

# UNESCO CYCLING ROUTE

A SELF-DISCOVERY CYCLING JOURNEY  
THROUGH SOUTHEAST OF ALBANIA





A circular cycling route with a total length of 1080 km and 15 recommended days. Through a human-speed exploratory journey, you will discover the charms of Southeast Albania while cycling through stunning scenery along peaceful, almost traffic-free roads in the historic villages and along the turquoise coast of the Ionian Sea. During this trip, you have the possibility to visit the last wild river flow in Europe, Vjosa, and the UNESCO sites of Gjirokastra and Berat, the lake of Ohrid, and the archaeological ruins of Butrint.



# INTRODUCTION

By bicycle in Albania, you move slowly, in an explanatory way, along roads between lands, rivers, lakes, valleys, vineyards, olive trees near the seashore and alongside ancient villages placed on the slopes of the mountains. Where monasteries and castles overlook the sea and where time seems to have stopped and somehow pulses on the past.

Cycling in this country feels like an artistic and poetic experience that takes you on a journey through some of the most stunning and diverse landscapes of the Balkans. With the wind in your hair and the sun on your face, you'll feel the rhythm of the road and the beat of your own heart as you pedal through this captivating country.

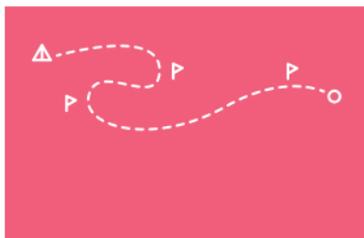
As you cycle through Albania's winding roads and rugged terrain, you'll discover a land that is both timeless and modern, where ancient ruins and traditional villages stand alongside bustling cities and vibrant seaside towns. From the majestic mountains to the crystal-clear waters of the Ionian Sea, every turn of the road brings a new vista to marvel at and a new adventure to embark on.

In the countryside you'll be greeted by the warm hospitality of its people and the delicious flavors of its Mediterranean cuisine. You can pause to rest and recharge in cozy small and simple hotels and guesthouses, where you'll be welcomed like family and treated to the best of Albanian hospitality.

Through every hill and valley, you'll feel the thrill of the open road and the freedom that comes with traveling on two wheels. You'll explore hidden corners of the country that are often overlooked by other travelers, and you'll experience the true spirit of Albania in all its beauty and diversity.

This isn't just a trip; it's a step into a country that feels untouched by time, brimming with raw beauty, authentic charm, and endless adventure.

**Albania is waiting to be discovered in 2 wheels—come and see it for yourself.**



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# 1. General information

## ROAD CONDITIONS

Most of the time you will be following old interurban asphalted roads, that are now free from traffic due to the construction of new highways or intersections, roads dedicated to vehicles only. Yet, some of the sections/passages are either gravel roads or especially in urban areas, normal urban roads with heavy traffic, functioning as connection segments. Some sections involve steep ascent and descent, whilst others will have a moderate gradient in comparison. You should ensure that you are comfortable cycling at this level of grading and are physically prepared for the trip.

## WHEN TO GO

The best time to cycle in Albania is from April to November when the weather is warm and dry. However, it can get quite hot in July and August, so be prepared for the heat.



## PRACTICAL INFORMATION

The best way to start this trip is to get to Tirana one night before, and from there on the next morning to start the journey.

## ACCOMMODATION

There are plenty of accommodation options in Albania, from campsites and guesthouses to hotels and luxury resorts. You may want to book your accommodation in advance, especially during peak season.



## FOOD & DRINKS

Albania has a rich culinary culture and offers plenty of delicious and affordable food and drink options for travelers:

**Traditional Plates:** We are known for our grilled meats, stews, soups, and baked goods. Some traditional dishes include Tavë kosi (baked lamb and rice), Fërgesë (a mixed meat and vegetable dish), and Byrek (a savory pastry filled with cheese, spinach, or meat).

**Seafood:** Albania is located on the Adriatic and Ionian Sea, so seafood is abundant and fresh. You can find a variety of seafood dishes, including grilled fish, calamari, and seafood risotto.

**Vegetarian and vegan options:** Albanian cuisine also has many vegetarian and vegan options, such as stuffed peppers, eggplant dishes, and vegetable stews.

**Cafes and bars:** Albania have a vibrant cafe culture, with many cafes offering coffee, tea, and sweet treats like baklava. The country also has a thriving wine industry, and you can find many local wines in restaurants and bars.

**Prices:** The food and drinks in Albania are generally affordable, and you can get a meal for a reasonable price. However, prices can vary depending on where you are, and touristy areas may be more expensive.



## **LUGGAGE**

During your cycling trip, you have the option to either carry your own luggage on your bike or arrange a self-guided luggage transfer through local tour operators for added convenience.

## **LANGUAGE**

Although you will find that English and Italian are often spoken, we recommend you take along a phrase book and try to learn some simple Albanian phrases and greetings. The local people will of course especially appreciate any attempt to speak their language and is all part of the fun.

## **SELF-GUIDED HOLIDAY**

As the name suggests, self-guided holidays are for those that prefer to be independent. Within reason you can dictate your own schedule, as well as cycle at your own pace with the aid of route notes and maps. It is important that you are entirely comfortable with being independent whilst on a cycling holiday.

### TOUR OPERATORS IN ALBANIA

In case you prefer a guided cycling tour, here are some available tour operators who can provide you all logistics and guides for a guided cycling tour in Albania.

[Outdoor Albania](#) - Specialist travel agency, located in Tirana, Albania. Offering trips, tours and holidays that focus on culture, heritage, and adventure.

[[www.cyclealbania.com](http://www.cyclealbania.com)]

[Cycle Albania](#) - Specialist cycling agency, located in Tirana, Albania. Offering cycling trips, tours and services.

[[www.outdooralbania.com](http://www.outdooralbania.com)]

[Beyond Albania](#) - Specialist cycling agency, located in Tirana, Albania. Offering cycling trips, tours and cycling services.

[[www.beyondalbania.com](http://www.beyondalbania.com)]



## BIKE RENTALS & TOURING SERVICES

**Bike Doctor Albania:** A small and hospitable bike shop in Tirana where you can find the route's info point, rents bikes, and welcomes cyclists for coffee, beer, and conversation.

(Contact: bikedoctoral@gmail.com & +355 69 811 4422)

**Bike Point Albania:** Another solid shop in Tirana, Bike Point does repairs and rentals, and carries mountain, road, and gravel bicycles.

(Contact: bikepointalbania@gmail.com / +355 68 860 00 60)

Make sure to book in advance and check the condition of the bikes before renting.

**Gear:** Make sure you have all the necessary gear for your trip, including a helmet, comfortable cycling clothes, and shoes, and any other accessories you may need.

### SAFETY TIPS:

Cycling in Albania can be a rewarding experience, but it's important to be safe on the road. Here are some safety tips to keep in mind:

**Wear a helmet:** A helmet can protect your head in case of an accident.

**Follow traffic rules:** Obey traffic laws and signals, and always ride on the right side of the road.

**Stay visible:** Wear bright or reflective clothing, especially at night or in low light conditions.

**Be aware of road conditions:** Albanian roads can be narrow and winding, and there may be potholes or other hazards. Keep an eye out for road signs and markings.

**Bring a basic first aid kit:** In case of an emergency, it's always a good idea to have a first aid kit on hand.

## **CULTURAL TIPS:**

Albania has a rich cultural heritage, and it's important to be respectful of local customs and traditions. Here are some tips to help you navigate Albanian culture:

**Dress appropriately:** It's important to dress modestly, especially when visiting religious sites or rural areas.

**Learn a few basic phrases:** Albanians appreciate it when visitors try to speak their language. Learn a few basic phrases such as "Hello - Peshendetje" and "Thank you - Faleminderit"



**Be respectful of local customs:** Albanians are hospitable and welcoming, but it's important to be respectful of local customs and traditions. For example, it's customary to remove your shoes before entering someone's home.

## SECURITY

Whilst most travelers never experience anything untoward it is worth taking precautions and never leave your valuables unattended.

## FIRST AID

You should always carry your own small, personal first aid kit. This could consist of the following: A general antibiotic, throat lozenges, painkillers, plasters (band-aids), blister treatment, insect repellent (DEET), rehydration salts, antiseptic cream, diarrhea treatment (e.g. Imodium).



## VACCINATIONS & HEALTH

We always recommend visiting your doctor and dentist for a checkup before travelling. Your doctor will also have access to the most up to date information on vaccinations and medical precautions for the country you are about to visit. In general, no vaccinations are necessary for Albania.

## CLIMATE

It is of course impossible to predict the precise weather conditions you will encounter during your holiday. Depending upon when you travel temperatures may be between 23°C - 33°C. Albania has a lot of mountains who tend to be notorious for creating their own, localized weather conditions, so you should always be prepared for inclement weather conditions.

For climate statistics visit [www.worldweather.org](http://www.worldweather.org)

## ALTITUDE

The altitudes on this trip are from moderate to challenging, and you should be prepared and comfortable with them before the trip to anticipate any problems.

## CURRENCY

We recommend you have enough cash with you, ATM machines are widely available in towns but not in villages. Euros are accepted too, but ALL is the preferred option.

## TIPPING

It is customary to leave a small tip at your discretion for services.

## MAP

UNESCO Cycling Route in **Outdooractive**

## TRAVEL INSURANCE

It is your responsibility to ensure you are covered for medical and personal accident risks for the part of the world you intend to travel, and the activities involved. This cover should include repatriation costs, air ambulance and helicopter rescue.



## **PASSPORTS & VISAS**

EU passport holders do not require a visa to visit Albania for stays up to three months (please ensure your passport has at least 6 months validity). You can also enter the country with a biometric ID card.

## **BUDGETING FOR YOUR TRIP**

You will need to budget for accommodation, transportation, meals and drinks, also any optional sightseeing, souvenirs and items of a personal nature such as laundry.

## **MOBILE COVERAGE**

Mostly there is a good signal in these areas, yet you might experience poor network in some of the routes, especially in the mountains.

## **EMERGENCY NUMBERS**

112 Ambulance | 129 Police | 128 Fire Squad

# CLOTHING & EQUIPMENT



Using your own judgment for packing is of course important, especially regarding casual clothing, but the clothes needed are:

### Clothing:

- Cycling shorts (padded or unpadded depending on your preference)
- Cycling jersey or breathable shirt
- Windproof or waterproof jacket
- Arm warmers and leg warmers
- Cycling socks
- Gloves
- Sunglasses
- Cycling shoes or comfortable sneakers
- Helmet

### Equipment:

- Bicycle (make sure it's in good working condition before the tour)
- Spare tire tube and tire repair kit
- Bicycle pump
- Water bottles or hydration pack
- Bike lock
- Multi-tool or Allen wrench set
- First-aid kit
- GPS or map and compass (to navigate)

### Optional:

- Cycling gloves with padding
- Cycling vest or gilet for extra warmth
- Toe covers or shoe covers for colder weather.
- Rain pants and jacket for wet conditions
- Cycling hat or bandana to keep sweat and sun out of your eyes.
- Handlebar bag or panniers to carry extra gear and snacks.
- Rear rack and trunk bag for longer tours

Remember to also consider the weather and month of your cycling tour when packing. Plan for the possibility of rain, wind, or unexpected changes in temperature. Pack clothes and equipment that are lightweight and easy to pack and test out your gear before the tour to make sure everything fits and functions properly.

### **IMPORTANT NOTE**

Due to the special nature of cycling holidays, day-to-day itineraries should be taken as a guide only, and as statements of intent and not contractual obligations. Other factors such as adverse weather, unforeseen circumstances, and other matters entirely out of people control.

We hope this guidebook helps you plan your cycling trip in Albania. Have a great time exploring this beautiful country!



# ITINERARY



## DAY 1: TIRANË - ELBASAN - CERRIK - BELSH

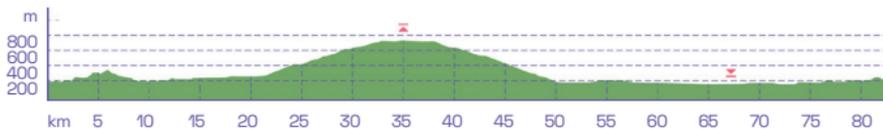
**Length:** 83km | Elevation: Accumulative gain 1782m / loss 1735m

**Road conditions:** Asphalt / Backcountry side (secondary road, asphalted and used by many cyclists who train there)

**The ride:** A diverse stage with cities, towns, and quiet villages, the first day leaves the capital with an immediate kick uphill. It's not the last challenging and fun surprise of the day. This rolling stage will take cyclists through historic Elbasan — with its castle and inviting restaurants — before ending the ride among karstic lakes.

**Road information tips:** The road is mostly safe, in Tirana you will most probably face traffic jam, rest point after 35km.

**Points of Interest:** Elbasan, home to several historical landmarks, including the ancient road of Via Egnatia, an ancient castle, a 15th-century mosque, and a large bazaar; Belsh, known for its karstic lakes and lot of agritourism in the area.



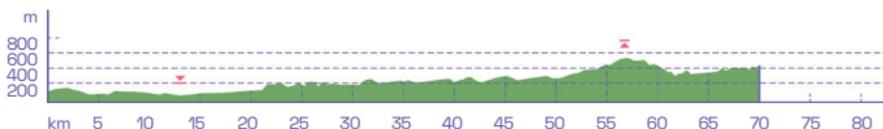
## DAY 2: BELSH - GRAMSH - MOGLIČĚ

Length: 68km | Elevation: gain 1592m / loss 1378m

Road conditions: Asphalt / Backcountry side main road

The ride: Another wonderful stage that rolls through undulating and quiet asphalt roads with jaw-dropping views. A little more than 10 kilometers after leaving Belsh, the route parallels the scenic Devoll River through the town of Gramsh to the stage's end in the village of Mogličë.

Road information tips: Stop at Banja Lake (Liqeni Banjës) Panoramic Point, Town of Gramshi, Village of Moglica (when in Moglica, ask the locals for accommodation).



## DAY 3: MOGLIČĚ - MALIQ - POGRADEC

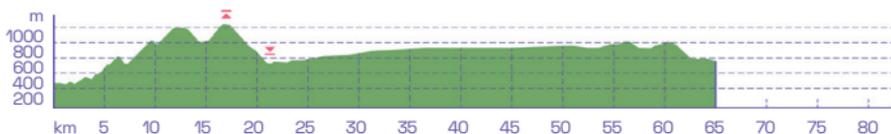
Length: 68km | Elevation: gain 1592m / loss 1378m

Road conditions: Asphalt but old road, some parts near the dam are under construction

The ride: The third day brings a wide range of landscapes and continual photo opportunities as riders pedal along easy-going roads through mountain villages along the Devoll River Valley to Maliq. After, the route heads due north for Pogradec on the magical shore of Lake Ohrid, which straddles the border with North Macedonia and is a UNESCO-inscribed World Heritage Site.

Road information tips: Panoramic Point “Moglica’s Dam” Diga e Moglices, Liqeni Pogradecit (Lake)

Food tip: Unique local fish that can be found only in Pogradec called “Koran”.

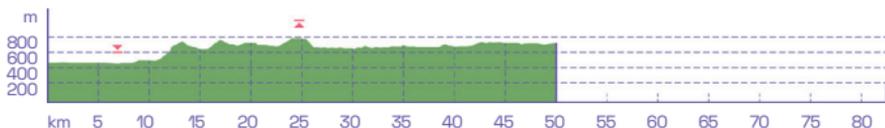


## DAY 4: POGRADEC - ZVEZDE - KORÇË

Length: 55km | Elevation: gain 752m / loss 585m

Road conditions: Asphalt Road information tips: Since is a short cycling day you will have more time to enjoy bazaar of Korca, great food and local music called “Serenata Korcare”

The ride: Though relatively flat, this stage is anything but flat culturally. Leaving Pogradec and Lake Ohrid, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, cyclists will ride south just below the shores of Lake Prespa, which has parts in Albania, North Macedonia, and Greece. From here, the stage rolls along roads connecting villages down to the city of Korçë, which has a magnetic Ottoman-era Bazaar and a famous beer festival.



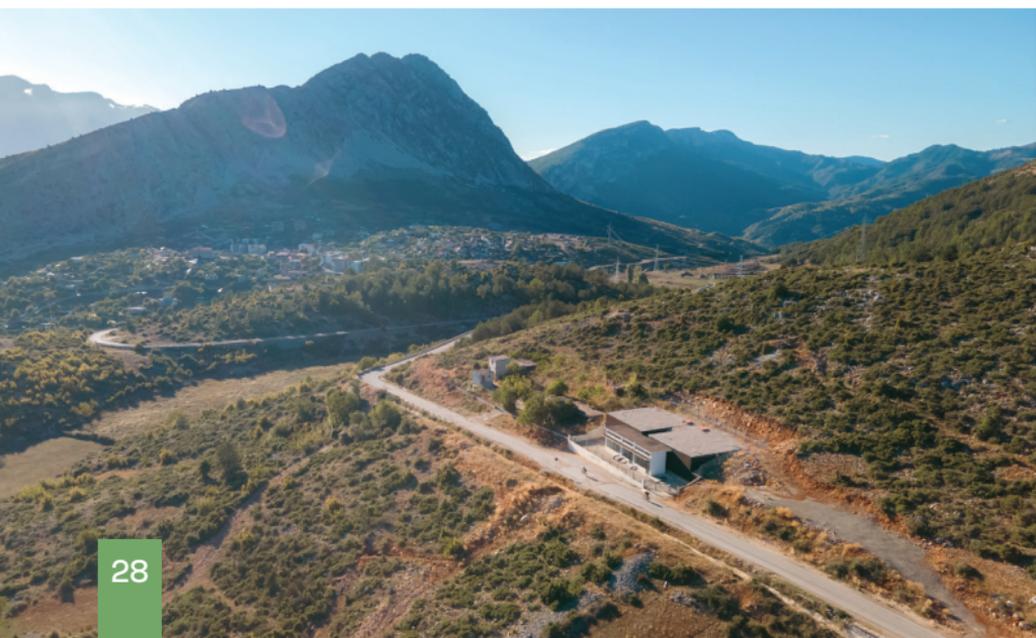
## DAY 5: KORCË - ERSEKË - GËRMENJË

Length: 72km | Elevation: gain 1524m / loss 1382m

Road conditions: Asphalt

In the heart of the Gramoz mountains. On the way to the eventual landing spot for the day, Gërmenjë, the itinerary rolls through Ersekë, a town that sits at more than 1000 meters — making it among the country's highest towns.

Road information tips: Cycling from Korca to the heart of the Gramozi mountain, you will go through Erseka, the highest elevation town in Albania.



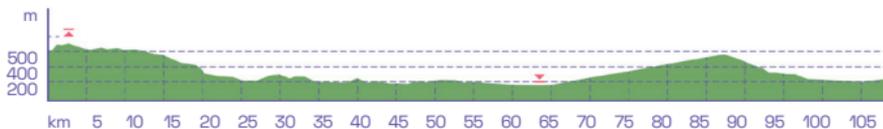
## DAY 6: GËRMENJË - LESKOVIK - PËRMET

**Length:** 65km | Elevation: gain 1192m / loss 1928m

**Road conditions:** Asphalt / Short segment of old asphalt not maintained bumpy road / Gravel.

**The ride:** An assortment of landscapes and new cultures will find cyclists as they pedal from Gërmenjë to Leskovik (about 15 kilometers from the Greek border) before turning north and west on a diagonal into southern Albania. Once the route connects with the Vjosa River, one of Europe's last remaining wild rivers, travelers are in for a new treat with villages along this important and historic waterway.

**Road information tips:** In Leskovik are 2 options 1: Short segment of old asphalt with a wonderful view and option 2: is a new asphalt road 8km longer, much faster, but you will miss the spectacular view of the canyon.



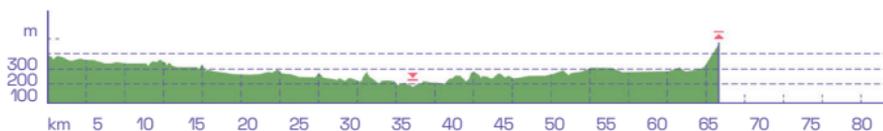
## DAY 7: PËRMET - KËLCYRË - GJIROKASTËR

**Length:** 61km | **Elevation:** gain 785m / loss 762m

**Road conditions:** Asphalt

**The ride:** Legitimately one of the most important cultural stages in the Western Balkans, this day will take you along the Vjosa River and the newly named Vjosa Wild River National Park. The ride ends in Gjirokaštër, a UNESCO World Heritage Site and one of the most beautiful cities in the region.

**Road information tips:** Passing in Kelcyra, you should stay on the main road to minimize the possibility of taking a wrong turn. After passing “Lekri Bridge” the route to Gjirokastra continues through the main road, even being a main road is still safe for cycling.



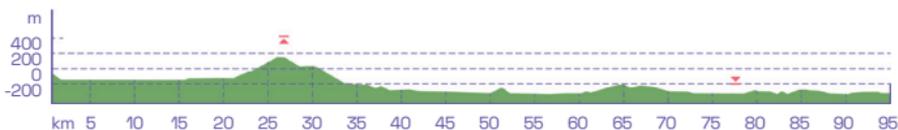
## DAY 8: GJIROKASTËR - JORGUCAT - MUZINË - CUKË - XARË - BUTRINT - KSAMIL - SARANDA

**Length:** 100km | **Elevation:** gain 1311m / loss 1605m

**Road conditions:** Asphalt

**The ride:** This stage will challenge cyclists and culture seekers of all abilities — and in the best way possible. A relatively long ride at 100 kilometers, this day rolls from a UNESCO city to a UNESCO icon in the country's far south. Starting in the incomparable stone city of Gjirokaštër, you'll ride through the ancient site of Butrint before continuing the coastal city of Saranda.

**Road information tips:** Cycling out of the old town of Gjirokastra continuing through the main road to Greece which is safe for cycling. Remember to turn right into Jorgucat, through Muzina Pass. When you come from Xarë to Butrint you need to cross the canal in a small boat. From Ksamil to Saranda you can enjoy the beautiful riviera of South Albania.



## DAY 9: SARANDA - HIMARA

**Length:** 52km | Elevation: gain 1288m / loss 1287m

**Road conditions:** Asphalt

**The ride:** Leaving from Saranda, Albania's UNESCO Cycling Route heads north along the beautiful blue Ionian Sea. The surface is all asphalt on this relatively short day of rolling ups and downs across an incredible landscape as you make your way past coves and bays to another famous beach destination: Himarë.

**Road information tips:** Short day of cycling with a lot of uphill and beautiful alternatives bays to explore from the Albanian riviera, suggested resting points "Shen Vasil", "Piqerras", "Borsh". In Borsh you may enjoy stopping in the restaurant "Ujevara" (Waterfall) for coffee or food, it is worth visiting inside.



## DAY 10: HIMARA - LLOGARA - ORIKUM

Length: 55km | Elevation: gain 1775m / loss 1763m

Road conditions: Asphalt

The ride: Though relatively short, this is a big day. Starting on the coast, in Himarë, the stage continues north and heads inland over the Llogara Pass with its famous serpentine switchbacks. The route rolls through Llogara National Park before descending to Orikum on the coast and just south of Vlora, where the Ionian and Adriatic Seas meet.

Road information tips: Short day of cycling with a lot of beautiful alternative ways to explore from the Albanian riviera and the stunning nature of the national park of Llogara. Food tip “You must try out the tasty yoghurt with honey and walnuts.”



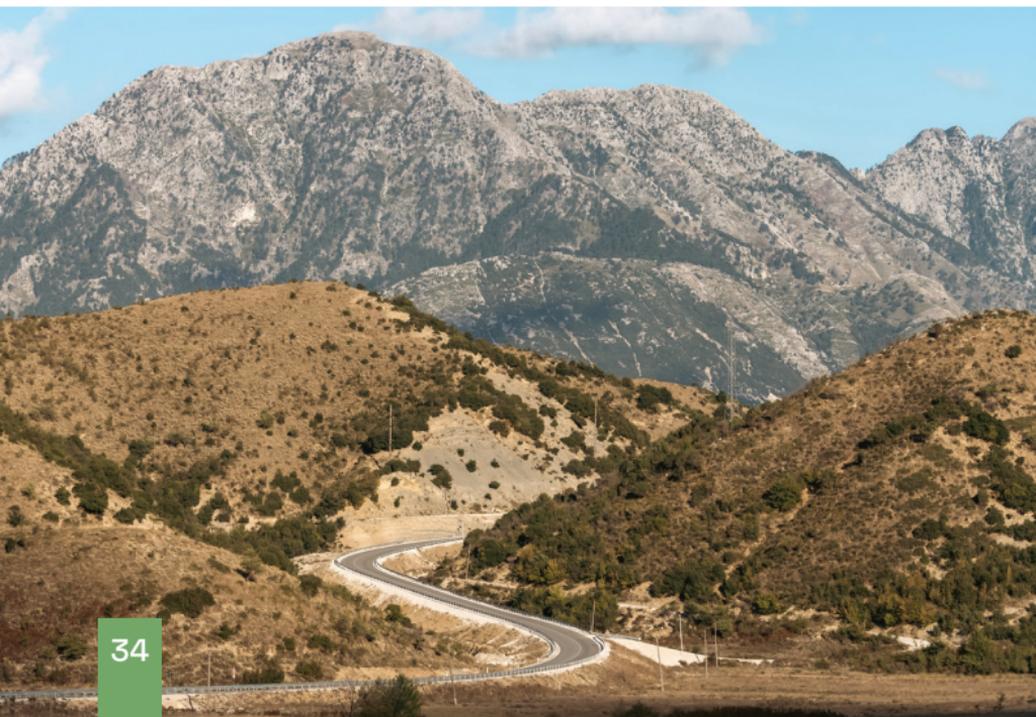
## DAY 11: ORIKUM - VLORË - KUÇ

Length: 76km | Elevation: gain 1989m / loss 1440m

Road conditions: Asphalt

The ride: This epic ride takes another twist as it passes through the city of Vlorë and then heads back inland through the mountains. There are rolling hills all day long with multiple challenging climbs as you ride east to the village of Kuç.

Road information tips: You enter inside the southern Albanian mountains across the Vlorë river.



## DAY 12: KUÇ - GUSMAR - NIVICË - SALARI - TEPELENË

Length: 47km | Elevation: gain 1348m / loss 1762m

Road conditions: Asphalt

The ride: Arguably one of the most beautiful stages on the route as cyclists leave Kuç and head east. A slightly shorter day because of all the climbs along the way — which are among the biggest of the entire route. The reward: Beautiful panoramas abound. The day ends back along the idyllic Vjosa River in the city of Tepelenë.

Road information tips: Short day of cycling with a great variation of elevation and stunning panorama.



## DAY 13: TEPELENË - BERAT

Length: 97km | Elevation: gain 2024m / loss 2113m

Road conditions: Asphalt

The ride: Leaving Tepelenë, the route will turn north through the town of Memaliaj and then the settlement of Illyrians, Bylis. From here, cyclists will pedal across a few big climbs (with views that are equally as big) on their way up to another destination that gives the route its UNESCO name: Berat, a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Road information tips: At the end of the day, you will have a wonderful evening in Berat which is designated as an UNESCO World Heritage Site



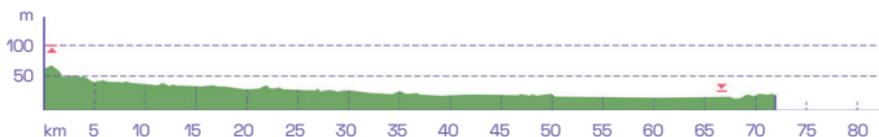
## DAY 14: BERAT - DIVJAKË

Length: 72km | Elevation: gain 498m / loss 549m

Road conditions: Asphalt

The ride: From Berat, the UNESCO Cycling Route rolls northwest on its way back toward the coast. The road itself — 72 kilometers from Berat to Divjaka — is among the flattest of the entire route. Don't let that fool you. The stage is filled with wonders including the Divjaka-Karavasta National Park and its protected lagoon, which is perfect for birdwatching.

Road information tips: At the end of the trip, you will enjoy the wonderful species of birds in the lagoon of Karavasta and you will have a great evening in the national park of Divjaka. Tip for the evening don't forget spray against mosquitoes.



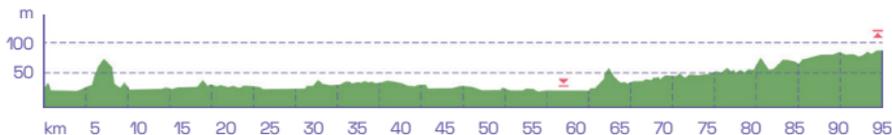
## DAY 15: DIVJAKË - TIRANË

Length: 99km | Elevation: gain 1039m / loss 944m

Road conditions: Asphalt

The ride: The final stage of the UNESCO Cycling Route leaves Divjaka and parallels the Adriatic Coast. Like most of the stages of the route, nothing comes easy — at the same time, however, it is this wonderful challenge that has made this such an exceptional cycle itinerary. About 60 kilometers into the 99-kilometer ride, just outside of the seaside port city of Durrës, the route makes its final push inland and east back to the capital city of Tirana, where it started 15 stages ago. Reward yourself with a cocktail and a meal in the Tirana — you deserve it.

Road information tips: On this day you will enjoy the beautiful sandy beaches of the Adriatic Sea.



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