



Folklore Tour



**Exploring
Southeastern
Albania**



Folklore Tour



Korçë - Kolonjë - Përmet - Gjirokastrë - Tepelenë

Content

Exploring Southeastern Albania	02
More Than Meets the Eye	04
Living the Story	06
Folklore in Motion: How does it shape Albania?	07
Where Tradition Meets Sustainability	10
The Trip Begins Here: Korçë	12
The countryside of Polenë & Boboshticë	16
Kolonjë, a toast (or two) for heritage	18
Leskovik, amidst mountains and music	20
Përmet & Këlcyrë, heaven for artisanal flavors	22
Gjirokastër, chronicle in stone	26
Libohovë and Tepelenë, a see you soon	30
Do you accept our invitation to explore Albania's soul?	32
How to get to Southeastern Albania?	36

Folklore Tour

Exploring Southeastern Albania

Albania isn't just a place you visit; it's a place you experience with all your senses. You probably have heard about its rugged mountains, sunlit coastlines, and UNESCO-listed sites. But what if we tell you about the hidden villages where time slows down and every step reveals a story? This journey is about diving into Albania's living heritage through its agritourism. From one family-run farm to another, you'll connect with locals who take pride in preserving the country's traditions through food, crafts, and hospitality. Music fills the air, meals are a labor of love, and crafts passed down for centuries still shape the fabric of communities.





More Than Meets the Eye

For decades, Albania remained one of Europe's best-kept secrets, isolated from the rest of the world. But today, the country is undergoing an exciting transformation. With a fast-growing tourism sector, improved infrastructure, and a renewed interest in its cultural heritage, Albania has become a sought-after destination for those looking to explore beyond the usual tourist trails. Once an undiscovered gem, it is now attracting travelers from all over the world, drawn by its untouched landscapes and warm people.

It's easy to underestimate Albania when you look at a map. A country so tiny – surely a week is more than enough to explore it all, right? Think again.

Albania is incredibly dense with activities, natural wonders, and cultural sites, making it almost impossible to see and experience everything in one go. Whether you're hiking the Albanian Alps, wandering through Ottoman-era towns, or diving into the turquoise waters of the Riviera, every corner of the country offers something unexpected.

What makes Albania even more inviting is its people. Foreign languages are widely spoken, especially in areas near the borders, and young people often speak fluent English. Safety is another key highlight. Traveling through Albania is not just easy but also reassuring, even for solo travelers.

The southeastern part of the country, in particular, is known for its kindness and generosity, where locals welcome visitors with open arms and genuine warmth.



Living the Story

This journey through southeastern Albania isn't about checking landmarks off the list, it's about diving into the country's folklore, flavors, and rhythms. Over eight days and seven nights, you'll meet the artisans, musicians, and storytellers who keep Albania's soul alive. Whether you're dancing to the beat of a valle, tasting honey straight from the hive, or learning the delicate art of embroidery, you won't just be a visitor. You'll be part of the story.

We call it the Folklore Tour, but what is folklore? It's the soul of the people - their music, dance, craftsmanship, and stories, passed down for generations. And in southeastern Albania, folklore isn't something you watch from a distance. It's something you step into.



Folklore in Motion: How does it shape Albania?

Folklore is a key element of Albanian culture, shaping and preserving traditions, identity, and history. It has long served as a thread connecting generations, keeping customs, values, and artistic expressions alive. Through legends, epic poetry, and traditional songs, Albanians have ensured their heritage remains strong despite the passage of time. But nowadays it's not just about epic tales – it's reflected in daily life; you can see it reflected in the hardworking people who make a living preserving crafts, from wooden artifacts to traditional costumes. But that's not all - it expands to music and festivals and even food.

*Now, you are probably **wondering, what does food have to do with folklore?***

Food in Albania is about more than just sustenance. It carries stories, symbolism, and traditions that tie people to their roots. Many traditional dishes are linked to rituals, celebrations, or even myths. Beyond specific dishes, the very concept of Albanian hospitality, deeply rooted in folklore, revolves around food. Many legends tell of strangers, sometimes disguised gods or spirits, knocking on doors and testing a family's generosity. Offering bread and water was considered a sacred duty, and refusing could bring misfortune.

Even today, Albanian's behavior is a reflection of these old beliefs, where guests are treated with great honor, and often get the best service available.

But we have to prepare you for when you have dinner with an Albanian family while you spend the night in a local agritourism. In southern Albania, making a toast isn't just about clinking glasses and saying **gëzuar** (cheers). It's practically a performance. There's a unique rhythm to it, almost like a short speech, where the person toasting is not shy at all about saying out loud heartfelt wishes, poetic lines, or flattery. It's all about celebrating the moment, the people around you, and whatever good fortune life has thrown your way. And if you think you can just have your drink and stay quiet, you couldn't be more wrong, everyone takes turns.



Traditional costumes are still created in Albania, sewn by hand by skilled artisans, maintaining the distinct elements, symbols, patterns, and colors of each region. Similarly, wood-crafting has been practiced for generations, honoring old techniques to create functional and decorative ornaments.

While folklore extends to the whole country, the southeastern regions have their own unique myths, music, and storytelling traditions. This part of the country is known for its Iso-polyphonic singing, a UNESCO-recognized tradition. This style of singing is deeply tied to legends and historical events, preserving memories of past struggles, love, and heroism.



Southern Albanian folklore is also filled with mythical beings such as Ora, a guardian spirit believed to protect certain people or entire villages. Meanwhile, ancient legends speak of powerful natural forces, from sacred mountains to enchanted rivers, which continue to influence local customs.

Where Tradition Meets Sustainability

You will learn all this and more during this trip, whether from the tour guides, the people you will meet along the way, or those who will welcome you into their homes.

What makes this experience truly unique is your stay in family-run agritourism accommodations, where farm-to-table dining isn't just a trend, but a way of life. Your hosts will open their doors to you, sharing not only their homes, but their stories, traditions, and the deep-rooted hospitality that Albanians take great pride in.

Why agritourism? Because it's where tradition meets sustainability, allowing visitors to connect with the land, local hosts, and authentic ways of life. And the best part? This experience is available all year round, thanks to the country's mild Mediterranean climate. Each season brings something special: In Spring, the countryside bursts into bloom, making it perfect for hikes and outdoor explorations. Summer offers sun-soaked days ideal for experiencing traditional festivals and tasting seasonal produce at its peak. Autumn is harvest time, when you can witness or even better, take part in it. Autumn is also the time when homemaker women prepare food supplies for winter, called *zahire*. Pickles, vegetables and dried fruit are preserved in jars and can last for more than six months. Winter, while quieter, is the perfect time to enjoy warm home-cooked meals by the fire, sip a glass of *raki*, and get involved in open-hearted

conversations about local traditions away from the crowds.

You can choose the time that best suits your interests, whether you're drawn to nature, history, or food, there's always something to discover, no matter the season. Whatever you choose, your journey will be a seamless blend of adventure, culture, and unforgettable memories.

Now, let's take you on a journey through some of Albania's most fascinating and lesser-known gems.



The Trip Begins Here: Korçë

Your adventure starts in **Korçë**, a city where the historic center hums with history and creativity. Did you know that this city was called among the locals as **“Little Paris”**? It was done so due to its rich cultural and intellectual life, especially during the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

As you walk its picturesque streets you can't help but sniff the smell of pie fresh from the oven. By joining this tour, you will not just taste it, but also learn to prepare it yourself. Your day will also take you to Mr. **Anesti Duka**'s traditional bakery, where you can savor the famous **chickpea bread**.



Korça is also home to master artisans. In a more quiet street, **Etnoart**, the atelier of **Lirika Pojani**, an embroidery expert, is a gateway to Albania's rich textile heritage. Here, each embroidery and woven fabric is a testament to the artistry of folk costume design.



As evening falls, you'll head to **House of Horses Agritourism** for a dinner that feels like a celebration. This family-run farm houses 30 horses of various breeds, offering visitors a chance to get to know the full rhythm of farm life. You can book your horseriding tour here, led by a specialized guide, and visit the attractions nearby. The farm offers other numerous activities, one of which **Fili's** workshop, where the rhythmic sound of a loom fills the air. She weaves the same patterns her ancestors did, each thread connecting past to present.



When in Korça, make sure to not miss the **Serenades**, particularly famous to the city. These are romantic, melancholic songs performed with guitars and mandolins, often sung in the narrow cobbled streets, giving the city a special musical identity.



The countryside of Polenë & Boboshticë

As you move beyond the city, Korçë's surrounding villages reveal even more layers of tradition. In the village of **Polenë**, **Marsela's** shelves are a burst of color—jars of homemade preserves line in, together with **trahana** (grains) and homemade pasta pieces. Like Marsela, you will meet many artisans who have turned the art of preserve-making into a way of living. We can mention Irena, who produces and sells these products on demand to many shops and guesthouses in the region. The village of Polenë is also famous for its Lakror Festival, organized every August, a key event for those who love this pie.

Exploring further, you'll visit **Xhufka Agritourism**, where a **farm-to-table meal** brings you closer to the land. This meal, prepared with the freshest ingredients from the surrounding farms, celebrates the agricultural abundance of the region. The cooling climate at over 1000 meters above sea level makes this a perfect retreat during the hot summer months. On the menu, you will find home-cooked specialties like lamb and meatballs, prepared with locally sourced ingredients.



If you're searching for something stronger, **Koço's** 100-year-old copper pot still in Boboshticë produces some of the region's finest mulberry raki. But we must say, no glass of raki is finer than the stories he tells. If you're lucky, your visit might coincide with the annual Rakia Festival, where this fiery spirit takes center stage.



You will spend the night at **Villa Melko & Farm**, where before a delicious meal, you'll have the chance to roll up your sleeves and take part in a lakror cooking class while dancing valle. If you're worried that you won't know the steps, then don't be. You will be guided through this folk dance by the master himself, **Bardhi Pojani**. The beauty of valle is that it still brings people together, regardless of where they are from, just as it has gathered Albanian communities for centuries.



Kolonjë, a toast (or two) for heritage

Following winding trails through rolling hills, the landscape shifts as you arrive in Kolonjë, where the flavors of Albania's mountain regions come to life.

At **Sofra Kolonjare**, the air is filled with the scent of fresh dairy, where butter is made by hand in a time-honored tradition. But there's more to this visit. Every year, many women in the suburbs prepare **zahire**, vegetables turned into winter preserves to last them through the coldest month. What used to be a necessity, now it's a pleasure due to their strong unique taste that goes along with most winter meals. You will have the chance to witness this process, all the while listening to ladies sing age-old songs.

A visit to the **Ethnographic Museum of Kolonjë** provides a deeper understanding of every day Albanian life ages ago. But to truly feel the heartbeat of this region, you venture to **Rehovë**, a village that offers a wonderful panorama of the mountains. In Kolonjë, the stone houses and wooden balconies set the scene for an unforgettable meal.

Your stay at Sofra Kolonjare promises a delicious end to the day, where traditional dishes of the mountain regions await you, all made with love and respect for the land's rich history.

Çfarë është etnografia? What is ethnography?

Etnografia është një degëzim i antropologjisë, me qasje cilësore dhe jo sasore. Etnografia përkërkuan popujt dhe kulturat përmes shqyrtimit të zakoneve, traditave si dhe dallimeve mes tyre. Objektet e prodhuara nga një grup kulturor, bartin shumë informacione rreth njerëzve që i punuan si dhe shoqërisë së kohës. Mënyra e punimit, përdorimi, materialet, dizajni dhe ngjyrat e tyre flasin për traditat dhe zakonet e shoqërisë vendase, për zhvillimin e teknologjinë artistike, si dhe për prodhimin dhe ekonominë vendase.

Ethnography is a field within anthropology that is qualitative, not quantitative. Ethnography is the description of peoples and cultures with their customs, habits, and mutual differences. The objects produced by a cultural group hold many information about the people who made them and about their society. The way they are made, their use, materials, design and colors talk about the local traditions and social habits, the artistic development and technology, local production and economy.



Leskovik, amidst mountains and music

From Kolonjë, the road leads south, where folklore and nature blend seamlessly in **Gërmenj**. This village in **Leskovik** is where untouched landscapes meet some of Albania's most hauntingly beautiful music. As you settle into **Farma Sotira**, a serene retreat surrounded by forests and lakes, the silence is broken only by the birds. Here, you will admire nature's splendor and enjoy a traditional breakfast before moving on to explore a small village nearby.

Further into the mountains, the small village of **Radanj** offers a warmth that goes beyond a welcome. Around a home-cooked meal, laughter and stories flow as easily as the local wine. Here, people are eager to share their stories and customs, so conversations can stretch late into the evening, blurring the line between guest and family.

But you cannot end the day in this town without the hypnotic sounds of **Sazet e Leskovikut**. Saze means a musical ensemble typically made up of three different instruments. Gifted musicians in the area will bring to life this legendary folk music with over **200 years of history**. Their harmonies echo through the night and carry you deeper into the heart of Albania's musical legacy. These songs are deeply emotional, often about love, heroism, nature, and loss, and they're performed at celebrations, weddings, and festivals.

As the journey continues, the mountains give way to the soft vineyards and fertile lands of **Përmet**.



Përmet & Këlcyrë, heaven for artisanal flavors

The morning begins with a slow-food experience at Nemërçka Restaurant, surrounded by the beautiful valley and rock formations of the Vjosa River. Next, you will visit **Di Pro Bio**, where the owner Entela will tell you how she used the craft of gliko preserve-making into a successful business and a platform to empower local women, at a time when working opportunities in the rural areas of Albania are very limited. You will see jars full of figs, eggplant, oranges, and figs and each of them will taste delicious. Rumour has it, that in Përmet every guest must always be treated with a spoonful of gliko.

Here you can also participate in a cooking experience and learn the secrets behind the preparation of these products, especially the famous **Walnut Gliko** preserve, the pride of Përmet.

And just down the road, **Flora Sali's** shop is a treasure of local delicacies, from wild herbal teas to hand-picked olives. The Sali family also owns a farm where they make Bedunica honey, a certified product registered under quality schemes as **TSG (Traditional Specialty Guaranteed)**. This makes it a rare, excellent treat deep into the area of Hotova National Park.

Then, to get the best nature has to offer, at **Honey House Kastrioti**, Kastro welcomes you into the buzzing world of beekeeping.



Standing among the hives, you learn about sustainable honey production before tasting his signature honey raki, a sweet, golden infusion, unlike anything you've tried before.

Talking about things you've never done before - Did you know that you can taste and buy cheese inside an old communist bunker? **Altin Meshini** has transformed and repurposed this historic site into a small dairy processing unit, where fresh milk from local farmers is turned into the iconic white cheeses of Përmet, using time-honored techniques passed down through the centuries.

Nearby in Këlcyrë, the journey continues to Ferma Grand Albanik, a picturesque organic farm offering a deeper connection to Albania's agricultural traditions. Nestled among rolling hills, this eco-friendly farm is dedicated to sustainable practices and produces fresh organic fruits, vegetables, and dairy products. You'll get to explore the farm, meet the local producers, and taste some of their best homemade specialties, an experience that perfectly captures the essence of slow living in the Albanian countryside.



Gjirokastër, chronicle in stone

As you leave Përmet, the road winds toward **Gjirokastër**, where history, as everyone knows it, is carved into stone. This isn't just a city, it's a stage where Albania's past plays out in grand detail. The city is part of UNESCO sites, known for its distinctive Ottoman-era architecture and rich cultural heritage. One of the most mesmerizing stops in our tour is **Argjiro Group's** performance space, where the ancient art of **ISO-polyphony** comes alive. Led by **Roland Çenko**, a recipient of the "Master of the Arts" title, the group plays a key role in preserving and showcasing this recognized musical tradition.

Since 2002, *Argjiro Group* has been the first Albanian ensemble to perform regularly for international tourists, bringing their captivating sounds to iconic museum houses and throughout the historic district. It will be the master himself, Mr. Cenko, that will guide you through the complex harmonies of this music, as you join to sing.

But Gjirokastra is also renowned for its incredible Old Bazaar, where you will meet artisans performing different crafts. You can visit **Mrs. Eli's workshop**, where she keeps the rare art of sewing traditional costumes alive. Each garment is handcrafted with gold-thread embroidery and here's the best part - you can try them on yourself. Imagine looking over the cobbled street and the vibrant colors of the bazaar dressed in one of these stunning costumes.



And if you're into the unusual, there's something else you shouldn't miss - Gjirokastra's **coffee brewed in stone**. This tastes different from your usual espresso. It's rich, strong, and prepared in a way you won't find anywhere else, a unique brewing method that has been around for centuries.

Additionally, in the Old Bazaar, you can meet skilled **wood craftsmen** whose works are celebrated nationally. Learn about their old practice and if you're lucky, you can also buy your customized piece as a beautiful souvenir from the city.





Libohovë and Tepelenë, a see you soon

No journey through Albania's folk heritage would be complete without a final stop in **Libohovë and Tepelenë**.

Just a short ride away from Gjirokastra, The **Church of St. Mary in Labovë** dazzles with its Byzantine frescoes, while the city's streets echo with the sounds of craftsmen shaping silver filigree and weaving carpets and kilim rugs using a thousand years old techniques. Dinner at **Maria Guesthouse** and a picture-perfect panoramic view of the hills and mountains in Labovë make for a perfect ending to the day.



In Libohovë you will feel that time has stopped. Polyphonic songs drift through the air, not from a stage, but from street merchants and old people sharing stories through music.

Although very small in size, Tepelena is surrounded by the stunning beauty of the Vjosa River Valley and its fascinating history. Given its association with Ali Pasha, a national hero, the city has many legends about his life. His story inspired European writers, such as Lord Byron, who visited the fortifications and described him in his works.

As our trip nears to an end, we will say goodbye with a feast at **Lord Byron Agritourism** in Tepelenë. Byrek (pie), fërgesë, and homemade wine, just as they have been prepared for generations, will surely make it a meal to remember. Just a small tip, when in Tepelenë go easy on the raki - the area takes special pride in it as one of the best and the strongest in the region.



Do you accept our invitation to explore Albania's soul?

This isn't just an itinerary. It's an invitation to **taste, cook, listen, sing, dance, create, and connect.**

Every step of this journey supports local producers, artisans, family-run agritourism, and artists & musicians, ensuring that Albania's traditions don't just survive, but thrive. Whether you have eight days or just a few, you can tailor the experience to fit your schedule.



Book Your Experience Today!

Step into Albania's living heritage. **Let the music, flavors, and traditions welcome you. Whether you prefer a guided experience or the freedom of exploring at your own pace, there's an option for you.**



Contact one of our selected tour operators for availability and pricing:



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How to get to Southeastern Albania?



Renting a car: If you are comfortable driving on two-lane windy roads, renting a car is the most convenient and flexible option. You can rent one either directly at the airport of Tirana or from one of the multiple rental agencies in the capital.



Public transport: For a more budget-friendly option, public transport is available. You can take a minibus from Tirana to Korça. The bus station in Tirana is located east of the city, not far from the center, and there are frequent routes throughout the day, typically taking around 4 hours per journey. Make sure to check the schedule, as times can vary. From Korça you can hop on another minivan, depending on your next destination.



Taxis: For a more direct and private experience, taxis can be hired. It's important to agree on the fare beforehand or ensure the driver uses the meter. This option can be expensive, especially if you are traveling alone, but it offers flexibility in terms of departure time and comfort.

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