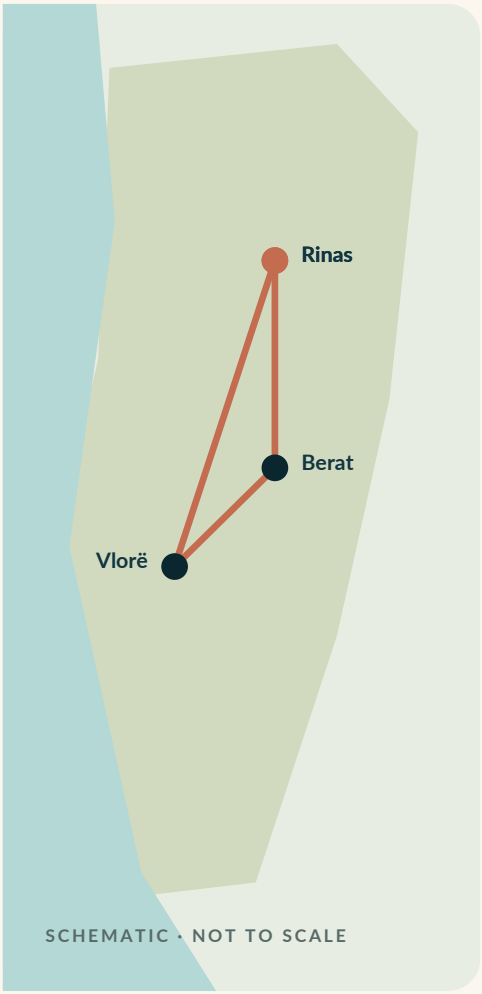
Drove from Berat to Vlorë, explored the seafront and cafés, and collected the sort of local moments no itinerary can script.

4 **The sky chapter**

Paragliding became a whole adventure of its own — a reminder that the weather, the nerves and the story have their say.

5 **The long way home**

A pizza stop, the drive back to Rinas, car return and an early airport departure closed the circle.



WHY THIS SHAPES THE GUIDE

We learned that Albania rewards slower stops: time for a viewpoint, a café conversation or an unexpected detour. The suggested routes below expand on our journey; they do not claim that we personally visited every place.

02 / THE BIG DECISION

How much Albania fits your time?

Choose a route by the feeling you want, not only the number of landmarks you can squeeze onto a map.

3–4

The short escape

Tirana + Berat; add Vlorë if you have four full days and a car. Great for a weekend with culture and one coast-side memory.

7

A week on the move

Our original route grows into the Riviera and Gjirokastër. A balanced first taste, with a couple of proper beach pauses.

10–14

The grand Albania

Go south without rushing, or add Theth and Shkodër in a full two-week journey through mountains and sea.

THE THREE ROUTE DNA

SHORT	1–2 BASES	City and UNESCO town; coast only on 4-day version.
MID	4–5 BASES	Old towns, lively coast, one Riviera base, history.
LONG	5–7 BASES	Riviera, Butrint, Gjirokastër; Alps in 14-day version.

Timing note: days are calendar days; late arrivals and early flights can make a “4-day trip” feel more like two full sightseeing days.

03 / THE SHORT ESCAPE

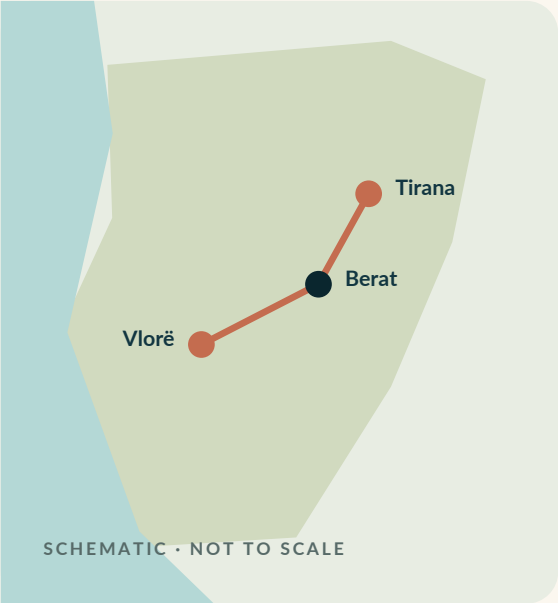
Three days, or four if you can.

A compact Tirana–Berat escape; add Vlorë only when you have four days.

BEST FOR

A long weekend, a first visit, families who dislike constant packing, and travellers who want old-town atmosphere with good food stops.

3 days: sleep in Tirana and Berat; skip Vlorë. 4 days: add a night by the sea if arrival and departure times work.



THE DAY-BY-DAY

D1

Tirana / arrival

Land at Rinas, settle in, then stroll Skanderbeg Square, the New Bazaar or Blloku. Sleep Tirana.

D2

Berat / old town

Drive to Berat. Walk Mangalem and Gorica, cross the river, and save golden-hour light for the castle area. Sleep Berat.

D3

Choose your ending

3-day trip: enjoy Berat, then return to Tirana or Rinas with generous airport buffer. 4-day trip: drive to Vlorë, explore Lungomare, sleep there.

D4

Vlorë / return

Only on the 4-day version: unhurried coastal morning or a pre-booked, weather-appropriate activity; return to Rinas.

Route trade-off: a short break is better without Vlorë than with a rushed, late-night airport drive.

04 / THE ONE-WEEK JOURNEY

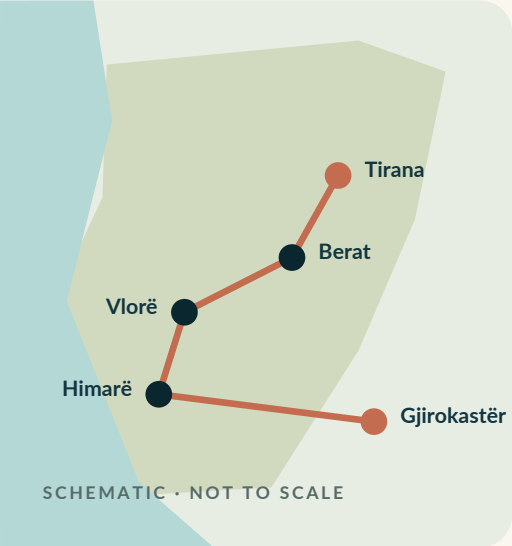
Seven days, coast to culture.

From Tirana through Berat and Vlorë to the Riviera, returning via Gjirokastër.

ROUTE AT A GLANCE

TIRANA → BERAT → VLORË → HIMARË / DHËRMI → GJIROKASTËR → RINAS

Aim for two nights in a Riviera base so the beach does not become another item on a checklist.



A FLEXIBLE SEVEN-DAY FLOW

D1 — **Tirana**
Land, walk the centre, enjoy a relaxed evening. Overnight: Tirana.

D2 — **Berat**
Mangalem, Gorica, castle and a riverside sunset. Overnight: Berat.

D3 — **Vlorë**
Seafront stroll and cafés; paragliding only if conditions allow. Sleep Vlorë.

D4 — **Riviera road**
Travel south through Llogara, stop for views, and check into Himarë or Dhërmi. Overnight: Riviera.

D5 — **Slow beach day**
Choose one or two coves, a boat outing if operating, or Porto Palermo. Overnight: same Riviera base.

D6 — **Gjirokastër**
Cross towards Gjirokastër; add a Blue Eye stop only if timing allows. Overnight: Gjirokastër.

D7 — **Return to Rinas**
Enjoy the historic bazaar or castle if flight timing permits, then drive back with a generous buffer.

Want Ksamil + Butrint? Add 2–3 days rather than sacrificing the beach and driving too much.

05 / THE LONG ROAD

Ten days through the south.

This is the most complete southern-Albania route: a proper taste of the Riviera, the UNESCO towns and the ancient world.

01 Tirana

Arrive; city centre, cafés and an easy first evening.

02 Berat

Explore the UNESCO old town; sleep in Berat.

03 Berat → Vlorë

Castle or slow breakfast; drive to Vlorë.

04 Vlorë

Coast, Zvërnec / Narta, or optional activity day.

05 Llogara → Himarë

Scenic Riviera drive. Settle into one beach base.

06 Himarë / Dhërmi

Rest, swim in season, or explore a nearby cove.

07 South coast

Porto Palermo and Qeparo / Borsh en route to Sarandë.

08 Ksamil + Butrint

Pair a beach pause with the UNESCO archaeological park.

09 Blue Eye → Gjirokastër

Spring visit if open; bazaar and fortress in town.

10 Rinas / depart

Return via the inland road with time to spare.

THE RULE THAT SAVES THIS TRIP

Stay two nights in one Riviera base. One free morning is worth more than another three stops on a map.

06 / THE FULL ADVENTURE

Fourteen days: mountains to sea.

Start in Shkodër and Theth, then follow the old towns and southern coast.

THREE ACTS

ACT I Tirana, Shkodër & Theth / ACT II Berat & Vlorë / ACT III Riviera, Ksamil & Gjirokastër

DAYS 01–05 / THE NORTH

01 Tirana
Arrival and easy evening.

02 Shkodër
Krujë detour; Rozafa / old town.

03 Theth
Transfer to the mountains.

04 Theth
Guided nature walk or easy village day.

05 Shkodër
Return from the Alps; rest.

DAYS 06–09 / OLD TOWNS

06 Berat
Drive south; sleep in Berat.

07 Berat
A full old-town and castle day.

08 Vlorë
Coastal arrival, evening promenade.

09 Himarë
Llogara road; beach-base check-in.

DAYS 10–14 / THE RIVIERA

10 Himarë
Beach and nearby coves.

11 Sarandë
Porto Palermo / coastal stops.

12 Ksamil
Butrint and sea time.

13 Gjirokastër
Blue Eye + historic city.

14 Rinas
Return to airport; fly home.

IMPORTANT SEASONAL SWAP

Outside safe Alpine travel conditions, substitute extra time in Tirana, Shkodër, Korçë or the south. Do not assume high-altitude paths or transfers are operating.

07 / THE PLACES

What each stop gives you.

Six distinctly different moods. Mix them according to your interests; the memorable itinerary is rarely the busiest one.

CULTURE

BERAT

Stone, windows, warm light

UNESCO city; Mangalem, Gorica, castle lanes.

• VISITED

SEAFRONT

VLORË

Coast and a little chaos

A lively seafront, cafés, access to coastal adventure.

• VISITED

BEACH

HIMARË

The pause button

A relaxed base for Riviera coves and Porto Palermo.

• CURATED

HISTORY

KSAMIL / BUTRINT

Sea meets antiquity

Beaches plus a remarkable UNESCO archaeological site.

• CURATED

HERITAGE

GJIROKASTËR

A city cut from stone

Castle, bazaar and traditional architecture.

• CURATED

NATURE

SHKODËR / THETH

Into the mountains

Lake-city culture and Alpine scenery; seasonal.

• CURATED

Tip: give your trip one anchor town, one coast day and one completely unscripted afternoon. The country will do the rest.

08 / BEFORE YOU GO

Useful details, not fine print.

A small set of practical decisions can make a road trip much more relaxed — particularly when travelling with children.

WHEN

May–June and September are appealing for a balance of weather and crowds. Summer brings busy beaches; Alpine walking has a shorter safe season.

CURRENCY

Albanian lek (ALL). Carry some cash for small businesses; cards work in many larger establishments, but not everywhere.

GETTING AROUND

This guide's longer loops work best by car. Check rental insurance, child seats, parking and the road plan. Prefer daylight driving.

FLIGHTS

Rinas (TIA) is the main entry used here. Make the last night compatible with your departure time; allow a generous airport margin.

FAMILY PACE

Balance walking and driving. Berat's cobbles and castle slopes can be tough for strollers; plan snack and playground pauses.

ADVENTURE

Paragliding and boats require suitable weather, legitimate operators, and appropriate cover. Have a gentle alternative ready.

ENTRY

Rules depend on nationality. As of 30 Oct 2026, Dutch passport/ID travellers can visit visa-free for up to 90 days; check validity rules.

INSURANCE

Travel insurance should cover medical care and repatriation; review any additional cover for adventure sports.

STAY CONNECTED

Check mobile roaming fees and download offline maps. Never rely on signal in remote mountain areas.

REAL-WORLD CHECK

Before publishing a travel date or making a booking: recheck opening hours, ferry or activity availability, travel advice, road conditions and flight schedules.

09 / OUR PROMISE

A guide you can actually trust.

A travel story is personal; a travel recommendation is editorial; a bookable activity is a live fact. We keep those three separate.

VISITED	We personally travelled the Tirana / Rinas – Berat – Vlorë loop in October 2026.
CURATED	Extra places, routes and day plans are recommended extensions, not claims of firsthand visits.
CHECK LIVE	Prices, opening times, operators, weather, flight schedules and availability are not confirmed here.

REFERENCE NOTES / REVIEWED 01 NOV 2026

Albanian National Tourism Agency

Official itineraries, destination profiles, adventure notes.

UNESCO World Heritage Centre

Berat and Gjirokastër historic centres.

UNESCO / Butrint

Butrint cultural and natural heritage.

Netherlands Worldwide

Current Dutch entry, driving, safety and insurance guidance.

Bank of Albania

Albanian lek official currency.

MAPS & METAPHORS / KEEP EXPLORING

A road trip should leave room for the unexpected. Find our stories, routes and future travel updates at mapsandmetaphors.com.