

Geography of Albania



Albania is located in front of the heel of Italy's boot, from which it is separated by the Strait of Otranto. It's bounded by the Adriatic and Ionian Seas to the west, Montenegro and Kosovo to the north and north-east and Greece to the south and south-east. There are only 3 km from the Greek island of Corfu to the Albanian ground.

Its area is more or less equal to Belgium or the Lake Baikal (28.000km²), since Russians compare the latter to the first as regards the area.

The territory can be divided in 4 regions:

1) The western coast, that stretches from the north to the south along the Adriatic and the Ionian Seas. Durrës and Vlorë are the two most important towns of this region. The coastal plain collects the rivers, that flow from the mountain ranges, like the Drin in the north, the Shkumbin in the centre or the Vjosë in the south. Islands are very few and they aren't interesting according to our criteria. The most important (Sazan, 5.7km²) is situated near Vlorë. It can be visited, but there is no significant summit accessible by road bike.

In this coastal region, the selected climbs are necessarily at low altitude, but they are great places of interest: from the north to the south, the Saint Anthony Church of Laç, the Royal Villa of Durrës, the Orthodox Monastery of Ardenica, the ancient Greek colony of Apollonia, Kaninë and Lëkursi Castles and the Archaeological Park of Butrint, just in front of Corfu.



Sea views from Lëkursi (Sarandë)



and Kaninë (Vlorë)

The mountain appears as soon as we penetrate the hinterland.

2) To the north of the Drin River, the Albanian Alps stretch from the west to the east. They are the southern part of the Dinaric Alps and Maja e Jezercës is their highest point (2694m). We for our part make do with 1660m at the Qafa e Thorës (ALB004). Thethi and Lugina e Valbonës National Parks are located in this region.



Qafa e Thorës



Maja e Jezercës

3) The third region occupies the whole middle part of the country, between the Drin River to the north and the Vjosë River to the south. The mountain ranges are clearly separated by the rivers.

3-1 In the north we find the Pukë District Mountains. The challenge visits them thanks to the Qafa e Pukës (ALB008, 953m).

3-2 In the centre, the Skanderbeg Mts. (Mali i Krujës, 1141m, and Dajti Mt. to the east of Tirana, 1613m), Lurë (highest point at 2121m), Korab (highest point of the country at 2764m) and Shebenik (Maja e Shebenikut, 2253m).

The challenge climbs up to Krujë (ALB027) and Dajti Belvedere (ALB032). Thanks to Ploshtan (ALB021) and Llangë (ALB035), we manage to approach Korab and the Shebenik Mts.

3-3 To the south, Vallmarë (2373m), the Mount Tomorr (ALB049, highest point at Çuka e Partizanit, 2416m) and the extension of the Pindus Mts. across the Greek border.



View from Mali i Krujës



Korab

4) The fourth and last region lies to the south of the Vjosë River, between Vlorë (on the coast) and Gjirokastër (inland). On the map we can see three major ranges.

4-1 Along the sea, from Vlorë to Sarandë, the Ceraunian Mountains. They start in the NW with the Karaburun Peninsula, they cross the Llogara Pass and peak at the Mount Çika (2045m). Just to the south of Llogara, the road towers above the sea, crosses the Qafa e Vishës and the cornice in Borsh and allows us to climb to the small village of Qeparo i Sepërm.

4-2 To the NW of Gjirokaštër, a massif overhung by the Mounts Maja e Këndrevicës (2121m) and Maja e Tartarit. The roads don't climb very high there, hardly higher than 400m at Dukaj.

4-3 To the east of Gjirokaštër, Maja e Papingut (2482m) is the highest point of the Nemërçka Mts., which can be seen from the road Përmet-Çarçovë (ALB075). At the Qafa e Çajupit (ALB072), we are above 1300m high.



The road Përmet-Çarçovë at the bottom of the Nemërçka Mts.

So rare in Albania



Tourism in Albania

In 2019 there were 800 protected natural areas, among which 750 « natural monuments », 14 national parks and 8 archaeological parks.

The comprehensive list of the national parks (« park kombëtar ») is to be found on the government website <http://akzm.gov.al/protected-areas/park-kombetar>

Location on map: <https://www.google.com/maps/d/viewer?mid=1W2AQGeTcV0jB1rJfUsxTAJIR6OA&ll=39.747686008557785%2C20.15758228867188&z=9>

You'll find 10 of them in NATALB, from north to south:

Thethi (we approach it at the Qafa e Thorës)

Lugina e Valbonës (Valbonë)

Qafë-Shtamë (the eponymous pass Qafë e Shtamës and Rranzë-Hida Road)

Mali i Dajtit (Dajti Belvedere)

Shebenik-Jabllanicë (Llangë)

Mali i Tomorrit (aka Mount Tomorr)

Prespa (Qafa e Zvezdës)

Llogara (the BIG Qafa e Llogarasë)

Bredhi i Hotovës-Dangëlli (Teqeja e Baba Aliut-Alipostivan)

Butrinti (archaeological site of Butrint)

Bushkash crosses the Ulëz Regional Natural Park.

To the south of Gjirokastrë, the road to the Qafa e Muzinës passes along the beautiful turquoise spring « Blue Eye » (Syri i kaltër), which is one of the Albanian natural monuments.

The Qafa e Çajupit, to the north of Gjirokastrë, is the gate of the Zagoria Natural Park.



The Lake Prespa



The Blue Eye

3 very important lakes (« liqeni » in Albanian):

The Shkodra Lake (in the NW), that Albania shares with Montenegro. It can be seen from Shkodër itself, at the bottom of the kalaja e Rozafës or, in Montenegro, from Kruševica (MNE064), Pinčići (MNE069) or Stegvaš (MNE072).

The Lake Ohrid (in the east), shared by Albania and North Macedonia. The best viewpoint is at the top of the Qafë e Thanës (ALB051), near the border crossing. In North Macedonia we'll appreciate the lake from the Samuel's Fortress in Ohrid (MKN028), from Velestovo (MKN029) or the western side of Galičica (MKN030).

The Lake Prespa (near the Lake Ohrid), straddling Albania, North Macedonia and Greece, is to be seen on the plateau after the Qafa e Zvezdës (ALB053), at Kurbinovo (MKN031), from Slivnica Monastery (MKN032) and the eastern side of the already mentioned Galiçica National Park.

Other smaller lakes are part of the list:

- Liçeni i Fierzës at the bottom of Poravë (ALB005)
- Liçeni i Komanit (ALB007)
- Likeni i Ulzës (Bushkash, ALB019)
- Liçeni i Bovillës (Bovilla Reservoir) from the Hida Road (ALB029)



Liçeni i Komanit



Liçeni i Bovillës

In the steep-sided valleys there are a lot of corniches, like:

- Muç-Has (ALB013) above the Drin River before the junction with the Liçeni i Fierzës.
- Zhaban (ALB050), from Çorovodë, that overhangs the Osum Canyon.
- Bratilë (ALB040) with a brand new asphalt above the Lumi Devoll.
- The road from Përmet to Çarçovë (ALB075) in the Vjosë Gorge.

The most beautiful scenic roads:

- The « stelvios » Leqet e Hotit (ALB002) and its breathtaking transparent viewpoint.
- The winding road to the Qafa e Thorës (ALB004). The eastern side is even more winding, but it is unpaved, paradise for mountain bikers and access to the Thethi National Park.
- Dajti Belvedere (ALB032), that towers 900m above Tirana.
- At the top of the BIG Gracen (ALB037), the sunset over the surrounding hills is a delight to the eyes.
- The rruga Çlirimi i Korçës (ALB055), that is 6km long, ends at a panorama with hotel and restaurant 450m above Korçë and its surroundings.



The hairpinned road to Leqet e Hotit



Dajti Belvedere and Tirana in the background

Two places to go skiing: Shishtavec (in the north-east, near the border with Kosovo) and the ski-pista Bigëll in Dardhë (EuroBIG, that lies in the south-east, near Greece).

4 UNESCO sites are in the list:

- The Archaeological Park in Butrint (ALB068)
- The Historic Centres of Berat (ALB047) and Gjirokastër (ALB074)
- The Ohrid region (Qafë e Thanës and Qafa e Plloçës, ALB 051 and 052)

The Apollonia Archaeological Park (ALB043) is not an official UNESCO site, but it belongs to the Albanian Tentative List.

Two other ancient cities: Byllis (ALB044) and Antigone (ALB073).



The Ancient Greek theatre in Butrint



The bouleuterion in Apollonia

Tops are often ancient castles (« kalaja »):

- The BIG Rozafa (ALB006) in Shkodër in the Zone 1
- Prezë (ALB031) and Petrelë (ALB034) in the Zone 2
- Berat (ALB047), Kaninë (ALB064) above Vlora, Lëkursi (ALB066) above Saranda, and Gjirokastër (ALB074) in the Zone 3.



Gjirokastër



and Petrelë Castles

A few religious places reveal the Albanian multiconfessionalism:

- The sacred Mount Tomorr (ALB049).
- A bit further south, the Teqeja e Baba Aliut in Alipostivan (ALB071), very important place of worship in the Bektashi Sufism.
- The Sari Saltik Sanctuary (Turkish dervish, venerated as a saint by the Bektashis), place of pilgrimage at the top of Mali i Krujës (ALB027).

- The Saint Anthony Church of Laç (Kisha e Shna Ndout - e Laçit, ALB018), the most important catholic church in Albania.
- The Orthodox Ardenica Monastery (ALB042).

The Royal Villa in Durrës (ALB030). Ahmet Zogu was the King of the Albanians from 1928 to 1939 as Zog I of Albania.



Teqeja e Baba Aliut



Ahmet Zogu's Villa

Sport in Albania

The hardest climb of the list is by far the Mount Tomorr: 2373m high, 2221m elevation gain in 31km, 2454 europoints and a bomb at 46. It's unpaved, but however the track allows cars to reach the top, which is a place of pilgrimage.



What else besides Tomorr?

The highest tops (above 1300m): Qafa e Thorës (1660m), Dardhë (1591m), Shishtavec (1379m), Bordolecit (1358m) and the Qafa e Çajupit (1312m).



The track to Bordolecit



Qafa e Çajupit

Europoints

Qafë e Shtamës (1060pts) is the second difficult climb, followed by Ploshtan (980), Qafa e Çajupit (966), Qafa e Llogarasë (940) and Qafa e Bordolecit (893).



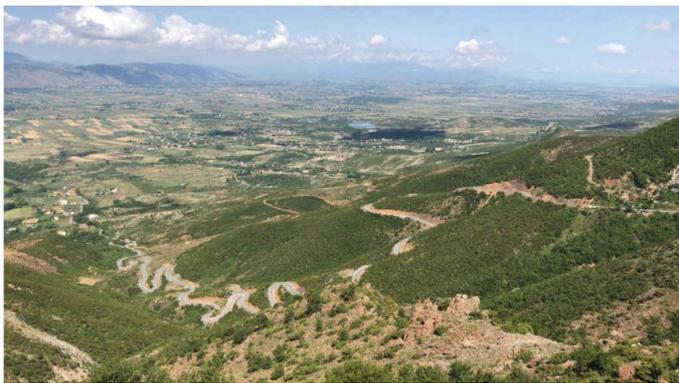
Qafa e Shtamës



The hairpins of Llogarasë

The most explosive (bombs):

Gjuricaj (36pts), Dardhë (33), Qafa e Çajupit and Rruga Çlirimi i Korçës (29), Rruga Lezhë-Ungrej, Mali i Krujës, Poravë and Kalaja e Gjirokastrës (28).



The hairpins from Lezhë to Ungrej



Cobbles in Korçë



Dardhë



The road to Shishtavec

The greatest elevation gains:

More than 1000m: Qafa e Thorës (1213m), Qafë e Shtamës (1205m), Qafa e Bordolecit (1123m), Qafa e Çajupit (1098m), Shishtavec (1054m) and Qafa e Llogarasë (1044m).

The longest: Qafa e Pukës (45km), Qafë e Shtamës (32), Valbonë (32), Mali i Tomorrit (31), Qafa e Thorës (29), Ploshtan (29), Qafa e Hazërit (25) and Shishtavec (25).



The road to Pukë



Vallbonë National Park

Albania and the media

The Tour of Albania (Turi Çiklistik i Shqipërisë) exists since 1925. Winners were always Albanian, except from 2014 (3 victories for Serbia and Italy). In 2017 and 2018, the routes were the same and they crossed 8 climbs of the challenge:

1st stage (Tirana-Korçë): Qafa e Thanës-O and Qafa e Ploçës above the Lake Ohrid.

2nd stage (Korçë-Elbasan): Thanë in the other direction (SE).

3rd stage (Elbasan-Vlorë): the N side of the BIG Gracen.

4th stage (Vlorë-Sarandë): the ledge road with Llogara, Borsh and the finish line at Lëkursi Castle above Sarandë.

5th stage (Sarandë-Fier): northward across the Qafa e Muzinë and Bejar.



View to the Qafa e Thanës



The hairpins to Gracen (from Elbasan)



The bottom of Muzinë (East side)

A hill climb makes the connection between Tirana (Mother Teresa Square) and Dajti Belvedere (ALB032). 26km and a nice 1000m elevation gain.

Garë Çiklizmi për amatorë dhe profesionistë për të gjitha moshat

Ndërgjegjësojmë për Malet

10 Dhjetor

Ora 10:00

Starti
Sheshi "Nënë Tereza"

Finish tek fusha Dajt **26.km**



The hill climb to Dajti in one shot



High-angle shot of the road to Mali i Krujës

The Auto Club Albania organizes a hill climb from Krujë to Mali i Krujës (ALB027):

SAFETY PLAN KRUJA HILL CLIMB 2021

AUTO CLUB ALBANIA

START
KM 0
790 Meters
Above Sea Level

FINISH
3.8 Km
1130 Meters
Above Sea Level

MAP LEGEND

- MARSHAL
- FIREFIGHTERS
- AMBULANCE
- POLICE
- ROAD ASSISTANCE

TRACK

- Type: Asphalt
- Length: 3800 meters
- Width: 6 meters
- Curves: 7 to the left, 8 to the right
- Signals: Flags and board