

jeto/puno/zbulo

NË FSHAT

Get to know

ZOGAJ

#NËFSHAT

—the land between  
the lake and the mountain



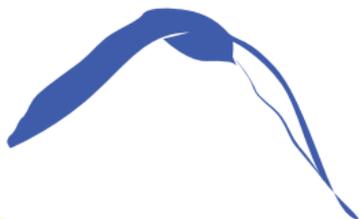
## CONTENT

Introduction	02
The Road to Zogaj	04
Zogaj, a little history	06
The Zogaj people (Zaganjorët)	08
Everyday life	14
The perfect time to visit Zogaj	16
Natural and Ecological tourism	17
Fishing tourism	20
Curative tourism	21
Culinary delight	22
History and tradition	24
Echoes of tradition; a poem	32
Instead of an ending...	34
A Postcard	35

## Introduction

It is now well known that one of the unique features of Albania is the diversity of its nature. As a result, no city in Albania is like another, and no village is the same as another.

Every land has its own ecosystem, shaped by the dominance of mountains, seas, lakes, rivers, or rocks – or a harmonious blend of all. In turn, the people of each place have absorbed the essence of the nature around them, or that which they have chosen to call home.

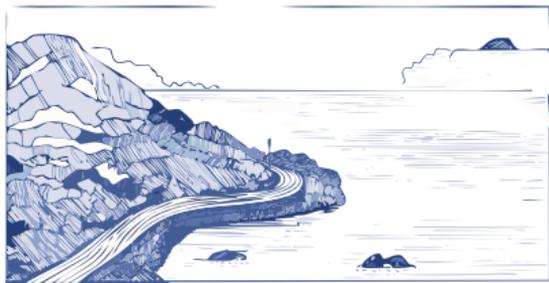




# Fisherman Village

## The Road to Zogaj

Zogaj is the village that wakes up earlier than any other village. This is because fishing is the heart of its daily rhythm, and certainly, the day begins not with the rising sun, but a little before.



The road to Zogaj is a narrow road built in the 1930s, but it is in perfect harmony with the ecosystem of the area.

Zogaj stretches along the rocky shores of Lake Shkodra (the largest in the Balkans), and to its left rises Mount Taraboshi (595 meters high). It takes 28 minutes from Shkodra to get there. It takes 2 hours and 12 minutes from Tirana (the capital) to get there.



Montenegro  
Albania

Zogaj

Shkodra Lake

 28 min

Bahçallëk

Rozafa  
Castle

Shkodër

## Zogaj, a little history

Zogaj is an old settlement, first mentioned in the 15th century on Venetian maps from the 1500s. It consisted of a homogeneous population of 25 Catholic households and 50 soldiers, who, despite their dignified battles, had to endure the long and deep Ottoman occupation.

Leftovers of this takeover include the 300-year-old mosque and the 200-year-old Ottoman graves.

What followed this invasion was not less of a hardship. The period of dictatorship was not easy for this village, further isolating it due to its position as a border point with Montenegro.

Nevertheless, no dictatorship or ruler has ever diminished the spirit of this village, which has been preserved with fanaticism by its residents.

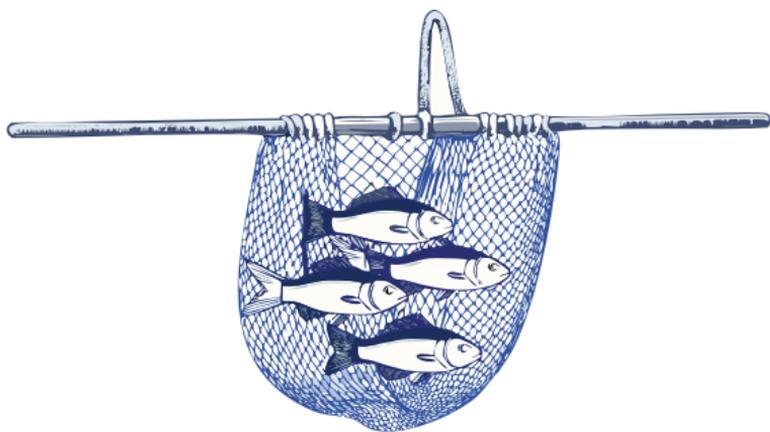




## The Zogaj people (Zaganjorët)

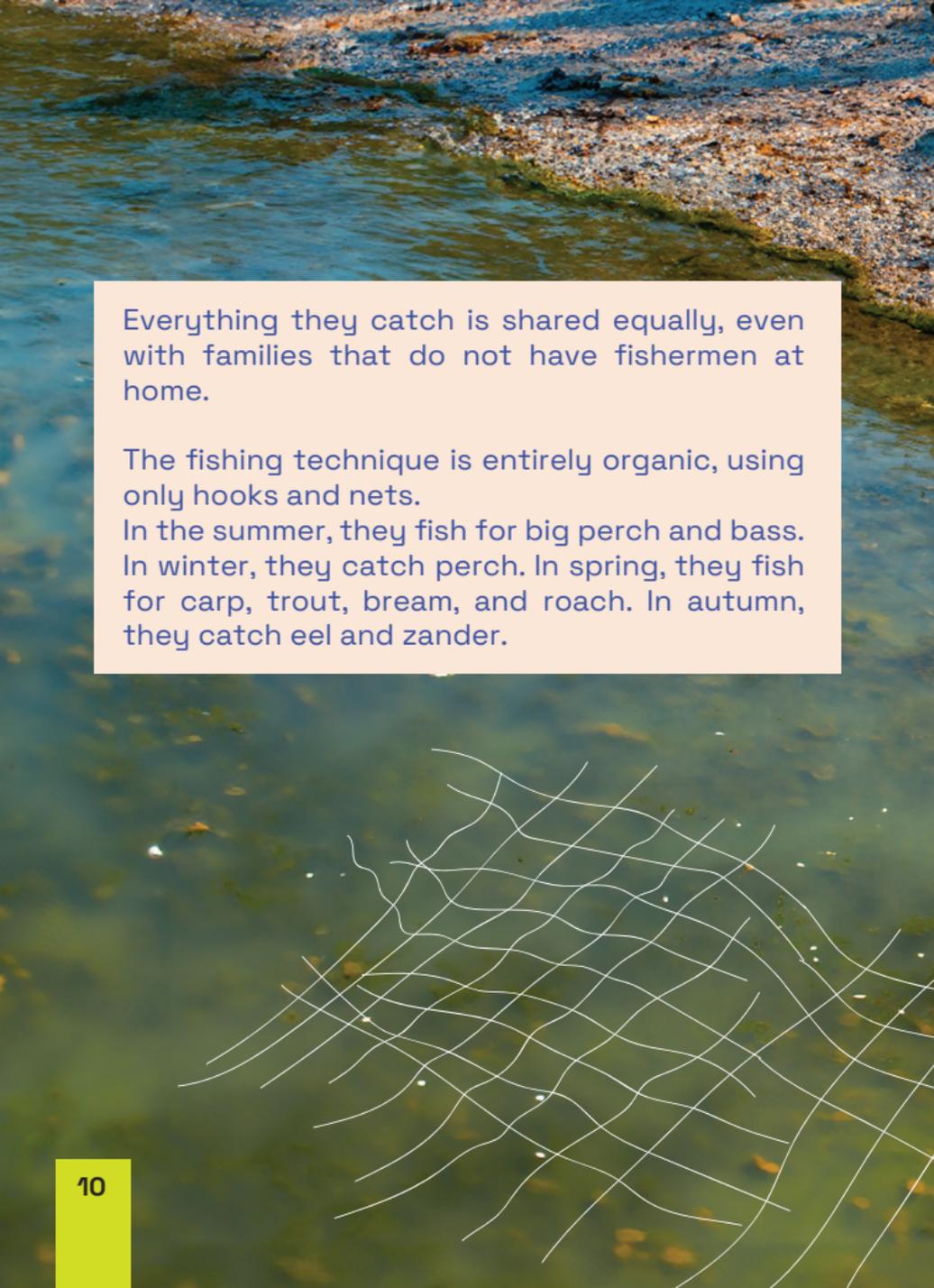
The common denominators of Zogaj's rich natural wealth and its curative microclimate are "Zaganjorët". Aware of the natural riches they possess, they have managed to become the best teachers of coexistence and harmony.

Fishing is the activity that keeps the families alive. The men go out every morning to fish. Exploring the shores of the lake without disturbing its contents is their mission.



Fishing is the lifeblood that sustains the families, woven into the rhythm of their days. Each morning, the men set out, their boats gliding quietly over the waters, guided by the call of the lake. Their mission is not only to gather from its depths but to honour its stillness, moving along the shores with a gentle touch, careful not to disturb the wisdom it holds.





Everything they catch is shared equally, even with families that do not have fishermen at home.

The fishing technique is entirely organic, using only hooks and nets.

In the summer, they fish for big perch and bass. In winter, they catch perch. In spring, they fish for carp, trout, bream, and roach. In autumn, they catch eel and zander.



This is harmony, to adapt to the changes of the seasons without ever interfering with human and natural coexistence. Just as the Tarabosh Mountain coexists with the Lake.

Now let's step out of the boat, and take a look at what the women are doing on the land.

In Zogaj, there is an artisan workshop for women where the most beautiful carpets and blankets ever seen are woven.

The women have inherited this craft from generation to generation, taking care of everything from the very first material: goat wool, to spinning, dyeing, and weaving.

Through a diverse and artistic treatment, with natural flower colors and deeply Albanian motifs, these ladies make sure our homes look their most beautiful, authentic, and warm.

If you're lucky one day, you might even learn how to weave a carpet, or at least a small rug or a bag.

**These ladies are magical.**

They don't plan to leave Zogaj; instead, they create unique ideas to represent the village.





Again, in harmony with nature, you will find dishes that you won't try anywhere else:



**Carp Casserole**



**Fish Eggs  
(putarkat)**



**Sage Honey**



**Many Jams**



**Eels on the Roof Tile**

## Life in Zogaj/ everyday life

It's enough to step into a house in this village, and you will remember the experience of this place forever.

Not only is there the view of the lake, but the houses are all two-story, stone-built, set against the mountain, with white walls, small windows, and white façades.

All the houses are connected by white cobblestone paths, made with stones from the Tarabosh mountain, aligned perfectly as if designed by professional architects.

The village has only a small bar in its centre, from where you can enjoy the (modestly speaking) extraordinary view, the countless birds, and of course, a rose water drink.

Because the villagers now follow the Muslim faith, they don't serve alcohol.

Through an internal regulation, everyone works together and shares the profits equally with each other.



They have no intention of abandoning the village, but even if they are forced to leave, they never sell their homes, because they believe this is a way of not betraying their origins.

## When is the perfect time to visit this village?

If you haven't found the answer by now in between the lines, just like there are different types of fish in each season of the year, Zogaj is also worth visiting in any season.

In spring, the villagers celebrate "Shtregullat," their authentic pagan festival where they celebrate the arrival of spring by dressing up beautifully, gathering in the center of the village, and sharing stories and jokes with each other.

The birth of a child (especially the birth of a boy) and wedding ceremonies are also very important events there.

Throughout each season, you can explore the lake, Tarabosh Mountain, and the flora and fauna, which include over 85 plant and 600 animal species.

There, you can collect medicinal sage, black mullein, floating leaves, winter salep, or water lily.

You'll also enjoy seeing nightjars, hoopoes, and the river shrike.

## Natural and Ecological Tourism



Nestled between the mountain and the lake, the village of Zogaj is a hidden gem, offering a rare opportunity to experience the wild beauty of nature, dramatic landscapes, and areas that remain almost untouched by human hands.

Zogaj is a sanctuary for those who seek a deep connection with nature, an experience that gently awakens even the most passive visitor to the wonders of Mother Nature.

Do you remember the first time you sailed across a lake?

Imagine gliding over the serene waters of Lake Shkodra, aboard a Liburnian boat—crafted and passed down through generations by the Zogaj people.

Would it take you back to your childhood? Or would it be a brand-new adventure that stirs a nostalgic feeling deep within you?

These are the questions that arise for those who can never resist the magic of nature's embrace.

Lake Shkodra serves as a haven for countless species of waterfowl that migrate from distant corners of the earth.

Especially in spring and winter, the shores of the lake transform into transient homes for pelicans, herons, storks, ducks, and cormorants, who choose Zogaj as their resting point during their long journeys.

To miss the chance to visit a land chosen by these feathered travelers would be a grave loss for any nature lover.



On the rugged, undeveloped lands in the southwest of Shkodra, where the terrain rises sharply in karst formations, stands the Tarabosh Mountain, towering at nearly 600 meters.

An ancient, dormant volcano, its slopes are sparsely covered in vegetation, yet teeming with a wildlife that demands attention.

Tarabosh is a paradise for nature lovers and adventure seekers alike.

Foxes, brown bears, eagles, and jackals call this mountain home, thriving in the untouched wilderness.

A cycling trail has also been carved into the mountain, welcoming those who wish to explore this rugged landscape on two wheels.

Thus, as you journey through the village of Zogaj, you not only encounter stunning scenery, but you also awaken a deeper, shared awareness of the natural world around you.

If you're still wondering what activities await you in the breathtaking landscapes of Zogaj, here are a few suggestions:

Hiking, Birdwatching, Camping, Exploring forests, Fishing, Photography, Cycling, and immersing yourself in the untouched wildlife, landscapes, and environments that remain blissfully undisturbed by human influence.



## Fishing Tourism

In the midst of meditation and nature exploration, you can also engage in fishing activities. Fishing tourism is not just about fishing – it's about the whole experience of being immersed in nature, spending time outdoors, and connecting with local cultures and traditions.

This way, you will have the opportunity to sail with the fishermen of Zogaj through the tranquil beauty of Lake Shkodra, and if you're lucky, you might catch carp, trout, or perch. However, if you're a true fishing enthusiast, luck won't be necessary. You'll only need a boat, a hook, or a net.

Sailing and fishing are the emblematic experiences of Zogaj. Definitely!



## Curative Tourism

Zogaj is located in an area known for its healing properties. This is primarily due to the climate of the region and the abundance of medicinal plants that have grown there for centuries. Notable examples include sage, mountain tea, and salep.

The humid subtropical climate gives the village unique natural qualities, offering curative benefits for various conditions, including allergies and asthma, for all age groups.

“Zogaj Neighborhood” is also mentioned on Italian medicinal maps for its healing microclimate.

Indeed, the nature of Zogaj provides a break from the daily grind, offering a more mindful and enriching travel experience.

There, you will find a deeper connection with the natural world. Yoga corners are available, and you can take your yoga mat or simply wear comfortable, light clothing.

Zogaj’s nature is ready to guide you on a journey of healing for both your body and mind.

## Culinary Tourism

We all know that culinary experiences are a way to connect with a place on a sensory level through its food. Imagine the joy of enjoying a perfect meal with a stunning view on the stone verandas of Zogaj's homes.

So, what defines a perfect meal? Nothing less than the truly authentic and original dishes of the region.

Sometimes, being isolated and left aside is a blessing, as it makes you more aware of the maximum use of the resources that are available right there. This ability is most beautifully showcased by the Zogaj people, especially the Zogaj women, who delight us with their special, handmade dishes, crafted by their brilliant hands and minds.

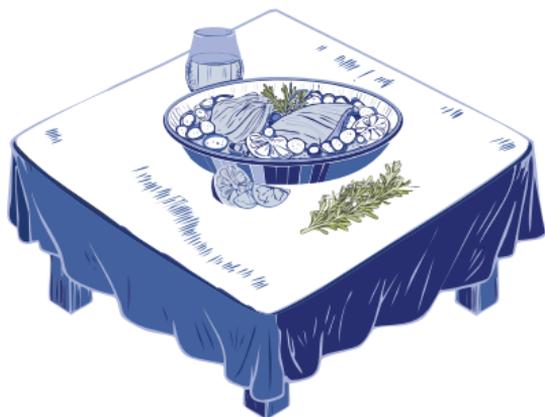
Food experiences in Zogaj will be a deep and unforgettable memory, because we bet you've never tried baked carp in a clay oven, fish grilled on tiles, or fish eggs fried to perfection.



Not to mention the wide variety of homemade jams and the uniquely made rose petal syrup. These culinary works of art are presented to us by the fantastic Zogaj women.

Give yourself the opportunity to try new dishes, because in Zogaj, we're talking about creativity developed in the most primitive conditions of every dimension, including cuisine.

Knock on a door, and you will find a beautiful meal, made with love and shared with the warmth of a conversation with the house's host.



## Historical and Cultural Tourism

Architecture is the most eloquent voice of a country's culture. Stone is another symbol of Zogaj.

From the moment you arrive in the village, you are struck by an architecture that tells stories of fragments of the past, which most strongly connect us to the present.

The Zogaj houses are stone buildings, all two to three stories high, with small windows and roofs made of stone slabs. The houses are interconnected by large stairways and narrow, cobbled streets, all handmade over many, many years.



The stones used in the buildings are taken from the mountain nearby (Mount Tarabosh), and in their grandeur, they carry whispers of the past. All the stones are coated with white lime, symbolizing the purity of the Zogaj spirit, which not only preserves their village but also the culture of house construction. This is why you will find 100-year-old towers still intact, enduring according to the ancient tradition of the village.



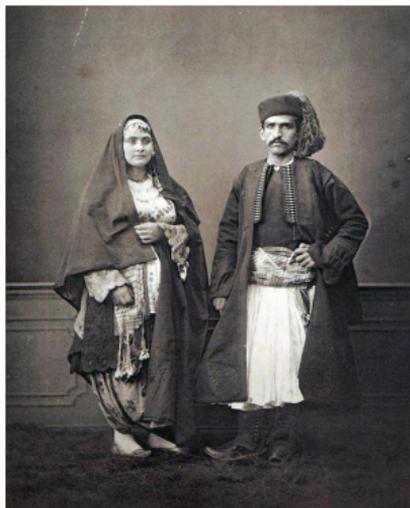
All these fragments tell the story of the beauty of resilience through many epochs of the village of Zogaj, which was first inhabited by a single Catholic clan in the 1500s. Despite every form of destruction (Ottoman occupation) and isolation (45 years of dictatorship), it has managed to survive and flourish until today.

The 300-year-old mosque and Ottoman tombstones are evidence of the long-standing Islamic culture embraced by the current residents of Zogaj. Today, all the villagers follow the Islamic faith, practice Muslim rituals, and, through a silent mutual pact, do not serve alcohol in respect for their religion.



Traditional clothing also carries Islamic elements, starting with the terms:

“Shkodra Muslim woman’s attire” and  
“Shkodra Muslim man’s attire.”



Traditional clothing consists of many elements and layers. It is worth mentioning that women from the higher classes wore clothes embroidered with golden threads, indicating their social status. In the 1930s, the traditional attire of Shkodra women was replaced by that of Tirana due to the economic crisis (the Tirana attire was less expensive).

Meanwhile, the men's costume with the "fustanella" (a pleated skirt) is distinct from all other Albanian regional costumes, as it was made up of many layers, with the length of the "fustanella" reaching up to the thighs.

- Imagine a culture where men in "fustanella" and "opinga" (traditional shoes) would go fishing.
- Now imagine the women, who not only wove their own clothes but also made their rugs, prayer mats, household linens, and baskets. This centuries-old culture has managed to be passed down and preserved until today, unchanged.





The old method of spinning goat hair into wool represents the delicate beauty of the craft carried out by the women of Zogaj. Mrs. Nabije Qotaj has established her workshop with many other women from the region, tirelessly weaving the culture they hold dear.

Spinning wool requires patience, dedication, and authentic love.

In the rhythm of the spinning wheel and the camaraderie of the workshop, at Nabije's place, you risk finding yourself—your passions, your appreciation for beauty, and your own tastes.

She welcomes anyone with a passion for art, colors, and beauty—whether for a small informative lesson or to become a master of spinning.

You might weave your own story by creating a colorful rug. You never know.

It is a blessing that the craftsmanship is being passed down to the younger generations.

The "Shtregullat" are an authentic celebration of the village of Zogaj. It's a pagan festival that celebrates the arrival of spring. The men and women of the village dress in their finest clothes, gather in the village square, enjoy the best food, sing, dance to the tunes of northern folk music, and exchange jokes with one another.

Weddings and the birth of a child are also important community events in the village.

Thus, Zogaj might seem like a village of simple natural beauty, but a visit there is an experience in itself. Because nature shapes us, but perhaps, we also shape nature.

Sitting down with an elder in Zogaj and listening to stories of old legends, or watching artisans continue their centuries-old traditions, you're not just a witness—you are part of the ongoing evolution of a culture.



## A folk song from Shkodra

### Spring has started to arrive

Spring has started to arrive,  
And the nightingale begins to sing.  
The white jasmine flower,  
Comes to the window to be heard.

Oh, my love, how deeply I care for you,  
For you, I've given all of me.  
Oh, my love, how deeply I care for you,  
To spend life together, just we two.

I've walked all around Shkodra,  
Flowers upon flowers as I roamed.  
Among the fairest, I've chosen you,  
Like a star of beauty shining through.  
The canary feels the longing,  
No one can truly understand.  
For the nightingale is the first,  
And to it, my trust





## Instead of an ending...

”Does this village ever echo with anything more?

Will it forever remain a place of meditation, or is there a possibility that it will become a place of noise and celebrations?

Is there any female fisherman in Zogaj?

And above all, for as long as the roots of Zogaj carry the word “zog” which means bird in it, is there any invisible thread that connects the name of this village and its glorious nature?”

-I’ve heard there are many storks...

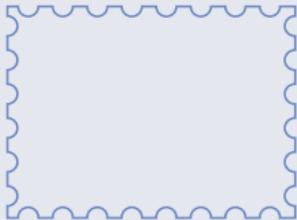
These answers can only be found if you see for yourself.



Grab this postcard, travel to Zogaj,  
and invite your friend to join you there!

This space is for writing

This side is for address





Imprint space



**bashkëpunimi  
gjerman**  
DEUTSCHE ZUSAMMENARBEIT

Implemented by

**giz** Deutsche Gesellschaft  
für Internationale  
Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft  
Confédération suisse  
Confederazione Svizzera  
Confederaziun svizra

Swiss Agency for Development  
and Cooperation SDC



**UK International  
Development**  
Partnership | Progress | Prosperity



MINISTRIA E TURIZMIT, KULTURËS DHE SPORTIT