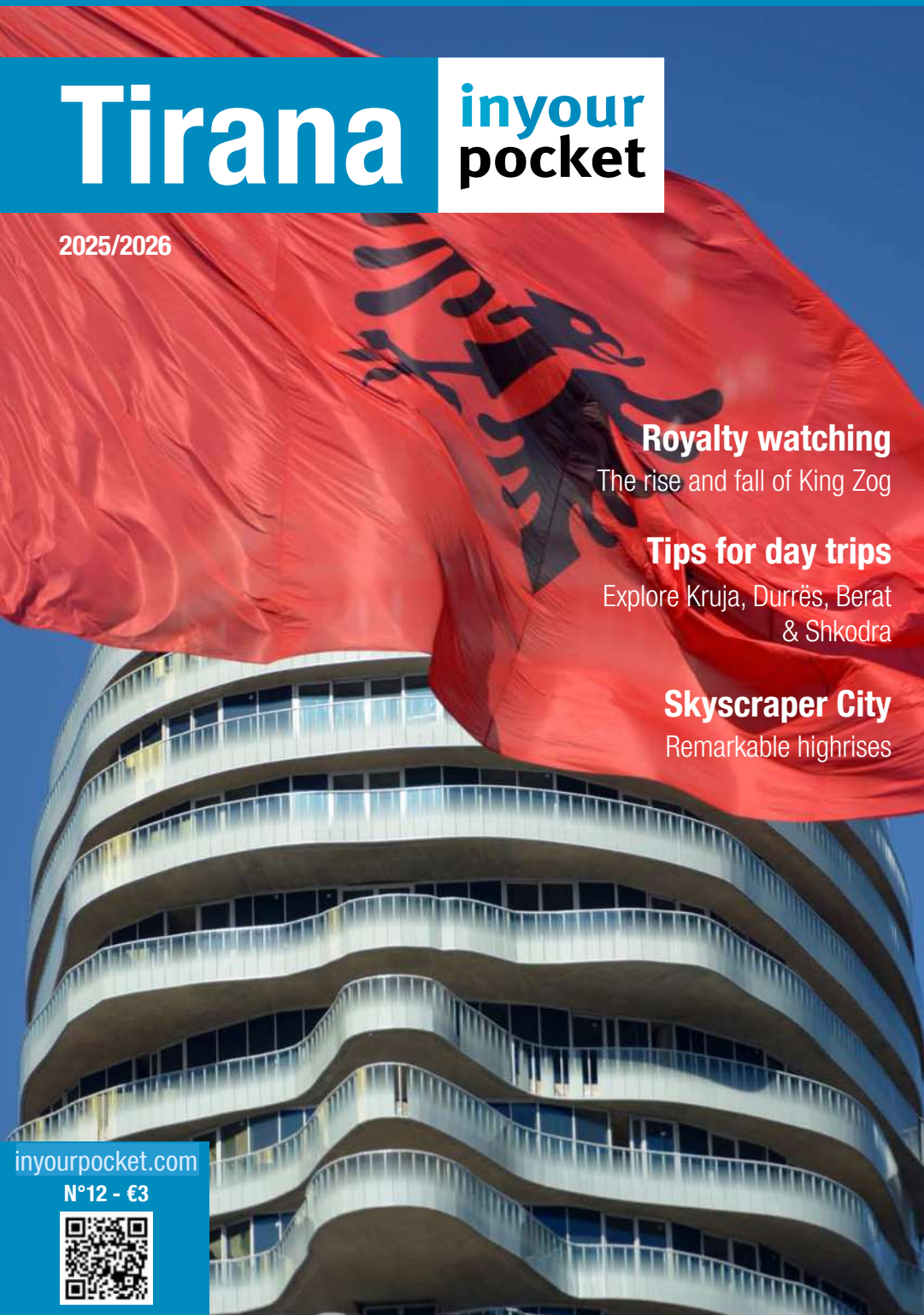
Tirana

inyour pocket

2025/2026



Royalty watching

The rise and fall of King Zog

Tips for day trips

Explore Kruja, Durrës, Berat & Shkodra

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Et'hem Bey Mosque by night

Basking in newfound popularity, Tirana is rapidly climbing the ranks of must-see destinations, with ever more foreigners travelling here to see what the fuss is all about. Yet, despite the dramatic changes the city has gone through in recent years - all the road expansion, traffic measures, and new buildings - we're relieved that one thing remains the same, and that is the hospitality, courtesy and friendliness that visitors still can expect when interacting with the citizens of the Albanian capital.

In this 12th edition of Tirana In Your Pocket, we look up at the wild designs of the new skyscrapers in town. We also look back at the pivotal events of summer 1990, when an ordinary Albanian smashed through an embassy wall with his truck and ignited a revolution. Tirana is well-positioned for all kinds of adventures, so we also present several day trips to historical and beautiful destinations within easy reach of the city.

We hope you enjoy exploring Tirana as much as we do writing about it. We welcome all tips and comments at albania@inyourpocket.com.

Cover Story



The iconic and almost-finished Tirana's Rock building literally overlooks the city's main square from beside the Opera house and the national flag. At 89 metres high, it's not the tallest new build in town, but it's certainly the most… striking. Intended to resemble national hero Skanderbeg, it's just one of many wacky modern buildings sprouting up in the city centre. See our Skyscraper City feature on p.50 for more. Photo by Erich Mehrl.

Tirana's magnetism

Attraction is a mysterious thing: a quick look, a stolen glance, then a casual gaze, until you finally approach your new object of desire and fully engage. Tirana, I believe, works similarly. Long overlooked, this city now exerts a powerful magnetism, drawing visitors worldwide. Those who let themselves be drawn into this magnet will find that Tirana combines zest for life, a love for partying, incredible food, and friendship in a unique way – truly, the Albanian way. At Tirana In Your Pocket, we're dedicated to promoting our fascinating capital and ensuring foreigners make the most of their visit. Welcome to Albania – enjoy Tirana!



Gazmend Haxhia, publisher

About this guide

The *Tirana In Your Pocket* city guide is part of an international series of acclaimed city guides. Our guides are written for foreign travellers and residents, to provide honest, critical information that makes visiting the city easier. As a private and commercial initiative, this guide has been written and researched by a team of local and foreign travel guide experts.

Udhëzuesi i qytetit *Tirana In Your Pocket* (‚Tirana në xhepin tuaj') është udhëzuesi i vetëm në gjuhën angleze që i dedikohet kryeqytetit të Shqipërisë, dhe është pjesë e një sërë udhëzuesve të njohur të qyteteve në mbarë Evropën. Udhëzuesit in your pocket janë dizajnuar për udhëtarët e huaj dhe banorët, por thjeshtë që të sigurojnë informata të sinqerta kritike që e bëjnë vizitën në qytet më të lehtë për të sapoardhurit. Si një iniciative private komerciale, Tirana In Your Pocket është shkruar dhe hulumtuar nga një ekip i ekspertëve vendor dhe të huaj të udhëzuesve të udhëtimit.

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Transport

Departing from Tirana International Airport

Getting to Albania has never been this easy, with affordable links via land, sea and air. Once you've arrived, keep in mind that as long as you're on the ground it's going to be a bumpy ride, whether you take a taxi, bus, car or train.

Public transport

Tirana's fleet of buses plies a total of 16 routes every day between about 05:00 and 22:00, with lines and timetables available in Google Maps. Simply get on and wait for the conductor to come by to collect the 40 lek fare. It's unlikely you'll ever have to wait more than 10 minutes to travel on one, so at these prices and at this frequency, it would be somewhat impolite to complain. See the Tirana city bus map on p.46-47.

Taxis

Taxis are a useful form of transport in Tirana, and after 22:00, if you're too tipsy to walk or confidently operate a bicycle, they're the only game in town. Rates start at 300 lek for the first 2km (sufficient for most city centre trips) and 95 lek/km after that. Between 22:00 and 07:00 the start rate rises to 350 lek. Rates to and from the airport vary from around 1200 lek to 2200 lek. Not all drivers speak English, so it's a good idea to write down the address, or to telephone someone who can explain.

Green Taxis

Electric fleet of taxis; use their website to share your location via Whatsapp. Green has an attractive flat airport rate, with pick-ups from the hotel opposite the terminal. ▸ tel. +355 800 20 00, www.green.al.

Merr Taxi

Merr has a fixed rate of 650 lek from central Tirana to the Dajti Express cable car. ▸ tel. +355 67 400 66 10/+355 800 5555, www.merrtaxi.com. Always Open.

Speed Taxi

The taxis with the kangaroo. Easy online ride booking. ▸ tel. +355 4 222 25 55/+355 69 642 2211, www.speedtaxi.al.

Taxi Lux Albania

Cheap fixed rates to (1100 lek) and from (1300 lek) the airport. ▸ tel. 04 562 0333, www.taxiluxalbania.al. Always open.

Airport

Tirana's ever-expanding Nënë Tereza International Airport, aka Rinas, is located 17km northwest of the city centre. There's a bookshop, ATMs, mobile phone shops, a small supermarket and cafés. The airport express bus runs from near Skenderbeg Square hourly, day and night, for 400 lek. Alternatively, a taxi costs between 1,200-3,000 lek, taking 25 minutes to an hour, depending on traffic. ▸ Rinas, tel. +355 4 238 18 00, www.tirana-airport.com.

Helicopters

Viva Helicopters

Flightseeing trips all across Albania and neighbouring countries. The Viva fleet of three helicopters is run by a German aviation team and based in Baldushk, 15km south of town, with an office on the 3rd floor of the Galeria ETC mall. Prices start at €36 per minute. ▸ Baldushk, tel. +355 42 27 19 38, www.vivahelicopters.com.

Car rental

Renting a car in Albania starts at around €30 a day for the cheapest model. Besides Google, the free Maps.me app offers downloadable offline road maps.

Avis

Offices in the city centre and at the airport. ▸ H-5, Rr. Themistokli Germenji, tel. +355 67 60 38 900, www.avis.al.

Budget

▸ H-5, Rr. Themistokli Germenji, tel. +355 4 450 05 41/+355 67 60 38 900, www.budget.com.

Hertz

▸ Tirana airport, tel. +355 69 205 87 75/+355 692058775, www.hertzalbania.com.

Camper vans

Fully equipped camper vans, some of them 4x4, can be rented from two companies, and are a fantastic way to get around the country.

Camper Albania

Camper vans from €100 per day. For a small fee, you also get a map marked with recommended spots to park or get fresh drinking water. ▸ Manëz, tel. +355 69 526 49 83, www.camper-albania.eu.

Campervan Albania

Top-range to basic self-built camper vans from €90 per night, complete with route tips and 24/7 online assistance. ▸ SH56, Pezë-Helmës, tel. +355 676 46 16 03, www.renting-van-albania.com.

Driving

Whist the country's roads may be improving, the local drivers who use them continue to be among the worst imaginable, with road fatality figures some of the highest in Europe. Disrespectful of the law and seemingly unaware of the fact that pedestrians are soft and break easily, the quintessential Albanian motorist is easily distracted, oblivious to speed limits and would rather undergo torture than wear a seatbelt. Before 1991, only Party officials were allowed to own and drive cars, of which there were only about 600 in the entire country.

Speed limits are 40km/h in urban areas and villages, 80km/h outside those, 90km/h on dual carriageways, and 110 km/h on highways. Drivers are required by law to have a fire extinguisher, yellow vest and first aid kit in the car, and always drive with the lights on. In cities, be aware of everything, in the countryside, keep an eye out for potholes and donkeys.

Long-distance buses

Travel to and from Tirana is easier than ever, with regular departures to Albanian cities and neighbouring countries from two new **bus terminals**, connected to the centre by city bus. Some domestic destinations are served by *furgon* minibuses, a transport choice often held together with little more than tape and prayers; large buses usually offer more comfort. The official bus timetable website can be found at www.etransport.al, the commercial site www.travel.gjirafa.com can also sell some tickets online, though it's often easier to simply show up and pay at a kiosk or to the driver.

North-South Bus Terminal (Terminali i Autobusave të Veriut dhe Jugut)

The bus station for national and international destinations to the north ('veri') and south ('jug') of Tirana. Reached on bus 5B from the city centre. ▸ Rr. Kastriotet, Kashar.

Tirana East Bus Terminal (Terminali Lindor i Autobuseve Ndërqytetas)

The bus station for national and international destinations to the south ('jug') and east ('lindje') of Tirana. It's part of the TEG mall, reached on bus 8A from the city centre. ▸ Tirana East Gate Mall (TEG).

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Travel agencies

Albanian Trip
A renowned travel agency that's committed to sustainable tours offering 'handmade' boutique travel experiences for groups and individuals, working with specialists and supporting local communities where possible. Food, nature, bunkers and military history are their specialities, and some tours include a meeting with one of Albania's famed sworn virgins. ▸ tel. + 355 4 220 8414/+355 68 406 62 07, www.albaniantrip.com.

Landways International
Guided city tours, day trips to Apollonia, Berat, Durrës, Kruja and other destinations, plane tickets, discounted booking of the best hotels, and much more. ▸ H-5, Rr. Themistokli Germenji 10, tel. +355 42 255 655, www.landways.eu.

Outdoor Albania
Tailor-made trips: trekking, mountain biking, rafting, kayaking, mountaineering, paragliding, 4W-driving and more, for individuals or groups. Even if you're in just Tirana for a short while, they can arrange an active day trip in the nearby mountains. ▸ Rr. Gjin Bue Shpata 9/1, tel. +355 4 222 71 21, www.outdooralbania.com.

Cycling

Bike Point Albania
Excellent bike shop with rental of city bikes for 1500 lek/day and mountain bikes from 2500 lek/day, as well as sales and repairs. Also organizes off-road tours around Tirana. ▸ Rr. Myslym Shyri 44/3, tel. +355 68 860 00 60. Open 09:00-13:00, 14:00-18:00; Sat 09:00-13:00; closed Sun.

Cycle Albania
Mountain (e-)bikes, from 1800 lek per day. Also organizes various multi-day tours through Albania. ▸ Rr. Bardhok Biba, tel. +355 69 247 57 28, www.cyclealbania.com. Open 08:00-17:00.

Evergreen
Mountain bike rental, from 2,000 lek per day. ▸ Rr. Ibrahim Rugova, tel. +355 69 738 69 49. Open 10:30-21:00.

LikSad e-Bike
Normal and e-bikes for rent from €24-40 per day. ▸ Rr. Margarita Tutulani, tel. +355 683 61 29 98, www.liksad.com. Open 09:00-21:00; closed Sun.


Albanian eagle traffic light

Luggage storage

Luggage storage is a new phenomenon in Albania. Just a few years ago, you would have a problem finding a place to leave some bags in a central and safe place in Tirana. In the meantime, a small revolution has transpired, and several independent new places have popped up across the city centre where you can safely store your bags for a few hours or a few days. Some of them are classic staffed storage spaces, others are unmanned high-tech affairs that are open 24 hours per day. Others are developing into handy one-stop tourist shops, offering everything from storage to car rental, accommodation and tour bookings. Prices for luggage storage generally start at around 150 lek for an hour.

International apps that are active in Tirana include *Bounce* (available at restaurants Bitter, Fruit Juice & More, Shije Fshati, or at the Nerium Garden Inn hotel near the airport, among others).

Bablock
Smart self-service luggage lockers, accessible day and night. Lockers accept both cash and card payment. ▸ E-4, Rr. Ded Gjo Luli, Lulishtja e Piacës, tel. +355 69 876 33 63, www.lockers.al. Open 24hrs.

Lock It
Luggage storage shop with novel services like power bank rental, boarding pass printing, and a changing room. Also on Rruga Mine Peza with a self-service locker room. ▸ G-4, Blv. Gjergj Fishta 9, tel. +355 69 207 28 08, www.lockit.al. Open 10:00-22:00.

Luggage Storage Tirana
Card payments accepted. On the corner of Rr. Qemal Stafa. ▸ E-4, Rr. Barrikadave, NECI Services, Elevator A1, 1st floor, tel. +355 69 246 08 22, www.luggagestoragetirana.com. Open 08:00-21:00.

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King Zog I in 1939, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

The legacy of King Zog

King Zog I of Albania (Burrel 1895 - Paris 1961), one of the 20th century's most fascinating monarchs, rose from humble beginnings to claim the throne in 1928. Born as Ahmet Zogolli to an aristocratic family, he was a shrewd politician, rising through the ranks in the tumultuous local political landscape of the early 1900s. As the country's only king, he is remembered for his modernization and westernization efforts and his staunch nationalist stance, which he attempted to translate to his people. He's also known for his dependence on Italian funds, and the high level of corruption at the time. Despite his exile after the outbreak of World War II and the renunciation of all things royal under the communist regime, traces of Albania's brief royal history still linger in Tirana - not least in the grand 1930s government buildings lining the main boulevard.

When Albania transitioned into a democracy after 1990, the king's son, Prince Leka, came to Tirana to advocate for the return to a monarchy, however only 33% of voters supported that idea in a 1997 referendum. King Zog's grandson, also called Leka, is currently the head of the royal house, and he's an active figure in Albanian high society, politics, charity and diplomacy.

Visitors looking for traces of Albania's royal past should start at the **statue of *Mbreti Zog***, King Zog, at the northern end of Zog I Boulevard near the crossing with Rruga Petrela. This boulevard, together with many other infrastructural projects, was built during the reign of the king as part of his attempts to change Tirana from a small and remote city, rather randomly chosen as capital, to a more fitting centre of government. The statue depicts the king in his military attire, as a fitting ode to the country's only monarch. Just down the road, on the corner of Rruga Fortuzi, stands the elegant statue of **Geraldine Apponyi**, Zog's wife, who was *Mbretëresha e Shqiptarëve* or "Queen of the Albanians" for the last year of Zog's rule, and nicknamed the white rose. Born in Budapest, her statue was donated in 2022 by the Hungarian embassy.

Another site of interest is the former **Royal Palace** at the eastern edge of the Grand Park, now used as Albania's Presidential Palace and unfortunately closed to the public, although the gardens can be visited (Sat & Sun 09:00-20:00, winter 09:00-16:00; free). The idea of a grand royal residence was brought up by Zog in the early 1930s, and construction started shortly after. However, Albania's invasion by Italy delayed completion until 1941, and Zog never got to reside there. The palace was used only once for its intended purpose, by Italian King Victor Emmanuel III, who slept there during his only tour of Albania. The building was used by the Italian viceroys until Albania's liberation in 1944, when it was stormed and ransacked by Communist brigades. After WWII, the palace was used for government receptions, with all paintings, engravings or furniture from the monarchy removed. It remains a venue for high-profile government events, acting as a testament of Albania's rich history.



Near the palace, the monumental **Royal Mausoleum** is a quiet, reflective site dedicated to the memory of many members of the Zog family. It was built in 1935 for the burial of Zog's mother, Queen Sadije. After the communists took Tirana from the Nazis in 1944, the mausoleum was demolished, then seen as an unwanted symbol of a bygone era. In 2012, an exact replica was rebuilt by the Albanian government in order to reconnect with the forgotten past. The graves of King Zog, the Queen Mother, Zog's Austro-Hungarian wife Queen Geraldine, his son Prince Leka and his Australian wife Princess Susan are all located here. Find it beside the Sofra e Ariut restaurant.

Though King Zog's legacy is both celebrated and controversial, his royal landmarks provide travelers with an intriguing glimpse into Albania's royal past. It's a journey through time, offering insights into a period of Albania's history that, while short, shaped the nation in ways that still echo today.

By Erik Haxhia



Culture

Sheshi Italia square

Tirana offers a surprisingly diverse selection of culture, but finding it is another matter entirely though. Visit the websites and social media of these venues, ask anyone with an interesting haircut and keep an eye out for posters.

Cinemas

Films are usually shown in their original languages with Albanian subtitles, with tickets generally costing 400-600 lek. In 2025, the Tirana International Film Festival takes place from 21-27 September, the International Human Rights Film Festival from 15-20 September.

Cineplexx

Seven screening rooms showing mostly blockbuster films. Cineplexx also has screens at the QTU mall along the Durres highway. ▸ Tirana East Gate mall (TEG), tel. +355 44 50 02 40, www.cineplexx.al.

Kinema Millennium

Screens popular foreign films in English with Albanian subtitles. Book in advance for evening and weekend screenings. ▸ F-5, Rr. Murat Toptani, tel. +355 69 78 56 678, www.kinemamillennium.com.

Marubi Film & Multimedia Academy

Regular free screenings (classics on Thursday at 19:00h) inside the city's film school, *Akademia e Filmit dhe Multimedias Marubi*, north-east of the centre. Bus 11 or 15A. ▸ Rr. Aleksandër Moisiu 78, tel. +355 69 207 95 17, www.afmm.edu.al.

Cultural centres

Once dominated by the foreign-run centres that still are important promotors of international culture and events, Tirana's cultural scene is growing increasingly diverse.

Destil Creative Hub

For creative types there is no other place like Destil (named after 1920s Dutch art movement, *De Stijl*). Providing exhibition space for up-and-coming artists, musicians, photographers and even historians wanting to present their topic in an interesting way, events held here are widely varied. This is also one of the few true LGBTQ+ venues in town. ▸ D-4, Blv. Zogu I, tel. +355 69 374 54 33, www.destil.al. Open 08:00-24:00.

Tirana Ekspres

The railway warehouse where Tirana's first true 'art space' started off was unfortunately bulldozed, but they've popped up again here as a centre for art exhibitions and events ranging from performances, shows and film screenings to party nights. ▸ E-6, Rr. Hoxha Tahsin, tel. +355 69 656 90 03, www.tiranaekspres.com. Open for events only.

Tulla Culture Center

A wonderful space for alternative culture, art and music, and a café too. ▸ I-2, Rr. Hiqmet Delvina 4/2, tel. +355 69 382 96 19, www.tulla.tv. Open 09:00-17:00; Sat 11:00-15:00; closed Sun. Free entry.

Theatre, Opera & Dance

ArTurbina Theater

A modern theatre with two stages in a former turbine laboratory building, currently used by the National Theatre. ▸ I-4, Rr. Sami Frashëri, tel. +355 4 222 30 22, www.teatrikombetar.gov.al.

National Theatre of Opera & Ballet

Performances by Tirana's enthusiastic opera company inside the Palace of Culture, with English surtitles shown above the stage. ▸ E-4, Sheshi Skënderbej, tel. +355 4 222 74 71, www.tkob.gov.al. Ticket office open 10:00-14:00, 16:00-20:00. Tickets 500-2500 lek.



Sights

Mosaic on the National History Museum

Tirana's strengths lie not in landmark sights to be crossed off a bucket list, but in its vibrancy and the warmth of the people who live in it, qualities many better-known cities lack. Tirana is very much a city for the *flâneur*, a chaotic urban concoction, bursting with unexpected sights and sounds that are best appreciated whilst strolling its streets in a leisurely fashion. If you must see some must-sees, visit the Et'hem Bey Mosque and the House of Leaves museum.

Tirana Highlights

Blloku

'The block' is a relatively small patchwork of streets in southwest central Tirana, saturated with some of the best bars, restaurants and shops in the city. After WW2, the area was full of factories that were cleared to make way for an enclosed and guarded complex of luxury residential buildings for the exclusive use of the country's ruling elite. Reopened to the public during the political changes of the early 1990s, the *Blloku* is now the place to come for fine dining, people-watching from one of the countless café terraces, and endlessly driving around in circles showing off flashy rental cars. ▸ H-4.

Bulevardi Dëshmorët e Kombit

The "Boulevard of the Martyrs of the Nation" is a wide and impressive kilometre-long road stretching north-south between Sheshi Skënderbej and Sheshi Nënë Tereza. The street and many of the examples of fascist architecture along it are the work of the Italian architect Gherardo Bosio in the late 1930s. With several of the city's museums, national institutions, and the Et'hem Bey Mosque along its length, the street offers something of a condensed history lesson of the city in one architectural ensemble. ▸ C-4, I-5.

Pyramid (Piramida)

The pyramid, as it's popularly known, opened in 1988 as a museum dedicated to the recently deceased Albanian dictator-cum-pharaoh Enver Hoxha. Designed by Hoxha's daughter Pranvera, the building was reportedly the most expensive ever constructed in Albania. After the regime collapsed, the place became a conference centre and location of a club (called *The Mummy*, of course). Demonstrations prevented plans to demolish the structure, and recently it was transformed by Dutch architects MVRDV into a playful complex with colourful scattered boxes, with an educational centre and cafés inside. The exterior is fitted with steps providing free access to the peak, a great spot for sunset views. Near the street crossing, the Peace Bell is a memorial from 1999 made by the children of Shkodra; the metal for the bell came from thousands of bullet cartridges fired off in the lawless 1990s. ▸ G-5, Blv. Bajram Curri, www.piramida.edu.al.

Skanderbeg Square (Sheshi Skënderbej)

Tirana's sprawling Skanderbeg Square is the city's undisputed heart. Focused around the impressive equestrian statue of national hero Gjergj Kastrioti Skanderbeg and dominated by various high-rises, this

vast pedestrianized space hums with life on summer evenings. Made with paving stones from across Albania and fringed by the mosaic-adorned National History Museum, the Palace of Culture, the landmark Et'hem Bey Mosque and the historic Clock Tower, the square was a chaotic traffic roundabout just a few years ago. Now a public space for leisure and events, it's perfect for people-watching, and taking in Tirana's unique blend of architectural styles. ▸ E-4.

Ottoman Tirana

Tirana existed and grew under Ottoman rule for 500 years. For lovers of Ottoman architecture however, the news isn't good. A great many of the city's original Ottoman-era buildings were destroyed by Mussolini and Hoxha, and, except for the structures listed below, little of the original Ottoman city exists.

Clock Tower (Kulla e Sahatit)

Tirana's Ottoman clock tower was built by the poet Haxhi Et'hem Bey, and dates from 1822. Extended to 35m in 1928 when a German-made clock was also installed (the current Chinese clock is the fourth in the tower's existence), it was for a long time the tallest building in the city, but is increasingly dwarfed by new high-rises. The climb up the 90 steps to the top is worth it for the views of the main square. ▸ F-4/5, Sheshi Skënderbej, tel. +355 4 224 32 92. Open 08:00-15:00; Sat 09:00-14:00; closed Sun. Admission 200 lek.

Et'hem Bey Mosque (Xhamia e Et'hem Beut)

Tirana's most lovely sight is this gorgeous little mosque, built between 1790s to the 1820s by Molla Bey and his son, Haxhi Et'hem Bey. Closed under Communist rule, some 10,000 courageous people dared to attend prayers in January 1991, and remarkably the police did nothing to intervene, an event now hailed as a milestone in the rebirth of religious freedom in Albania. Have a look at the colourful frescoes outside and in the portico which depict trees, waterfalls and bridges - motifs rarely seen in Islamic art. Visitors are welcome outside prayer times; dress appropriately and remove your shoes before entering. ▸ F-4, Sheshi Skënderbej. Open 09:00-11:00, 12:30-14:30, 16:00-17:00; Fri open 09:00-11:00, 13:00-14:00.

Kapllan Pasha's Tomb (Tyrbe e Kapllan Pashait)

This elegant eight-columned tomb from 1817 celebrates Kapllan Pasha, an Ottoman ruler of the city. Originally part of a larger mosque complex that was destroyed during WWII, the monument sat neglected and immersed in rubbish for decades until it was incorporated into the modern building that

City tours

Open Bus Albania

Tirana's open-top bus tour runs every 45-60 minutes starting just east of the main square and looping around the city centre in around an hour. Audio guides in 12 languages inform you about Albania's history and the sights along the route. It also stops off on Bulevardi i Ri and Sheshi Nënë Tereza square, though it's perhaps best to do the tour from the start to get the full story. Tickets can be bought online or on the bus. Also tours around Durrës. ▸ tel. +355 69 703 35 55, www.openbusalbania.com. Tours daily, every 45-60 minutes between 10:00-17:00. Tickets 2,000/1,250 lek.

Tirana Free Tour

Tirana walking tours in several languages by enthusiastic local guides, starting in front of the opera building every day, year round. The 4km route takes around 2-2.5 hours and covers all main sights and the city's recent history. Book online if you're bringing more than 7 people, or for their street art & modern architecture, communism and food tours. Tours are free, but tips are expected and much appreciated. ▸ E-4, Sheshi Skënderbej, tel. +355 69 631 58 58, www.tiranafreetour.com. English tours daily at 09:00, 10:00, 11:30, 14:00, 17:00 and 18:00; less frequently from Oct-Mar.

Market

Anyone with a cardboard box, a few packets of cigarettes and a square metre of pavement is effectively a market trader in Tirana. Whenever it rains, people will appear as if by magic, armed with a clutch of umbrellas for sale.

Pazari i Ri

Tirana's 'new market', actually dating back to 1931, is the city's main market, and an important source of fresh produce for the locals with 130 vendors. Indoors there's meat, fish and cheese, while an elegant roof protects the sellers of olives, figs, wine, piles of loose tobacco, *raki*, and - our favourite bargain souvenir - granny-knitten woolly house socks. Early morning is the best time of day to witness the Balkan-style trading and haggling. The area has a lively scene with many good restaurants. ▸ E-5, Sheshi Avni Rustemi, www.pazariiri.al.

now graciously shields it at one corner. Grave-robbers beware, the tomb contains neither treasure nor the remains of Kaplan Pasha, who was later dug up and reburied in Istanbul. ▸ F-5, Rr. 28 Nëntori.

Mahmud Agha Kokonozi Mosque

Sometimes referred to as the New Bazaar Mosque (*Xhamia e Pazarit të Ri*), this fine Ottoman-era building besides the market dates from the middle of the 18th century and is one of a very few of its kind to survive the brutal atheist campaign that started in the late 1960s. Used as a food and tobacco store during the Hoxha period, the mosque reopened in 1991 with a reconstructed minaret - one of only a handful in the region to feature two balconies. ▸ E-5, Rr. Shemsi Haka, Pazari i Ri.

Serai of Selim Pasha Toptani

The grand wooden Toptani family house is one of the few traditional Ottoman houses belonging to feudal lords (*serai*) to survive in Tirana. Built between 1833-1840, it is still looking rather lovely and features a small *hamamxhik* bath and carved wooden ceilings. Closed for now, plans are to renovate it for use as Tirana's ethnographic museum, but until then, you'll have to peek at the quaint exterior from over the fence. ▸ F-5, Rr. Abdi Toptani 7.

Sheikh Dyrri Tekke (Teqja e Sheh Dyrrit)

A beautiful 19th-century wooden prayer building set in a small courtyard. Next to the gate is an octagonal *türbe* holding the graves of three *babas*. Find the house in a small courtyard beside the Sami Frasheri school. It's usually open by appointment only. ▸ D-4, Rr. Barrikadave, tel. +355 69 728 81 11.

Tanners' Bridge (Ura e Tabakëve)

Somewhat lost in the modern city, this small and elegant triple-arched Ottoman stone footbridge once served as the main connection between Tirana and the highlands to the east. It was used to get agricultural produce and livestock across the Lana River to the markets, and sits in the traditional area of skinners and leather workers - hence the name. The Lana was rerouted in the 1930s and the bridge was neglected. It's now restored to its former glory and is proudly used by the locals again. ▸ F-6, Rr. George W. Bush. Admission free.

Tekke of Dervish Hatixhe (Teqeja Dervish Hatixhe)

A Sufi shrine in an unassuming building, dedicated to the female Bektashi saint Dervish Hatixhe Skenderi (1798-?), Tirana's own Florence Nightingale who nursed people through a bubonic plague epidemic. After her death, this *tekke* was founded near her grave, which miraculously survived the Hoxha regime hidden below a concrete floor, with worshippers risking their lives by secretly visiting. It still visited by people of different faiths, especially women. A corridor leads past a soot-blackened candle room to where the graves of Hatixhe, members of her family and a former servant can all be seen. ▸ C-4, Rr. Dervish Hatixhe 12, www.dervishhatixhe.com. Open 07:00-19:00. Admission free.

Tirana Castle (Kalaja e Tiranës)

The foundations that have been incorporated into the pedestrian Rruga Toptani street are all that is left of Tirana's original castle, a military stronghold dating from some time between the 4th and 6th centuries, though there's also a stretch of defensive wall further along the street from Ottoman times. The Toptani family from Kruja took possession of the castle around 1800, leading to decades of conflict that was only settled by intermarrying the warring families, after which Tirana started growing. The bazaar-like *Kalaja e Tiranës* street inside the complex is lined by upmarket restaurants and shops. ▸ F-5, Rr. Murat Toptani, tel. +355 69 685 47 05, www.kalajaetiranes.com.

Vila Sali Shijaku (Shtepia e Sali Shijakut)

This magnificent example of a stately Ottoman-era *konak* house is at least 300 years old, and has over the centuries served as a military building, a hospital and even a women's prison. Now owned by the Albanian artist Sali Shijaku (1933) and surrounded by a beautiful garden, the villa operates as a café and gallery containing a large collection of Impressionist and Socialist Realist paintings. Well worth visiting for a glimpse of old Tirana. ▸ B-5, Rr. Vildan Luarasi 24, tel. +355 4 226 14 58. Open 08:00-21:00. Admission 350 lek.



Kadare House

Religious sights

Despite the former Communist regime's total ban on religion starting in 1967 in which all 2169 religious buildings in Albania were closed and religious leaders of every faith persecuted, imprisoned, tortured and murdered, contemporary Albania has witnessed something of a religious revival since the regime change of 1991. As Tirana's skyline suggests, the Albanian capital is home to believers from a number of faiths including both Sunni and Bektashi Muslims, Catholics and members of the Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania.

Bektashi World Centre (Qendra Botërore Bektashiane)

The Bektashi Order is a dervish sect that fuses elements of predominantly Shia and Sufi thought into a unique blend of Islamic belief and philosophy. Founded in the 16th century and named in honour of the Muslim mystic Haji Bektash Veli (1209-1271), the Bektashi were found throughout the Ottoman Empire and had among their followers the Albanian national heroes Ali Pasha and Naim Frashëri. The Bektashi Order was outlawed by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk soon after the foundation of the Republic of Turkey in 1923, an event that led them to move their headquarters to Albania in 1925. The fabulous Bektashi World Centre northeast of central Tirana features a vast and impressive *tekke* with a fascinating museum in its basement and a small gift shop. Admission is free, but you may be asked to leave ID at the entrance. Interestingly, this religious centre made international headlines in 2024 when the Albanian prime minister suggested turning it into a tiny Muslim enclave state, like the Vatican. ▸ Rr. Hysen Loci, tel. +355 67 308 82 71, www.kryegjyshataboterorebektashiane.org. Open 10:00-13:00, 17:00-19:00. Admission free.

Namazgah Mosque (Xhamia e Namazgjasë)

Since its completion in 2024, the huge Namazgah Mosque has become a major visitor magnet. With four 50-metre high minarets and a 30-metre high central dome, the Turkish-style mosque is the largest in the Balkans, funded indirectly by the Turkish state and presented as a symbol of the brotherhood between the two nations. It has space inside for 8000 worshippers, a cultural centre, library and underground parking. Shoes need to be removed to enter, and robes are provided for covering up. ▸ F-5, Rr. George W. Bush.

Orthodox Cathedral (Katedralja Ortodokse Ngjallja e Krishtit)

The 'Resurrection of Christ' Orthodox Cathedral, the third largest in Europe, was consecrated in 2012 and has a 32-metre-high dome and a separate 46-metre high bell tower with 16 bells and four symbolic candles



Bektashi world centre. Photo by Marmontel CC BY 2.0

symbolizing the evangelists who proclaimed Christ's resurrection. Below the frescoed main space, there's a large hall for meetings and conferences, and a small museum. To see it at its best, make a visit after dark, when the entire structure lights up like a Vegas casino. ▸ F-4, Rr. Ibrahim Rugova 1, tel. +355 4 225 72 61, www.orthodoxalbania.org.

St. Paul's Cathedral (Katedralja e Shën Palit)

This refreshingly simple, if somewhat gargantuan, house of worship was consecrated in 2002. The cathedral is built using a combined triangle and circle shape, representing the Trinity and God's Eternity respectively, and has a relatively plain interior. The stained-glass windows at the front feature both Mother Teresa, whose statue can also be found outside, and Pope John Paul II, who visited the site of the church and laid the cornerstone in 1993. A range of classical music concerts are held inside the building throughout the year. On Sunday, English mass is at 09:00, Italian at 12:00. ▸ G-5, Blv. Zhan D'Ark. Open 07:00-19:00.

Adventure tourism

Zip Line Albania

Tirana's zip line, crossing the beautiful Erzen river valley near Petrelë castle, is also one of Europe's longest, at 1250 metres long. Zippers can expect to reach speeds of up to 100km/hr, depending on their weight and the wind, floating over trees, houses and the river. Visitors can optionally use a shuttle from the lower station to the take-off platform. It's a good idea to book ahead in summer and on weekends, and it's easy to combine a zip with a trip to the castle and the Fustanella Farm restaurant just down the road. ▸ Petrelë, tel. +355 67 400 44 44. Open 10:00-19:00. 1800 lek per ride, second ride 1200 lek.

Communist Tirana

For almost 50 years, the Albanians were at war with themselves, believing (or at least pretending to believe) they were fighting to defend a Socialist paradise. The reality, as everyone now knows, is somewhat different. Unlike for example the three Baltic States of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, occupied by Soviet Russia for a similar amount of time, the story of Communism in Albania is a strictly internal one, and it's only recently that any effort has been made to confront the recent past. Several worthwhile examples have emerged in Tirana.

Bunk'Art 1

This huge underground nuclear bunker built in the 1970s for Albania's political and military elite has been transformed into a combined museum and art space. Some 40 of the total 100-plus rooms on five sprawling levels contain exhibitions about the bunker's history, offering the first serious attempt to openly confront and openly discuss the country's silent past. Guided tours can be booked in advance. The bunker entrance is reached through a long tunnel, bus 11 stops nearby. ▸ Rr. Fadil Deliu, tel. +355 67 207 29 05, www.bunkart.al/1. Open 09:30-18:00. Admission 500 lek.

Bunk'Art 2

The second nuclear bunker to open to the public as a museum, this was completed in 1986 and lies behind the former Ministry of Internal Affairs in the city centre. Entered through a shattered bunker decorated with the photos of victims, the exhibition in the 24 rooms along cramped corridors focus on the history of the Albanian police, security forces, the labour camps and the terror spread by the *Sigurimi* secret police. The highlight of the complex is the lonely, wood-panelled private room of the minister. ▸ F-4, Rr. Abdi Toptani, tel. +355 67 207 29 05, www.bunkart.al/2. Open 09:30-18:00; Fri, Sat, Sun 09:30-20:00. Admission 500 lek.

Enver Hoxha's villa (Vila 31)

Peek over the fence to view the large 1970s villa once inhabited by dictator Enver Hoxha, filled with Western luxuries and books that were unknown and strictly forbidden for everyone else in Albania. Already surrounded by new highrises and thumping clubs, this monster's lair has finally been dragged into modern times by its recent conversion into a centre for art and experimentation, with local and international artists inhabiting the building for 3-month residencies - keeping the 1970s style and furnishings intact, and opening for exhibitions a few times per year. ▸ Rr. Ismail Qemali, www.artexplora.org/en/residences-dartistes-tirana.



The Bunk'Art 2 museum entrance

Museum of Secret Surveillance (House of Leaves) (Shtëpia me Gjethe)

This genuine house of horrors opposite the Orthodox Cathedral functioned as the national headquarters of the Gestapo during the Nazi occupation of 1943-1944 before falling into the hands of the *Sigurimi*, Albania's Communist-era version of the KGB, who used it as both a listening post and place of torture. The House of Leaves, named after the foliage then covering the facade, was opened as a museum of secret surveillance in 2017, focusing on the persecution of and psychological violence waged against Albanian citizens, and the ways the *Sigurimi* sought to control people's minds and bodies. In nine sections with names like "bugs and other creatures" or "daily life under surveillance", all manners of spy gadgets, photos and documents are on display, accompanied by witnesses' chilling tales. ▸ F-4, Rr. Dëshmorët e 4 Shkurtit, tel. +355 69 967 61 16/+355 69 967 61 16, www.muzeugjethi.gov.al. Open 09:00-19:00. Admission 700 lek.

Postblloku / Checkpoint

Part of Albania's attempts to un-erase certain aspects of its uncomfortable recent past and come to terms with its violent Communist-era history, the *Postblloku/Checkpoint* installation, or the 'Memorial to Communist Isolation', commemorates the country's political prisoners who suffered under the Hoxha regime in a small park along the main boulevard. Created by the former dissident Fatos Lubonja and the artist Ardian Isufi, the monument is made up of three elements: one of the small concrete defensive bunkers that to litter the country, concrete pillars from the mine at the notorious Spaç prison camp, where thousands of political prisoners suffered, and a brightly painted section of the Berlin Wall that once split that city in half. ▸ H-4, Blv. Dëshmorët e Kombit.

Bodinaku's Truck

A curious memorial, hidden at the rear of the German embassy compound on Rruga Xhezmi Delli, commemorates a decisive moment in Albania's path to democracy.

In the summer of 1990, when millions of Albanians still found themselves trapped in Europe's most repressive state, and with rumours of the fall of the Berlin Wall and dramatic political change across the region trickling through, the first cracks appeared when people demanded freedom during a violently suppressed demonstration in the town of Kavaja.

The West German ambassador at the time, Werner Daum, heard that some brave Albanians had requested asylum at other embassies in Tirana, but not at his own. Acting against the instructions of his government, he lit up the embassy at night and left the main gate open, to welcome any Albanians looking for asylum - and soon enough, the first people entered. At the same time, a truck driver named Ylli Bodinaku decided to take drastic action. On July 2, 1990, together with his wife and children, he drove his Skoda LIAZ truck at high speed straight at the massive rear wall of the West German embassy compound. Despite being wounded and bleeding after the impact, he managed to pull his family through the breach in the wall, and into diplomatic safety.

Eventually, some 3200 Albanians managed to enter the embassy compound, and a tense stand-off with the authorities started. They kept the media quiet about the events and cut off the embassy's electricity and water, later allowing news reports to state that the escapees were vandals and criminals. After 10 days, the government finally gave in and allowed all embassy refugees to leave Albania safely,



but continued their crackdown on dissidence until the student protests of December 1990 put an end to the miserable regime. Bodinaku and his family were invited to Germany, where he worked at a car factory, later returning to a free Albania. The worn-out German embassy, though officially closed, continued to serve asylum seekers. Ambassador Daum, content that changes had been set in motion, stayed on as caretaker for an additional month before he was recalled. Daum, who sadly passed away while back on holiday in Albania in 2025, is remembered as the "ambassador of freedom". Bodinaku's wild truck ride had set off a chain of events, helping to end of the brutal Communist dictatorship in Albania.

A memorial consisting of the front of a Skoda LIAZ truck, made by Bodinaku himself, was revealed at the rear of the German embassy compound to commemorate the actions of these brave Albanians. The memorial is easiest reached down the narrow alley beside the *Teg Zgara e Tirones* restaurant on Rruga e Kavajës. Another memorial commemorating those who risked their freedom on that day, a symbolically broken wall reading the date by sculptor Agim Rada, stands on Rr. Skënderbeg opposite the German embassy.

Cemeteries

Commonwealth War Graves (Varrezat e Memorialit)

53 British soldiers, most of them intelligence agents, lost their lives in Albania during WWII. This small cemetery in the Grand Park features the graves of 46 of them, and was established by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission only in 1995, their sacrifice being long suppressed from official Albanian history. There's a ceremony here every year on May 8. The red stone memorial to the servicemen originally was the stone on top of Enver Hoxha's grave in the National Martyrs' Cemetery, and you can still see the holes that held the plaque etched with the dictator's name in gold letters. ▸ K-6, Grand Park.

National Martyrs' Cemetery (Varrezat e Dëshmorëve)

The final resting place of some 900 Albanian partisans who gave their lives fighting to free Albania from fascist and Nazi occupation during WWII. Its literal and figurative crowning glory is Kristaq Rama's impressive, 12m-high white statue of Mother Albania, watching over the city in her windswept concrete gown. Dictator Enver Hoxha used to be buried at her feet until he fell from grace in 1991 and was moved to the city's municipal cemetery the following year. In an interesting political move, Hoxha's former resting place has been occupied with the remains of Azem Hajdari, the student leader behind the fight against the regime in the late 1980s who was assassinated in Tirana in 1998. The view of the city spread out below and mountains surrounding it is worth the visit alone. ▸ K-6, Rr. e Elbasanit.

Museums & Galleries

Archaeological Museum (Muzeu Arkeologjik)

A fascinating journey into the country's early history, from antiquity to the Middle Ages. Items on display range from ancient jewellery to Roman statues to vast clay pots covered in shellfish, found during the many archaeological field trips the museum is involved in. Visitors with a real interest in the subject can contact the museum in advance to arrange a guided tour. ▸ I-5, Sheshi Nënë Tereza 3, tel. +355 42 24 07 13, www.akad.gov.al. Open 10:00-14:00. Admission 400 lek.

Mosaic of Tirana (Mozaiku i Tiranës)

Uncovered in a residential area in 1972, and now protected by a spectacular new roof, the archaeological remains on show here are thought to be a Byzantine-era Roman villa from the 3rd century AD. This small attraction features not only some well-preserved mosaic floors, but also a collection of beautiful carved stones with religious motifs. The brand-new visitor centre is set to open in 2025. ▸ E-2, Rr. Naim Frashëri, tel. +355 4 222 60 05. Admission free.

National History Museum (Muzeu Historik Kombëtar)

The country's most important museum is currently closed for extensive renovations, with only the famous mosaic on the facade exposed to visitors. Once reopened, enjoy three floors dedicated to individual social and political periods of Albanian history from its very beginnings through to the communist and modern period. ▸ E-4, Sheshi Skënderbej, tel. +355 4 222 39 77, www.mhk.gov.al.

Studio House Kadare (Shtëpia Studio Kadare)

A cultural space rather than a museum, this is where the great Albanian writer Ismail Kadare lived and worked between 1974 and his departure to Paris in 1990. There's some information about his life, much of it in Albanian, and you can view his study and original bookcase (complete with a collection of his pipes) - the friendly staff are at hand to explain. The building is known as the *Cubist Flat,* designed by architect Max Velo in 1972, who tried to bring modern styles to Albania, and risked getting into serious trouble by doing so. ▸ E-4, Rruga e Dibrës 25. Open May-mid-Oct 09:00-19:00, Sun 10:00-17:00; mid Oct-Apr 10:00-17:00, Sun 10:00-15:00. Mon closed. Admission 500 lek.

Women's Museum (Museu i Gruas)

Tirana's unique Women's Museum, hosted in a small city centre flat, is a work of love by Elsa Ballauri, a well-known human rights activist from a prominent family that was harassed by the Sigurimi due to their "bad biography". Book your visit in advance, and you'll get a personal tour, focusing on the lives of women in Albania over the ages, as well as some women in particular. The collection has antiquities, jewellery, clothing like the traditional *xhubleta* dress, and cherished items that could have landed the owners in prison. There are hopeful stories of women's organizations emerging in the 1930s, medals awarded to "Mother heroes" who had lots of children, the awful consequences of the ban on abortions, and stories of persecution, incarceration and execution of Albanian women. Enter at the rear of the building with the Obsession shop, and walk up to the 3rd floor. ▸ F-3/4, Rr. Myslym Shyri 4/16, tel. +355 68 202 39 50, www.womensmuseumalbania.org. Open 10:00-17:00; Sat 10:00-15:00; closed Sun. Admission 500 lek.

Dajti Mountain

At 1613m high, Dajti is Tirana's own little mountain, easily accessed by cable car and a great option for a meal with breathtaking views, or wild bike rides back down to town. The peak is difficult to reach, and most visitors rarely step outside the immediate area around the top cable car station at 1050 metres high, where there's a large picnic field, minigolf and a kids' adventure park.



Mount Dajti cable car

Dajti Ekspres cable car (Teleferiku Dajti Ekspres)

A lovely 15-minute, 5-kilometre cable car ride floating over fields, forests, a lake and some bunkers takes you up to the top station at 1050 metres above sea level, well below the peak. The Ballkoni Dajtit restaurant offers great views across the city, and the Dajti Tower hotel has a viewing platform and a rotating bar. Dajti Express is reached with bus 11 to the Aziz Delia stop, or call Merr Taxi for a 650 lek fixed-fee ride. Easy to combine with the Bunk'Art 1 museum, just below the lower station. ▸ Rr. Mahmut Allushi, tel. +355 67 401 10 35, www.dajtiekspres.com. Open 09:00-18:00; Sat, Sun 09:00-18:30; closed Tue. Return trip 1200 lek.

Spaç Prison memorial site

Visiting Tirana's *Postblloku/Checkpoint* memorial, you'll see some curious concrete arches - these are the original pillars from the copper mine at Spaç prison camp (*Burgu i Spaçit*), 100km north of Tirana. It's relatively easy to visit the abandoned prison buildings there, although they are in bad shape, despite being declared a cultural monument in 2007 and some recent attempts at consolidating the structures against collapse.

Operating from 1968 till 1990, 'Re-education Unit 303' at Spaç was one of the most brutal prisons in communist Albania, holding up to 1050 political prisoners, who sometimes ended up there for the most trivial of perceived offences. Inmates were not only continuously taunted by sadistic guards, they were also forced to work at the adjacent copper and pyrite mine, still operational today, where they endured dangerous working conditions in 40°C heat and had to shovel 12,000kg of ore per shift. In the prison, food was terrible and rationed to 900 grams of bread, 20 grams of cheese, soup and rice per day. Temperatures inside dropped to freezing in winter, with 30-50 inmates sleeping on wooden bunks in each cell room.

The site consists of two buildings at the entrance that were used for the civilian mining workforce. Opposite, a stone memorial from 2007 commemorates the suffering of the prisoners in this camp. The prison blocks further up the hillside can be carefully explored. Some weathered signs point out the function of each building, the room at the entrance where family members could visit prisoners, the kitchens and dining hall, and the roll-call area on the terrace below the final building.



Spaç is famed for an uprising from 21-23 May 1973. Curiously, a stray dog named Tarti played an important role by attacking guards who were beating a prisoner, encouraging others to come to his defence. 500 brave prisoners took control of the camp and raised the national flag without the communist star. The inmates demanded an end to forced labour but had no chance of escaping, and special forces soon violently retook the prison, executing four leaders of the revolt who were buried in unmarked graves and remain missing today. Tarti was publicly hanged in the courtyard. Qafë Bar prison camp, another 20km further north along the same gravel road, experienced a similar revolt in 1984, which was equally brutally put down.

Spaç can only be reached with private transport; drive up the highway towards Kukes and Kosovo, turning off at Reps, immediately after the large service station. Follow the road, winding twice underneath the highway and continuing 8km up a gravel road, passable for normal cars, to the prison site. A visit to Spaç can be combined with a visit to one of the agrotourism restaurants along the lovely valley of Katund i Vjetër village, a 45-minute drive back towards Tirana.



Parks & Gardens

Botanical Gardens (Kopshti Botanik)

Part of Tirana University, the Botanical Garden is a modest but pleasant 15-hectare oasis on the western slopes of the city. Founded in 1971, the park houses some 1,400 species of plants, representing about a third of Albania's abundance of flora. Bring a picnic to enjoy the meadows and lanes of palm trees. Enter from the east; if the gate isn't open, wave and smile at one of the gardeners. ▸ Rr. Selita e Vjeter, tel. +355 4 222 52 87. Open 08:00-14:00; closed Mon, Sat, Sun. Admission 50 lek.

Grand Park (Parku i Madh)

A short stroll south of central Tirana, the city's Grand Park offers a convenient respite away from all the traffic and dust. At one time, thousands of the city's inhabitants came here to play and picnic. Now it's a place for people to stroll, fish, swim and have a sneaky snooze after lunch. Among the park's small collection of monuments are the tombs of the Frashëri brothers, who helped catalyse Albania's national awakening towards the end of the 19th century. Abdyl (1839-1892) was the leader of the Prizren League, Sami (1850-1904) a radical agitator for an independent Albanian republic and Naim (1846-1900) is generally recognized as being the first major Albanian-language poet. The large artificial lake in the park is a popular place during the summer. ▸ J-5.

Rinia Park

Tirana's 'youth park', a small but important green space in the city centre, is the proud focus of among other things the evening *xhiro*, when locals dress up and stroll around, meeting up with friends. It's hard to imagine that this area was once a disgraceful mess of illegal buildings, rubbish and shady dealings. The spidery white building that looks like it could be the lair of a James Bond villain is an entertainment complex called Taiwan, and houses restaurants, a café and a casino. The main attraction however is the fountain, which in the evening fascinates young and old onlookers with its modest light show. ▸ F/G-4, Blv. Dëshmorët e Kombit.

Zoopark Tirana (Kopshti Zoologjik)

Established in 1966, Tirana's zoo was for years too depressing to write about, but has recently undergone much-needed renovations. The conditions for the animals have much improved, with bears (Roki and Smoki), wolves, llamas, ostriches, antelopes, buffaloes, eagles, hawks, and rabbits inhabiting the enclosures. Walk under the bridge at the western end of the lake dam to find the entrance. ▸ Rr. Liqeni i Thate, www.aprtirana.al/parqe-rekreative/parku-zoologjik.Open 09:00-19:30. Admission 300 lek.



The Frashëri Brothers in the Grand Park

Monuments

Mother Teresa (Nënë Tereza)

A modest statue of the Skopje-born, ethnic Albanian Mother Teresa (Nënë Tereza, 1910-1997) stands in the southeast corner of the square named after her. An immense source of pride for Albanians, this is one of several monuments of her likeness found around the city. ▸ I-5, Sheshi Nënë Tereza.

Skanderbeg

Gjergj Kastrioti (1405-1468), known as Skanderbeg in English and Skënderbej in Albanian, is the only historical figure whom all Albanians agree was a national hero. He managed to create an independent Albanian princedom and keep it free for 25 long years. After his death, Albania was occupied by the Ottomans, but Skanderbeg's legacy preserved the Albanian national identity throughout 500 years of Ottoman rule. Albanians consider him not only the father of their nation, but also the man who helped save all Europe from the Ottoman Empire. The imposing statue on Tirana's main square was unveiled in 1968, 500 years after Skanderbeg's death ▸ E/F-4, Sheshi Skënderbej.

The loud (Reja)

On the lawn in front of the National Gallery of Arts (which is closed for renovations) stands Sou Fujimoto's wondrous and accessible 'Cloud' structure (*Reja*), an accessible installation made of hard white metal cubes, yet resembling a puffy cloud, especially when it's lit up at night. ▸ F-4, Blv. Dëshmorët e Kombit.



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Durrës

The pier at Durrës . Photo by Albert Hyseni on Unsplash

With a population of just over 200,000, Durrës is Albania's second-largest city. A busy Adriatic port a little over 30km to the west of Tirana, it is one of the oldest cities in the country, a fact borne out by the surviving Byzantine and Venetian relics to be found scattered around town, and also served as the capital between 1914 and 1920. Heavily bombed during WWII, the city was redeveloped as an industrial base during the communist period (when it was briefly known as *Durrës-Enver Hoxha*). Thankfully, the city centre is reasonably well-preserved, making Durrës a curious destination that's worth finding time to visit. As with all towns in the country, allow at least a little time to get lost wandering the less well-known areas, soaking up a little bit of unique Albanian street culture. Buses from Tirana East Bus Terminal to Durrës station depart very regularly, direct ones taking 40 minutes.

See

Amphitheatre (Amfiteatri Romak)

Slightly hidden in what remains of the old town of Durrës, the amphitheatre from the 2nd century CE is one of the largest of its kind in the Balkans, and is the city's main sight, despite looking a bit battered, still partially buried beneath modern houses. Over 130 metres wide and capable of holding 20,000 spectators, it was built for gladiator-type performances, but has over the centuries been added to, for example with a chapel holding an early Christian mosaic, and the remnants of a Byzantine marketplace. ▸ Rr. Kalase. Open 09:00-14:00, 17:00-21:00. Admission 300 lek.

Archeological Museum (Muzeu Arkeologjik)

Albania's largest archaeology museum was first opened in 1951, completely overhauled in 2015, and after sustaining earthquake damage in 2019, now awaits its third awakening after a new period of renovations, with reopening planned some time in 2025. It is an absolute must-see, with finds from the ancient site of Dyrrhachium and objects from the ancient Greek, Hellenistic and Roman periods. Highlights include Roman funerary stelae and stone sarcophagi, and a collection of miniature busts of Venus from the period that Durrës was a centre of worship of the goddess. Foreigners can look forward to lots of explanations in English. ▸ Rr. Taulantia 32. Open 09:00-18:00; closed Mon. Admission 300 lek.

Fatih Mosque (Xhamia e Fatihut)

A pretty little Ottoman mosque dating from the start of the 16th century and named after the Ottoman Sultan Mehmet Fatihu, making this the third oldest in the country, after mosques in Berat and Korça. Not to be confused with the 1931 Great Mosque on the main square. ▸ Rr. Xhamia.

Grand Mosque (Xhamia e Madhe)

Built in 1931 on the site of a smaller Ottoman mosque, this large and plain Muslim house of worship was not the luckiest mosque in the world, as it was closed in 1967 during the ban on religion in Albania, and was turned into a youth centre. Damaged by an earthquake in 1979, the Grand Mosque was finally returned to its original purpose in 1993. ▸ Rr. Glaukia.


Roman amphitheatre. Photo by Yuliya Yevseyeva on Unsplash

Hammam
The 18th-century bathhouse, much adapted over the years, has a central dressing room with a 6m-high dome studded with skylights, which is flanked by two small bathing areas, originally heated by underfloor pipes. The building, run down, and damaged during the 2019 earthquake, was renovated and reopened in 2025 as a fabulous little multimedia museum, showcasing the hammam's history, rituals and sounds. ▸ Rr. Stefan Vokopola. Open 09:00-14:00, 17:00-21:00.

Venetian Tower (Torra Veneciane)
A rare example of Venetian architecture near the main harbour was built on the site of an earlier Byzantine castle, of which the walls and three smaller towers can be found along Rruga Durrsaku. In more recent history, the castle was the sight of a short siege in 1939, when some 360 brave Albanians held the advancing Italian army at bay for several hours. The tower was renovated after the 2019 earthquake, and now contains a cultural heritage exhibition with VR headsets and multimedia video presentations (time your visit for the English-language one at 13:00), and harbour views from the battlements. ▸ Rr. Anastas Durrsaku. Open 09:00-14:00, 17:00-21:00. Admission 600 lek.


Sea views. Photo by Yuliya Yevseyeva on Unsplash

Beaches
The sandy beach at Durrës stretches for over 15 kilometres, from the ferry harbour all the way south along the bay. It's perfect for families, as the water is clear, warm and shallow. Near the city centre, it's very busy and built up, so for more space, peace and softer sand, head further south - buses can whisk you there from the station. West of the city centre, small beaches can be found between the restaurants lining the shore, but these are often not cleaned.


Durrës beach. Photo by erggis on Unsplash

Eat & Drink
There are plenty of options for places to eat and drink well in Durrës, mainly along the seafront and in the city centre.

Kater Stinet (Four Seasons)
Breakfast, lunch, dinner and cocktails are all served at the "four seasons", a popular venue on the seafront near the pier. Specialities include fresh fish dishes, steamed mussels, grilled octopus and a good seafood pizza. ▸ Rr. Taulantia, tel. +355 52 23 53 89, www.4stinet.com.

Pastarella
Upmarket pasta and seafood meals with beachfront views in the green highrise building along the boulevard. Pastarella dishes up everything from oysters, mussels and squid, to freshly caught fish. Find it on the third floor, accessed via the lift on the side of the building. ▸ Rr. Taulantia.

ZINS
Modern architecture, cocktails, sushi and burgers meet the sea at ZINS, a bouncing beach bar west of the city centre. Popular in the afternoon and packed by nighttime, it's a good place to say goodbye to the sun and get your night started. ▸ Rr. Currila, tel. +355 69 256 10 07. Open 08:00-01:00.

Kruja

Kruja's bazaar. Photo by Neonspark on Pexels

Kruja, an evocative town set on a steep mountainside, 30 kilometres north of Tirana, is a popular destination to visit for its stunning location, it's bustling tourist bazaar, and its importance in Albania's history. This is where the noble warrior and national hero Skanderbeg held the Ottomans at bay during the 15th century. Buses to Kruja depart very regularly from the North-South Bus Terminal, taking an hour. With your own wheels, Kruja can be visited quickly on your way to or from the airport.

Kruja Citadel (Kalaja e Krujës)

Kruja's legendary fortress is perched on an outcrop of rock overlooking the valley. Its walls withstood waves of Turkish sieges, only finally being conquered well after Skanderbeg's death. Entering the city gate from the Old Bazaar, you first come across the ruins of the old mosque of Sultan Mehmet Fatih, dating back to 1478, just below the Skenderbeg Museum. Beyond that stands the Ethnographic Museum. Take a right down some lovely cobbled lanes to enter the inhabited part of the fortress; you'll pass the hamam from around 1480 and finally the *Dollma Tekke*, a Sufi shrine built in 1780 by the Toptani family. Outside are the graves of several *babas* and a *dervish* (holy men), shaded by a 500-year-old olive tree, said to have been planted to commemorate Skanderbeg's wedding. A hole in the city wall near here offers great views over to the Adriatic Sea.



Skenderbeg Museum

Museums

Ethnographic Museum (Muzeu Etnografik)

A seriously beautiful traditional Albanian house built around 1800, exhibits on display include 19th-century women's folk dress, traditional copper goods and clay utensils and some gorgeous pieces of original furniture. The friendly gentleman who looks after the place can take you on an English-language tour of the rooms to give you the full and fascinating story of the place. ▸ Kalaja, Kruja, tel. +355 511 222 25, www.muzeumet-kruje.com. Open 09:00-19:00. Admission 400 lek.

Skanderbeg Museum (Muzeu Kombëtar Gjergj Kastrioti Skënderbeu)

Built to honour Albania's most-loved national hero, this large and somewhat ostentatious museum is something of a pilgrimage site for Albanians from across the Balkans. Set in a fake castle built in 1982, the halls hold a huge diorama of Skanderbeg and copies of things such as his sword and spiky helmet - the originals are in Vienna. The ticket office doubles as a small bookshop, and occasionally stocks interesting historical books in English. ▸ Kalaja, Kruja, tel. +355 511 222 25, www.muzeumet-kruje.com. Open 09:00-19:00. Admission 500 lek.


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Berat



Mangalemi district in Berat

The lovely museum town of Berat, below majestic Mount Tomorri, is one of the best-preserved Ottoman cities in the Balkans. It has everything you require; a beautiful medieval castle district complete with ancient churches and mosques, a lively lower town consisting of grand old houses draped on steep hillsides, an old stone bridge and a great museum. Just 125km south of Tirana, it's an easy two-hour drive on the highway via Durrës, slightly longer using one of many buses. You could see the highlights on a day trip, but better spend a night to experience this unique UNESCO-listed city slowly. After all, the very best thing to do in town is joining the locals on their *xhiro* evening stroll along the boulevard.

Berat Castle

Berat's highlight is the inhabited medieval citadel, reached on a steep and slippery road from the lower town. Rather than exhausting yourself on a warm day, drive or take a taxi up via the rear along Rruga Muzak Topia. After viewing the massive **main gate**, visit the amazing **Onufri Museum** and the three small medieval Orthodox chapels with frescoes and icons just beyond. Walk by the red-brick 14th-century **Holy Trinity church** up to the inner castle for 360-degree views and a peek into the cavernous **cisterns**. Finally, walk by the ruins of the 15th-century **Red Mosque** to the southern bastion tower, with dizzying views straight down to the Mangalemi and Gorica districts.



Berat seen from the castle

Onufri Museum (Muzeu Kombëtar Ikonografik Onufri)

The wonderful medieval Church of the Dormition of St Mary with its ornate 1807 wooden icon screen is reason enough to enter – and then there's the fabulous collection of 200 Albanian Orthodox icons, many painted by local artist master Onufri. In 1968, a small metal box was discovered in the crypt, holding the invaluable 6th-century Purple Codex of Berat, a book now inscribed on the UNESCO's *Memory of the World Register,* and safely stored in Tirana's National Archive. ▸ Rrugica Mbrica, Kalaja, tel. +355 32 23 22 24, www.muzeumet-berat.al. Open May-mid-Oct 09:00-19:00. Mid-Oct-Apr open 09:00-16:00, Sun 10:00-14:00, Mon closed. Admission 400 lek.

Mangalemi & Gorica

Berat's two densely packed lower town districts – Mangalemi at the foot of the citadel hill, Gorica across the river – are characterized by the typical white mansions with their 'thousand windows'. Even though there's not much to see in the ancient cobbled streets, they're great for aimless wandering, a drink or meal at one of the delightful family-run restaurants, and a

glimpse into lifestyles long gone elsewhere. Walk east towards the modern centre for highlights such as the **Lead Mosque** from 1555, named for its roofing material, the 19th-century **Bachelor's Mosque**, the **Sultan's Mosque**.

Ethnographic Museum

Halfway down the road from the castle to the lower town, the magnificent 17th-century Llavda mansion houses a quirky regional ethnographic collection. Guides take visitors on a short English-language tour of the house, which has original interiors, an impressive collection of traditional fashion and even a reconstructed bazaar street. Afterwards, sit on the huge wooden veranda, and strike a pasha pose. ▸ Rr. Toli Bojaxhiu, Mangalemi, tel. +355 32 23 22 24, www.muzeumet-berat.al. Open May-mid-Oct 09:00-19:00. Mid-Oct-Apr open 09:00-16:00, Sun 10:00-14:00, Mon closed. Admission 300 lek.

Osumi Canyon Rafting

The spectacular Osumi Canyon is 60km east of Berat, and great for a grade III rafting trip past waterfalls and sheer rock walls. Professional and safe trips are organized between February and June, river levels permitting, by Albania Rafting Group (tel. +355 67 200 66 23, www.albrafting.org) and Outdoor Albania (www.outdooralbania.com) and cost about €50 including transport from Berat.



Osumi canyon. Photo by Adventure Albania on Unsplash

Berat wine

Çobo Winery

The Çobo family's vineyards, 12km west of Berat along the main road to Fier, produce excellent wine and raki for on-the-spot sampling, or purchase. Try wine made with the local white 'bardha e Beratit' grape, the deep red Kashmer - or a raki with nuts. Groups can call ahead to arrange a wine-tasting session with tasty regional snacks. ▸ Ura Vajgurore, tel. +355 67 407 05 62, www.cobowineryonline.com.

Never Enver

Approaching Berat, you'll see the huge word NEVER spelled out with rocks on a mountainside. Enver Hoxha's first name was immortalized this way during his dictatorship, and the story goes that after democracy arrived, a local farmer got fed up with it and changed the first two letters.

Restaurants

Homemade Food Lili

In the courtyard of an old house below the castle, enthusiastic host Lili, his family and his dog all do their utmost best to ensure diners have an unforgettable evening here, filled with simple, traditional and delicious homemade dishes and copious amounts of wine and raki. Reservations recommended. ▸ tel. +355 69 234 93 62. Open 17:30-22:00; closed Sun.

Mangalemi Restaurant (Tomi's)

Perhaps the best place in Berat for a memorable Albanian meal. Tomi has been cooking for foreign visitors for decades, and the large plates of traditional food served on the wonderful terrace never disappoint. ▸ Rr. Mihal Komneno, Mangalemi, tel. +355 68 232 32 38, www.mangalemihotel.com. Open 11:30-16:00, 18:30-22:00.

Temi

A lovely traditional restaurant in Berat's castle district, with mountain views and dishes full of delicious local food. Have the baked lamb in yoghurt, the stuffed peppers, *byrek* spinach pie, or a village salad with feta cheese. ▸ Rrugica Mbrica, Kalaja. Open 12:00-16:00, 18:00-22:30 .

Bektashi pilgrimage

For one week in late August each year, the Muslim Bektashi sect in Albania embarks on a pilgrimage to Mount Tomorri near Berat. Bektashis from all over the world come to commemorate Abbas ibn Ali, who died at the battle of Karbala. This being Albania, the pilgrimage is inclusive, and locals of all religions and no religion make their way up there. From 20-25. August, expect thousands of pilgrims to visit the Bektashi tekke high up on the 2,379-metre-high mountain for prayers, festivities, and a mass picnic with some music and dancing.



Shkodra

Cafés on Rruga Kolë Idromeno

A diamond-shaped city wedged between the Rozafa Citadel, the magnificent Albanian Alps, deep blue Lake Shkodra, a 30-kilometre sand beach and the serene Buna river delta - Shkodra is a diamond in the rough with plenty of potential. While many visitors quickly breeze through the city, Shkodra's turbulent, 2400-year history has left plenty of interesting relics that make a stay in Albania's cultural capital worthwhile. Hundreds of years of no-nonsense religious and ethnic tolerance resulted in booming trade, witnessed by Shkodra's grand merchants' homes, and dozens of mosques and Catholic and Orthodox churches standing in proximity to each other. In its heyday, it was an important merchant's city, positioned along the ancient trade route between the Mediterranean Sea and Kosovo, with 2500 shops in the bazaar and 80 different crafts represented. The famous Wednesday regional markets attracted traders from across the region, and some of their buildings and traditions survive to this day. After visiting Rozafa Castle, try aimlessly wandering the historical streets between Rruga Kolë Idromeno and the Cathedral, visiting the excellent Marubi photo museum, and the beautiful Ottoman-era house with the Historical Museum to get a real feel for this historical city. Regular buses from Tirana's East Bus Terminal to Shkodra take about 2 hours.

Rozafa Castle

Crowning the 113m-high hill towering above the confluence of the Buna and Drini rivers, Shkodra's impressive top sight is the pride of the locals. The city's history started on this hilltop with the establishment of a Bronze Age settlement 4,000 years ago, followed much later by an Illyrian fortress and finally a medieval castle. After Albania gained independence in 1914 (the Marubi Museum has a beautiful photo of the flag-raising ceremony in the citadel), the castle lost its significance. The massive main gate complex with Illyrian 'Cyclopean walls' gives access to the three castle courtyards. The main medieval structure is St. Stephen's Church, built in 1319, expanded by the Venetians and finally turned into a mosque. The third and highest courtyard offers great views across the city, Lake Shkodra with the mountains of Montenegro behind it, and the Buna, Kiri and Drini rivers which converge just below the castle. You can also spot the old location of Shkodra's town centre below the castle: the lone Lead Mosque is all that's left of the settlement. ▸ Rr. Rozafa, 3km south of the city centre. Open 09:00-18:00, Oct-Mar 08:00-16:00. Admission 200 lek (foreigners), 100 lek (locals), 50 lek (children).

G'juhadol & Sarreq districts

Shkodra's most attractive and lively quarters can be found in the area between the mosque and the Cathedral. *G'juhadol* is the district around Rruga Kolë Idromeno and Rruga G'juhadol. Both streets are lined with elegant turn of the 20th century buildings, many looking fine after recent renovations. Especially along Rruga G'juhadol you see some grand former diplomatic residencies, constructed during the period that the Great Powers were pondering how to chop up the region in the aftermath of the Turkish defeat. *Sarreq* is the area around the cathedral, with a few remaining fine old houses. ▸ Rr. Kolë Idromeno and around.



Entrance to Rozafa Castle

Mosques & Churches

Shkodra has always been a multicultural city, with each religious or ethnic community playing an important role in the economy and cultural development of the city. In 1967, the Communist Party declared Albania to be the world's first atheistic state and unleashed a light version of China's cultural revolution, resulting in the senseless destruction of many religions buildings. After 1990, though many people are non-believers, the four main religions in Albania (Islam, Orthodoxy, Roman Catholicism and Bektashi faith) have gone through a revival and get along very well, and the monuments dotted around Shkodra attest to this traditional spirit of tolerance and cooperation.

Lead Mosque (Xhamia e Plumbit)

Once in the heart of Shkodra's old bazaar area right below the castle, the Lead Mosque (named after the material used on the roof) was built in 1773 by Mehmet Pasha Bushati, and was inspired by the great Sultan Ahmed mosque in Istanbul. In the 18th and 19th century, the Kiri and Drini rivers changed their course and flooded the old bazaar so often that the area was abandoned for a safer spot in Shkodra's current location. The Lead Mosque is all that remains of old Shkodra, standing like an Indian palace in the green fields. The minaret was destroyed by lightning in 1967, the same year as the cultural revolution that lead to the pulling down of many other religious buildings, but the mosque was left in peace until it was restored recently, now featuring a dam to prevent flooding. The mosque is just a short walk down from Rozafa Castle or from the main road. ▸ Rr. e Tabakëve 1.

St. Francis (Kuvendi i Shën Françeskut)

Used as a factory during the communist dictatorship and restored in 1998, the Italian-style St. Francis monastery church is crowned with statues and an elegant tower. Inside, some gruesome wall paintings interpret what befell the poor monks in the repressive years; devils can be seen whispering into the ears of Partisan soldiers, who then tie the monks to the trees, crucifix style, leaving them to die. 16 priests were killed between 1943 and 1965, and a memorial plaque is dedicated to them. ▸ Rr. Gjergj Fishta.

Museums

Marubi National Museum of Photography (Muzeu Kombëtar i Fotografisë Marubi)

Shkodra's greatest treasure is a fascinating collection of 250,000 original negatives with images of the city and major events in the region between 1858 and 1959, forming one of Europe's most valuable photo collections. The museum does a great job of presenting the best of the historical images, complemented by exhibitions of contemporary photography. Marubi's workshop and photo studio have also been recreated - and the selfie generation is welcome to *insta* themselves with a classic background, just like the genteel citizens and fierce mountain folk did a century ago. ▸ D-1, Rr. Kolë Idromeno 32, tel. +355 2 240 05 00, www.marubi.gov.al. Open 09:00-19:00. Admission 700 lek.

Site of Witness and Memory (Vendi i Dëshmisë dhe i Kujtesës)

A chilling exhibition about state terror and persecution, showing the pre-trial detention and torture cells that the Albanian Ministry of Interior used during Communist times. The gallery leading there follows the 50-metre route that a prisoner would take to his or her cell, and shows documents, testimonies and artefacts of victims and their families. As a city of clergy, prominent families and intellectuals, Shkodra suffered more under communist rule than other places in Albania - a Museum of Atheism was opened here after the 1967 anti-religious campaign. The country needed time to come to terms with the crimes of the past and this exhibition only opened in 2014 to educate the youth about the mistakes of the past. Many of the perpetrators and victims of the time are still alive today, wounds yet have to heal. ▸ Blv. Skënderbeu 26, www.vdkshkoder.com. Open 08:30-14:30; Tue, Wed 08:30-14:30, 17:00-19:00; closed Sun. Admission 150 lek.

Mesi Bridge

The magnificent Mesi bridge, 8km north of central Shkodra, is the largest and best-preserved Ottoman bridge in Albania, built along the ancient trade route from Shkodra to Kosovo which dates back to pre-Roman times. The modern road from Shkodra to Mes actually still follows the Roman route. Kosovo was of incredible importance to the Roman, Venetian and other Mediterranean economies as an important source of gold and other metals, and there was intensive trade along this route - not more than a donkey trail, a few metres wide at most - for millennia. Much of the original route is now submerged below the waters of the Drini valley dams, but here at Mes you can get an idea of its importance. The bridge was built in 1768 and is 108 metres long, 3m wide and has 13 arches, of which the elegantly humped main span measures 13m. The Kiri river it crosses has incredibly blue, clear mountain water. A modern bridge bypasses the bridge, allowing you to cross it on foot and view it from all sides.



Cafés & Restaurants

Eko Club

The café of the Eko Mendje envronmental NGO caters to your sustainable break, serving some snacks and many juices and other drinks that are sourced from the mountains near Shkodra. Try the mountain tea, fresh blackberry, blueberry, cherry or pomegranate juice. If you're after something stronger, their special *raki* varieties include blueberry from Vermosh, juniper or herbal roots from Tamara, and grape/honey from the Shala valley - or perhaps try a walnut liqueur. The café is a jungle of plants, recycled pallets swing seats and books. Profits go to the commendable activities of the NGO such as cleaning up natural areas, reforestation and increasing ecological awareness. ▸ Rr. Besnik Sykja, tel. +355 69 254 55 00. Open 7:00-02:00.

Elita

Shkodra's top address for refined local and Italian cuisine, Elita serves a variety of pasta dishes and risottos for starters, while main courses include lamb that has been oven-baked for hours, slow-cooked chicken and pork fillets, and traditional grilled sausages. There's a good selection of Albanian and Italian wines, spirits and local water as well. Find Elita opposite the Franciscan church. ▸ Rr. Gjergj Fishta 64, tel. +355 69 206 21 93, www.petithotelelita.com. Open 08:00-23:00.

Fish Art

One of the top restaurants in Shkodra, Fish Art is a classy and gleaming white marble restaurant serving all manner of seafood, displayed on ice and straight from Albania's fishing ports. From grilled red snapper, mussels and fish soup to octopus, shrimp risotto and large local salads, dishes are prepared and presented with care. As always, check the price of pay-per-weight fish before ordering. ▸ Sheshi 2 Prilli, tel. +355 69 910 91 16. Open 08:00-23:30.

Kultura Pub & Bistro

One of the most buzzing nightspots in Shkodra, Kultura is a true meeting place for locals and tourists; a pub and bistro with regular live music nights featuring bands, DJs and Latino dancing - check their social media for events. The stylish pub is decked out with stained-glass windows and a few licence plates, and has a pleasant terrace and garden. If you just don't want to leave, Kultura offers spacious apartments, rooms and dorm beds upstairs. ▸ Rr. Gjuhadol, tel. +355 69 235 72 10. Open 07:00-24:00.

Vila Bekteshi

A lovely villa beside the Orthodox Church, the long-established Vila Bektashi, also known as Çoçja, has a pleasant downstairs bar and leafy garden terrace where the walls have been constructed in traditional Shkodra style, using rounded rocks from mountain streams. Upstairs, the bright dining area provides access to more breezy outside seating. The menu lists Italian pizza and pasta dishes, fresh fish from the lake and the sea, a surprisingly tasty lemon soup, international wines, *Birra Korça* and raki. ▸ D/E-1, Rr. Hasan Riza Pasha 33, tel. +355 67 666 35 58/(+355) 069 286 74 45, www.cocja.com. Open 07:00-23:00.

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shkodra.inyourpocket.com



Restaurants

Tirana terrace. Photo by George Redgrave, CC BY-ND 2.0

Tirana continues to add innovative dining options to its repertoire, alongside a highly recommended collection of restaurants serving traditional Albanian cuisine. Increasingly, agro-tourism and 'health food' restaurants are popping up, a good sign for discerning diners. With a few upmarket exceptions, dining here remains an affordable extravagance that can be enjoyed outdoors for much of the year. Eating out in Tirana has never been this good.

Albanian

Albanian cuisine offers a unique fusion of predominantly Balkan, Mediterranean and Turkish flavours with an emphasis on grilled meat, fresh vegetables, exotic desserts and individual portions that could keep an entire army marching on its stomach for a week. Restaurants serving Albanian food range from cheap and cheerful establishments complete with grubby tablecloths to places where you're very likely to bump into the rich and famous.

Ballkoni Dajtit

A rather lovely, Alpine-style wooden restaurant next to the cable car station high up on the mountainside, Ballkoni Dajtit has several dining rooms of which the enclosed balcony offers the best views over Tirana. It serves mostly Albanian cuisine, such as *fergesë me speca* (a dish with eggs and cheese), oven dishes, and, during the season, wild boar and rabbit. ▸ tel. +355 67 401 1021, www.dajtiekspres.com. Open 11:00-17:30; Mon 09:00-17:30; closed Tue.

Bujtina Jone

What would you think if someone told you of a villa restaurant with 'Albanian-style yum cha dining'? Ignore the extensive menu, and hand-pick local meze from a cart of ready-to-go dishes that's wheeled to your table. Each one costs 150 lek, and each one is worth at least triple that. Let the good times roll as you enjoy the views from the far side of the lake. ▸ Rr. Memo Bejko, tel. +355 67 205 29 86. Open 06:00-23:00.

Era

Established in 1999 and hugely popular ever since, the Era restaurants serve the best of Italian and traditional Albanian dishes with only the finest ingredients. The menu evolves every few years and features outstanding traditional recipes, fresh salads, tasty desserts and pleasant wines. The professionalism is enhanced by the staff, many of whom have been working here for over a decade. Era Villa resembles a secret garden in the heart of the busy city, while Era Blloku is cozy and comfortable, located on Rr. Ismail Qemali in one of the most vibrant districts of Tirana. Reservations recommended. ▸ H/I-5, Rr. Papa Gjon Pali II, 11, tel. +355 4 225 50 00, www.era.al. Open 11:00-24:00.

Oda Garden
A truly traditional restaurant, where you can eat sitting at low tables in a reconstructed *oda* (guest room) in an old Ottoman-era house, or on the large enclosed garden right next to the Pazar i Ri market. Surrounded by shelves with dishes, strings of garlic and peppers and old photographs, it's best to allow the waiters to suggest a succession of appetizers and mains. The food is fresh and delicious (try the *lakror në saç* oven-baked pie), unforgettable even after washing it all down with several glasses of their home-made *raki*. A second outlet can be found just north of the market on Rruga Riza Jasa. ▸ E-5, Rr. Shenasi Dishnica, tel. +355 69 20 40 145, www.odagardenrestaurant.com. Open 12:00-24:00; Sun 13:00-23:00.

Tymi Ver Reçi
A joyous and longstanding grill restaurant with a wacky interior decorated with all kinds of rock music kitsch, Tymi packs the punters in and delights them with generous portions of grilled Albanian meals. Kebab, chicken wings, oven dishes dripping with cheese, grilled veggies - they have it all, with good beers to wash it all down. ▸ E-3, Rr. Kavajës, tel. +355 69 726 83 87. Open 12:00-00:00.

Farm to Table

Ceren Ismet Shehu
"Katunar and Proud!" read the aprons of the staff here, declaring their love for simple village life and turning a somewhat derogatory term into one of endearment. This Tirana institution in the castle area is best known for its incredible farm-raised meats. Enjoy a tasting plate of local appetizers before digging your teeth into spit-roasted goat or lamb for an authentic Albanian culinary experience. ▸ F-5, Shëtitorja Murat Toptani, Kalaja e Tiranes, tel. +355 69 386 66 65. Open 11:00-23:30.

Fustanella Farm
The most authentic organic farm restaurant we visited around Tirana, Fustanella is named after the traditional white kilt worn by men in these regions, and sits on a hillside amid its vegetable and potato fields - where you're welcome to wander around. Once seated in the elegant dining room with fabulous valley views, you feast on fresh farm bread, delicious small meze plates and seasonal meat courses, while the farm cats hunt for scraps. Home-made wine, raki, jam and oils for sale too. ▸ Road R-2, Petrelë, tel. +.355 69 448 40 00. Open 10:00-23:00; Sat, Sun 09:00-23:00.

Fustanella Garden
The new Tirana outlet of the famous Fustanella Farm gets its fresh produce and meat and the excellent traditional organic recipes from there, saving you the trek out of town. Try the seasonal salads, the *paximadia* starter with wheat bran and sour cream, or the veal in plum sauce. ▸ Rr. Njazi Demi 4, tel. +355 68 600 07 27. Open 08:00-23:30.

Gzona
The first restaurant in Tirana to truly modernize traditional Albanian food concepts. Head chef Bleri Dervishi began cooking at just 11 years old, and his slow food includes quail with juniper berries, and fish ragout with hazelnuts and mountain herbs. The awards received by this restaurant are a testament to its success. ▸ F-5, Rr. Murat Toptani, Kalaja e Tiranes, tel. +355 68 807 06 05, www.gzona.al. Open 08:00-23:00.

Kazerma e Cerenit
Part organic restaurant, part military museum, this large and very popular agrotourism enterprise in a former army barracks offers excellent Albanian food as part of a fixed tasting menu by UK-trained chef Ismet Shehu, served in the modernized military dining hall or on the lovely garden terrace - reservations recommended. You can visit the small military museum and tunnels, the kids can take a spin on the tractor trailer and there's farm animals to pet. Finally, farm products are for sale, and it's also possible to spend the night in the renovated dormitory rooms. ▸ Rruga e Rexhekrit, Surrel, tel. +355 68 500 04 99, www.kazermacerenit.al. Open 12:00-22:30.

Mullixhiu
Albania's most famous restaurant abroad, Mullixhiu, 'the miller', is where celebrity chef Bledar Kola brings country dining to the 21st century. Using locally-sourced ingredients, the menu offers an imaginative journey around traditional Albanian cuisine with lots of fancy flourishes. The rather modest, wood-panelled room doesn't seat too many guests, so book ahead online. Find Mullixhiu hidden in a basement right underneath a Burger King, in the park at the southern end of Rruga Sami Frashëri. ▸ K-4, Shëtitorja Lasgush Poradeci, Grand Park, tel. +355 69 666 04 44, www.mullixhiu.al. Open 12:00-16:00;18:00-22:00.

Uka Farm
A wonderful, refined agrotourism experience 20 minutes drive west of Tirana, Flori Uka's farm restaurant serves up a set menu of traditional Albanian starters and a main dish, using local organic produce, and decanting excellent home-made wines. A walk around the farm is also possible. Reserve online for meals or wine tasting sessions. ▸ Rr. Adem Jashari, Laknas, tel. +355 355 55 55, www.ukafarm.com.

American

Spaghetti Western
Getting your fix of Americana is surprisingly easy in Tirana, but the best value and selection is found at Spaghetti Western. Menu highlights include American favourites like burgers, chicken fried steak and BBQ pork ribs. The saloon style decor is very on theme, and the waiters are dressed to match the style, cowboy hats and all. ▸ H-4, Rr. Pjeter Bogdani 13, tel. +355 68 207 20 00. Open 09:00-23:00.

Tony's
Progeny of the long-running Stephen Center, Tony's American Bistro has built a name and reputation all of its own. The varied menu includes pizzas, burgers and Tex-Mex-inspired items such as fajitas, but it's the massive all-day breakfast menu that really sets this place apart. Definitely try the breakfast burrito and the Eggs Benedict - with a healthy slathering of hollandaise sauce. Also in one of the colourful blocks beside the Pyramid, on Rruga Papa Gjon Pali II 13. ▸ K-6, Rr. Sami Frasheri, tel. +355 69 400 60 70, www.tonys.al. Open 08:00-23:00.

Asian

In the late 1950s, when Stalin's regime was denounced, Albania turned to the Chinese for strict moral guidance, until they too were considered too bourgeois. However, it took several decades for a proper Chinese restaurant to open in Tirana. The Asian eateries present now are not quite authentic, but do the trick if you need a filling meal.

Chakra Indian Fusion
Firmly established in the Millennium cinema compound and featuring Indian chefs working away in the kitchen, you know this is the real deal just from the smell of spice that hits you when you enter the classy dark interior. The menu is packed with classic dishes from fresh *pakora* to a proper vindaloo, some unusual inventions like the Indian burger, plus a big selection for vegetarians. The dessert menu is tiny to say the least, although there are a handful of *lassis*. ▸ J-2, Rr. Murat Toptani, tel. +355 67 200 52 22, www.chakrarestaurant.al. Open 12:00-23:00.

Kungfu Noodle Bar
Tasty ramen, dim sum, rice bowls, stir-fry dishes and other pan-Asian nood food served in a stylish self-service restaurant by the Arena stadium. ▸ Rr. Dervish Hima, tel. +355 67 522 55 55, www.kungfunoodlebar.com. Open 11:30-23:00.


Kapllan Pasha's Tomb

Drink ujë, not aqua

Order mineral water with your meal, and chances are that you'll get sparkling water in a bottle that was shipped from Italy, France or even further away – usually at a high price for both the environment and the diner's wallet. All this, while Albania has excellent and abundant mineral water, and several good brands such as Qafshtama, Selita, Tepelena, Lajthiza and Glina. Join the revolution and ask your waiter for a local brand instead of imported mineral water, so that restaurants realize patrons want to have the choice. The Albanian economy needs all the support it can get, and this helps in a small, bubbly way.

Oriental City
A small, family-run business with a large menu of mostly Chinese dishes, Oriental City serves all the classics in suitably Asian-looking surroundings. Plenty of vegetarian options. There's a tiny little seating area if you prefer devouring your noodles al fresco. ▸ H-5, Rr. Themistokli Germenji, tel. +355 42 28 88 88, www.oriental-city-chinese-restaurant.business.site. Open 11:030-22:00.

Soma Vinyl Station
So much more than a restaurant serving delicious sushi, noodles, tempura, ramen and bao buns. Inside one of the cubes strewn around the iconic Piramida building, Soma is also inspired by Japanese listening bars, with a wall of records spanning decades of music, an impressive sound system, great cocktails, and regular DJ nights at the weekends. ▸ G-5, Rr. Gjon Pali II, Piramida, tel. +355 69 433 33 99. Open 08:00-23:45.

SoSushi
SoSushi has been around since before sushi became a trend in Tirana. Intimate in size and located below ground level, once inside you're transported into a tranquil bamboo paradise. Enjoy Japanese delicacies such as sushi, sashimi and tempura without the need to offer any arms or legs as payment. ▸ H-3, Rr. Brigada e VIII, tel. +355 67 413 25 82, www.sosushi.al. Open 12:00-23:00; closed Mon.

Burgers

DeliBros

Great'artisan'burgers in a modest restaurant with a small terrace. With nine burger varieties, our Smashburger was served fast, hot and delicious, and the Chuck Norris burger and pastrami sandwich didn't look half bad either. Also at Rr. e Kavajës 48. ▸ H-3, Rr. Komuna e Parisit 19, tel. +355 67 754 44 44, www.delibrosfood.com. Open 09:00-23:30; Sun 10:00-23:30.

Likos Burger

Whilst most Albanian burger joints fill their buns with a qofte replica of a burger patty, Likos' lush, full-meat patties are a welcome surprise. Likos also offers all the usual fast food, with the chicken gyros also a menu highlight. ▸ G-1, Rr. e Kavajës, corner of Rr. Babë Rexha, tel. +355 69 338 22 23. Open 06:00-2:00.

Fine dining

Otium

A firm and seasoned favourite, cosy little Otium churns out plate after plate of fabulous-looking food, thrown together from fresh ingredients bought by the chef Arvin Kita every day. There's no menu; the waiters will suggest a meal suited to your taste. Featuring large salads and a lot of well-prepared meat, including excellent burgers, Otium is Tirana's fine dining gem. ▸ H-3, Rr. Brigada e VIII, tel. +355 4 222 35 70, www.otium-restaurant.com. Open 12:00-23:00; closed Sun.

Salt

Much talked about by the Tirana in-crowd, Salt is an upmarket place set in a two-storey designer space hidden between the *Blloku* blocks. The pricey dishes served here include sushi, Mediterranean meals and seafood - all washed down with excellent wines and cocktails. ▸ H-4, Rr. Pjeter Bogdani, tel. +355 69 400 00 13, www.salt.al/tirana. Open 11:00-01:00; Fri, Sat 11:00-03:00.



Decorations on Et'hem Bey Mosque

International

Bana's Piramida

Healthy snacks, salads, sandwiches, pasta and drinks, served from behind the counter in a bright and cheerful little café inside the Pyramid, with terrace seating on a balcony. There's also a Bana's Liqeni near the lake on Rr. Frashëri. ▸ G-5, Bulevardi Dëshmorët e Kombit, tel. +355 69 696 15 66. Open 08:00-22:00; Wed 09:00-22:00.

Bitter Bistro Bar & Restaurant

Hidden down a quiet alley off the boulevard, American-owned Bitter hits all the sweet notes as a meeting point for foreigners in Tirana. Drop by for classic dishes like pancakes and avocado toast for breakfast; salads, chicken wings and cheesecake for dinner, or brunch specials on weekends. The Albanian draft beer accompanies the lively events held here, such as happy hour, games on Tuesday, music bingo on Wednesday, trivia on Thursday and karaoke on Saturday. ▸ C-4, Bulevardi Zogu I, 13, tel. +355 692 08 06 07, www.bitterrestaurant.com. Open 07:00-11:00; Sat, Sun 08:00-11:00.

Ceni's

Ceni's serves wonderfully fresh and original Italian and other regional food in a small basement not far from Grand Park. The owner is also a butcher, and his cuts of meat are some of the best in Tirana. With a changing daily menu you're never quite sure what's going to end up on your plate but if it helps, we recommend sticking to the pasta with additional meat for non-vegetarians. The business lunch offer is extremely good value for money. ▸ K-4, Rr. Sami Frashëri 4, tel. +355 67 406 61 66, www.cenisrestaurante.com. Open 12:00-23:00; closed Sun.

Fresh Garden

Slow service is to be expected all across Albania and Tirana is no exception - however Fresh Garden is. Attached to the organic supermarket below, this restaurant truly understands the idea of a business lunch, in that it can spit out courses in succession with a speed appropriate for those in the hastiest of a rush. For those eaters with social media following their every bite, the dishes are picture perfect too. ▸ H-3/4, Rr. Brigada VIII 8, tel. +355 67 402 07 77, www.freshgardenrestaurant.com. Open 08:00-24:00.

Millennium Garden

Tirana's best and most popular garden terrace, beside the Millennium cinema and removed from traffic, is dominated by lush greenery, garden fragrances and birdsong - when the music's not too loud. The bar and restaurant has an eclectic menu featuring everything from breakfast and brunch classics to burgers, pizza, poke bowls, sushi and Indian food. ▸ F-5, Shëtitorja Murat Toptani, tel. +355 69 702 24 56. Open 08:00-00:30.

Padam
Beside the lovely boutique hotel of the same name, this elegant-looking eatery wins hands down on the gourmet scale. Because this is genuinely a proper restaurant, not a room full of chairs and tables next to a kitchen, the best thing to do here is ask for a recommendation rather than gamble from the menu. The adjoining terrace offers a lovely place to dine in the open air. ▸ H-5, Rr. Papa Gjon Pali II, tel. +355 69 202 51 22, www.padam.al. Open 10:00-23:30.

Piazza
After all these years, Piazza remains a great spot to dine on well-prepared Italian dishes, including some fine efforts made with their home-made pasta. The very best thing about the place is the lush terrace, set among blooming flower beds and palm trees, away from the traffic. ▸ E-4, Rr. Ded Gjo Luli, Sheshi Harry Truman, tel. +355 42 23 07 06, www.piazza.com.al. Open 12:00-24:00.

Terracotta
Passionate for Mediterranean food, the chefs here don't follow a menu, but rather create dishes from whatever is fresh that day, served with home-made pasta and delicious salads. The tiny restaurant with a few seats by the kitchen and the rest downstairs can get busy. Now also with a larger Terracotta 2 restaurant at Rr. Nikolla Jorga. ▸ H-2, Rr. Komuna e Parisit, tel. +355 68 306 99 90. Open 12:00-23:00; closed Sun.

Italian

Artigiano (Vila Artigiano)
Artigiano and its sister restaurant Villa Artigiano (set behind a lovely leafy garden on Rr. Papa Gjon Pali II) both offer high-quality Italian dishes. You can expect treats prepared from their home-made pasta, cracking pizza baked in a proper wood-fired oven, gourmet burgers and seasonal salads - all served with a smile. ▸ I-4, Rr. Abdyl Frashëri, tel. +355 69 20 92 358, www.artigiano.al. Open 11:30-24:00.

Grand Panevino
A firm business dinner favourite next to the Maritim Plaza Hotel, expect a classy interior with an open kitchen, all of your favourite Italian dishes and a few surprises such as their awesome cheeseburger. The outside seating is a little way from the chaos in the street and provides some much-needed shade during the heat of the summer. ▸ F-5, Rr. Abdi Toptani 18, tel. +355 68 608 0880, www.grandpanevino.al. Open 07:30-24:00.


Steps up the Piramid

Juvenilja Castelo
A little folly of a castle surrounded by lush greenery is as close as you can get to Camelot at just a stone's throw from the football stadium. Juvenilja has been dishing up pizza, pasta, risotto and Italian mains here since 2001, with some excellent desserts to wrap up the evening, or your afternoon. There's another Juvenilja on Rr. Sami Frashëri in the Blloku. ▸ J-6, Rr. Skerdilajd Llagami, tel. +355 422 666 66, www.juvenilja.com. Open 07:00-23:00.

L'Osteria
If you happen by L'Osteria, you too will be sucked in by the cuteness of its curbside appeal. It won't stop at the street, either - the overture continues as you go inside, the adorable table decor seemingly straight out of a magazine. Then the food comes, and it's absolutely delectable - if you're unaccompanied you might be inclined to join an app just to enjoy a first encounter in what can only be described as the perfect first-date location. ▸ E-3, Rr. Mihal Duri 7, tel. +355 69 877 11 89. Open 11:00-23:00.

Pastaria
Fast pasta served in a bustling restaurant with a strikingly simple philosophy: attract a happy crowd of young Albanians by serving a choice of pasta shapes with as many varieties of sauces as possible, at low prices. There's so much choice that they categorize sauces by colour. With speedy and friendly service, we were out in a flash, feeling very content. Also on Rr. Urani Pano 9. ▸ I-3, Rr. Sami Frashëri, tel. +355 69 379 43 43, www.pastaria.al. Open 11:00-23:00.

Kosovar

Restaurant Gjakova

Named after the Kosovar city, Gjakova is a meat-lovers haven. Always buzzing with locals and foreigners and run by a team of friendly staff from Kosovo serving absolutely magnificent grilled meat dishes from the region, their ability to go off-menu for those living a plant-based life or with other dietary requirements make it a favourite. The menu here is like a short novel. On a budget? Meatballs, side and an ice-cold Peja beer will satisfy your tastebuds and wallet. Want to splurge? Beef florentine or tomahawk provide a salivating steak experience. Their fasule beans are the best in town, too. ▸ I-2, Rr. Emin Duraku, tel. +355 69 255 71 95, www.gjakovadelivery.al. Open 11:00-23:30.

Middle Eastern

Arabesque

Middle-Eastern food, very different from traditional Albanian fare, is best represented in this central restaurant serving delicious Syrian specialities. Besides the *baba ganoush* smoked aubergine appetizer, *falafel, hummus* and *kibbeh* fried meatballs, don't miss the *kunafa* dessert - a sinful concoction of stringy hot cheese and syrup. With limited tables, it can get busy here at lunchtimes. ▸ E-3, Rr. e Kavajës, tel. +355 67 203 17 33. Open 09:00-22:00.

Pizza

Because it's everywhere, locating good pizza in Tirana is like finding a needle in a haystack. The combination of proper flour, fresh ingredients and real pizza ovens in Tirana guarantees that the pizzas are often just as good as those across the Adriatic.

Bella Napoli

Tirana's best pizza? Quite possibly so. Salvatore's convivial pizzeria churns out some fabulous Neapolitan-style pizza using Italian ingredients, perfect dough and quality toppings. ▸ K-2, Rr. Liman Kaba, tel. +355 69 601 1117, www.bellanapoli.al. Open 12:30-23:00.

Golosa

Golosa means 'gluttonous' in Italian, and you're sure to feel that way with your fix of genuine wood-fired pizza. Follow the smell permeating through the shopping centre to enjoy the casual and relaxed vibe, and be prepared to roll out with a full belly because you won't be able to stop ordering. ▸ D-4, Rr. e Barrikadave, Galeria shopping centre, tel. +355 69 618 58 00. Open 11:00-23:00.

Airport diner

Amor

The airport's 24-hour departure lounge restaurant has something for everyone - from a sandwich or panini breakfast and a fresh pasta lunch to chicken dinners and bottled or draught beer. ▸ Tirana Airport departures area, tel. +355 69 479 07 93. Open 24 hours.



Selling socks at the Pazar i Ri market

Grande Roma

A contender for some of the top pizza in Tirana, Grande Roma dishes up all your Italian favourites in a cosy environment across all seasons. The ham, truffle and cream cheese is elegantly sumptuous, whilst their risottos are dainty but filling and flavourful. With a typical trattoria vibe, the atmosphere is casual yet comfortable and their delivery service is fast and reliable. ▸ H-5, Rr. Themistokli Gërmenji, tel. +355 68 871 11 17. Open 10:00-24:00.

Laguna

There's always a queue for the great-value and tasty pizza slices and ice cream served from this small kiosk and Tirana's prime late-night meeting point at the main crossroads in town. You should join the queue too. ▸ G-4, Blv. Bajram Curri, tel. +355 69 391 00 04. Open 07:00-11:30.

Proper Pizza

Hugely popular with the 20-something crowd, this place isn't called Proper Pizza for nothing. Choose from a baffling array of pizzas from the traditional to the more imaginative, some of them creatively decorated with strange crop-circle patterns, and all of them perfect for snacking on the premises, or eating elsewhere. ▸ I-3, Rr. Gjin Bue Shpata, tel. +355 69 777 88 88, www.properpizza.al. Open 10:00-24:00.



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Qofta

Known more widely as *kofta* in other parts of the world, the Albanian *qofta* is a simple, sausage-like dish made from ground beef that's cooked on an open flame and served with a wide variety of salads, sauces and fresh white bread. Popular with the more working class residents of Tirana, *qofta* restaurants are hard to find in the city centre. They often appear on your table in a matter of minutes, making them an excellent snack when on the run.

Zgara Korçare

This is our personal favourite *qofta* meatballs place in the capital, near the lake. As well as their magnificent Korça-style *qofta* served with *tzatziki* and hot bread, this basic but brilliant restaurant cooks a variety of other meat dishes with accompanying cold Korça beer and soft drinks. The wooden tables outside provide a great place to watch the madness of the city below. Their other *zgara* can be found at Rr. Luigj Gurakuqi 10, near the Pazar i Ri market. ▸ E-5, Rr. Sami Frashëri, tel. +355 69 353 28 03. Open 11:00-24:00.



Tirana street scene. Photo by Dave Collier, CC BY-SA 2.0

Seafood

Barely 30 minutes from the Adriatic, it shouldn't come as a great surprise to learn that Tirana features some truly outstanding seafood restaurants.

Fishop

At Fishop, you're welcomed by a fantastic display of today's catch, laid out on a bed of ice, so it's simply a matter of pointing out your choice and asking what the chefs recommend doing with it. Be sure to book ahead, as both Fishop outlets on this street are often packed, as is their shop at Kompleksi Kika 2 on Rruga Tish Dahia. For fast fish, visit their excellent fish burger joint at the Pazar i Ri market. ▸ H-6, Rr. Qemal Guranjaku, tel. +355 4 560 90 64, www.fishop.al. Open 12:00-23:30; Sun 12:00-18:00.

Brunch

Bufe Wine Bistro

Many places in Tirana claim to host brunch, but few actually deliver on the promise. Bufe was one of the first to embrace the magic of the mid-morning meal and, as such, offers all the typical classics for breakfast or brunch that will have your eyes looking like the love-heart-eyed emoji. In the afternoon and evening, mix and match your favourite appetizers, be they from sea or earth, or dig into their pasta dishes, accompanied by one of their recommended wines. ▸ F-4, Rr. Reshit Çollaku, tel. +355 69 318 11 49. Open 08:30-24:30.

Lenti's Fish

Seafood is best enjoyed with a water view, though with Tirana being set inland you might be willing to settle for less. No need! Lenti's Fish, overlooking the Dry Lake (which is not dry at all), offers beautiful scenery and dishes up the best fish cakes in town. Their selection of fresh seafood is amazing - they even have scallops. A bit out of town, the bus to the TEG mall runs nearby, and it's well worth the trek. ▸ Rr. Hamdi Garunja, Liqeni Thate, tel. +355 68 539 83 70. Open 12:00-23:00.

Still Fish

Excellent seafood, with fish soup, linguini frutti di mare, shrimp ravioli, various fish risottos, and a selection of grilled, fried or sautéed catch-of-the-day options, all served in casual surroundings. ▸ H-6, Rr. Qemal Guranjaku, tel. +355 69 946 55 22. Open 12:00-23:00; Sun 12:00-17:00.

Steak

El Gaucho

Some venues offer Argentinian meats, but there is only one that is truly dedicated to the cuisine. Instantly becoming a hit favourite amongst the expat crowd, this is a pricey alternative to the Albanian *zgare* places that are ubiquitous around town. The degustation menu is surprisingly good value, with empanadas and steaks being the highlights. ▸ H-2, Rr. Mustafa Qosja, tel. +355 69 609 88 88, www.elgauchotirana.com. Open 12:00-23:30.

Kopé Steakhouse

An excellent, upmarket experience, the new Kopé Steakhouse serves T-bone, tomahawk, rib eye Black Angus and other quality steaks, as well as veal fillet, duck breast, salads and pasta. There's a good selection of French wines to accompany the meal. ▸ E-3, Rr. e Bogdanëve 52. Open 12:00-23:00.

Tex-Mex

Serendipity

There's nothing serendipitous about Serendipity at all, with the finger food to the full-blown Mexican dishes being about as authentic as they can when you consider this is Tirana and not Tijuana. With a very relaxed vibe, this is the kind of restaurant you may drop in to for a snack at dinner time, but end up falling into bed six hours later, full of tequila and burritos. ▸ I-4, Rr. Ibrahim Rugova 26/1, tel. +355 68 902 80 29. Open 08:00-24:00.

Serendiville

A villa near the Dinamo sports fields has been converted into a Tex-Mex ranch, with small tables crammed with happy chicas and chicos inside, and a large terrace. The menu is massive - try the taco loco dish with beef, or the top-notch fajitas served on a sizzling plate. The enormous frozen margaritas are excellent thirst-quenchers. Service can be slow as they do get busy, but it's always with a smile. ▸ K-2, Rr. Liman Kaba 30, tel. +355 68 609 33 33. Open 09:00-23:00.

Turkish

Sofra Turke

An oasis of calm in an otherwise chaotic street, this slightly upmarket restaurant specializes in original *kuzhina turke*. Complete with pictures of old Istanbul and plenty of carpets on the walls, the staff speak enough English to take diners through the menu. Surplus to the cavalcade of delicious grilled meat options is a range of classic sticky Turkish baklava desserts. ▸ F-2, Rr. e Kavajës 170, tel. +355 4 2 22 68 18, www.sofraturke.wordpress.com. Open 09:00-24:00.



The dome of the Namazgah Mosque



Albanian mixed grill. Photo by Young Shanahan, CC BY 2.0

Vegetarian & Vegan

Plant-loving diners are increasingly catered for in Tirana, with the younger Albanians firmly hooked on healthy smoothies and snacks. Coffee lovers are best served in Mulliri, while self-caterers can visit Rossmann&Lala, Conad and Baronesha for tofu, vegan yoghurt and more.

Fit Food Bar

Overlooking busy Sheshi Wilson square, this tiny shop has various freshly pressed juice and smoothie combinations on offer, as well as healthy snack or meal options including salads and wraps. ▸ I-3, Rr. Abdyl Frashëri 21, tel. +355 68 559 61 61, www.fitfood.com.al. Open 07:00-21:00; closed Sun.

Happy Belly

Tiny Happy Belly, a few steps down from the street, is an unmissable veggie and vegan café - perhaps the only true vegan place in town. The friendly hostess serves fresh veggie and vegan juices, smoothies and Saturday brunches - all gorgeously presented behind a market stand full of fruit and veg. ▸ H-4, Rr. Ibrahim Rugova, tel. +355 69 54 50 082. Open 08:30-20:00; Wed 09:00-20:00; Sat 09:00-18:30; Sun 12:00-17:00. .

Veggies

The very best vegan and vegetarian option in town, Veggies has an extensive menu of veg sushi, ramen, portobello burger, burrito, salad bowls, fresh juices, smoothies, desserts and more. There's a nice terrace too. ▸ I-4, Rr. Sami Frashëri, tel. +355 69 207 77 26, www.veggiestirana.com. Open 08:00-21:00; closed Sun.



Cafés

Streetside cafe by Jasmine Halki, CC BY 2.0

Tirana's café scene is bigger and better than it ever was before. From the simple streetside shacks to gleaming cake and ice cream lounges, it's easy to find a good place for a coffee break.

Classic cafés

Ardi Bakery

Anyone walking around the Komuna e Parisit neighbourhood would be hard-pressed not to notice the name 'Ardi' in numerous locations; Ardi Bakery, Ardi Cafe, Ardi Factory. What started as a simple bread shop is now a cult favourite in the area. The first in Tirana to modernize the simple sandwich, here you can break away from typical fillings and enjoy a honey mustard chicken or tuna salad baguette, or simply enjoy a perfectly roasted coffee. ▸ J-2, Rr. Tish Dahia 10. Open 06:00-23:30.

Coffee-Lab

The only cafe in Tirana to roast their own coffee - and these coffee-lovers do it well and are happy to explain the process to visitors. The large space with a wall of windows is infused with the smell of roasting, and offers cakes and pastries besides the coffee and hot drinks. ▸ I-4, Rr. Nikolla Tupe. Open 07:30-22:30; Sat 08:00-22:30; Sun 09:00-14:00.

Kometa Café & More

Whether you're in the mood for a coffee, cocktail, or can't satisfy your hunger, Kometa's got you covered. With DJs performing on weekend nights as well, it's no wonder this place has established itself as the neighbourhood go-to spot. Staff appreciate their customers here with attentive service and the kind of energy many tourists would expect. ▸ Rr. Skender Luarasi 2, tel. +355 69 294 45 31. Open 08:00-01:00; Fri, Sat 08:00-02:00.

Komiteti Kafe Muzeum

Popular with wide-eyed tourists, Komiteti combines a café with a museum of bits and bobs from decades past - and manages to pull it off very nicely indeed. The distinction between a place for a quick cup of coffee and an evening of heavy drinking is so blurred here that it's impossible to define what it is - beyond the fact that you really should drop by. ▸ G-5, Rr.Gjon Pali II, tel. +355 69 445 27 72. Open 07:00-24:00.

The Stephen Center

Opened in 1994 by evangelical missionaries who certainly know how to run a good (not-for-profit) café, this is one of Tirana's best, a cosmopolitan meeting place for locals and foreigners alike, serving a wide variety of international cuisine. There's a pleasant terrace to gorge on bottomless coffee, freshly squeezed orange juice and Eggs Benedict for breakfast. ▸ E-5/6, Rr. Hoxha Tahsim 1, tel. +355 4 223 47 48, www.stephencenter.com. Open 07:00-23:00; closed Sun.

Tea time

The Tea Room
Like a calm little corner of England in Albania, the Tea Room is a cosy café decorated with flowery patterns and with windows overlooking the Lana river. You can try various tea-leaf and herbal infusions - try the delicious Albanian ironwort mountain tea, *caj mali* - as well as good local wines and sweet cakes. ▸ G-3, Blv. Zhan Dark, tel. +355 68 404 70 27. Open 09:32-21:32; Sat 08:00-21:30; Sun 08:00-23:30.

Sweet cafés

Cake shops, pâtisseries and other cafés that cater to your sweet tooth.

Big Scoop
Ice cream from Kosovo? Why not - this chain of brightly lit cafés was founded in Pristina by some experienced returnees from London, and is expanding across the Balkans with its delicious ice cream, waffles, crêpes, brownies, pancakes and more - all laden with sweet toppings. Thankfully, there are a few savoury options too. Conveniently set near the lake and park. ▸ K-4, Rr. Sami Frashëri, tel. +355 68 251 22 45, www.bigscoop.menu. Open 07:00-23:00.

Cioccolatitaliani
Modern, bright and always busy, the menu of this Italian chocolate concept store stretches well beyond crêpes, with a veritable smorgasbord of tooth-destroying treats on offer, among them waffles and many concoctions with chocolate. ▸ H/1-4, Rr. Ibrahim Rugova, tel. +355 4 433 03 72, www.cioccolatitaliani.it. Open 08:00-24:00.

D'Angelo
D'Angelo offers the usual roll call of inventive coffee concoctions, plus a range of frozen yoghurts, bubble tea, smoothies and freshly squeezed fruit juices, which all taste great during the summer meltdown period. To compliment the caffeine, D'Angelo also dabbles in desserts, among them an irresistible and affordable chocolate fondue for sharing with friends. Also in four other Tirana locations. ▸ Rr. Papa Gjon Pali II, tel. +355 69 97 79 669, www.dangelo.al. Open 07:00-23:30.

Fabrika
Ice cream sounds even better when you say it in Albanian - *akullore* - and it's perhaps best at Fabrika, where they make their own delicious, organic and vegan flavours, served with a smile. ▸ D-4, Blv. Zogu I, 24, tel. +355 68 662 95 59. Open 09:00-21:00.

Bagels

NYT Bagels
This small New York-style deli specializes in freshly-made bagels that are as good as you're going to get in this part of the world. They come with a choice of bread, toppings and fillings such as cream cheese and salmon, customized as you wish and assembled before your eyes. There's coffee and a few other snacks as well, plus a tiny little outside seating area. Find it in the side street halfway up Rr. Gërmenji. ▸ H-5/6, Rr. Themistokli Gërmenji, tel. +355 69 540 75 83, www.nytbagels.wixsite.com/home. Open 07:30-16:30; Sat 09:30-14:30; closed Sun.

Yogurteria
Frozen yoghurt, ice cream, waffles, crepes, smoothies and many more healthy and sweet distractions. Don't miss the Cipriani cake, or the San Sebastian cheesecake. ▸ I-4, Rr. Ibrahim Rrugova 7, tel. +355 69 840 01 70. Open 07:00-23:30.

Coffee shops

Le Bon
Sprinkled around several locations in town, the Le Bon bakery and pastry shops have a bustling, cosmopolitan vibe, and the sandwiches and pastries are tasty. Le Bon also manufactures stunning cakes, from cartoon-themed creations for the kids to Jack Daniels-laced confectionary for the adults. The outlet on Rruga Marko Boçari by the lake is the perfect place to stock up your park picnic basket. ▸ Rr. Dritan Hoxha, tel. +355 672 00 06 70, www.lebon.al. Open 06:30-22:30.

Mon Chéri
Speciality coffees, hot cocoa, smoothies, cakes snacks and much more, in a popular chain of coffee shops dotted all over the city. The busy outlet on Sheshi Wilson square has a take-away window supplying coffee around the clock for the truly desperate. ▸ I-3, Rr. Sami Frashëri, tel. +355 68 203 09 55, www.moncheri.al. Open 07:00-22:30.

Mulliri i Vjetër
Impossible to miss, Mulliri cafés offer a spot to relax with a book, get some work done, or meet friends while enjoying a speciality coffee, cookie or light meal. At this strategic Blloku street corner, Mulliri Gourmet is the flagship shop, with the largest selection of food and drinks. Their pleasant large terrace is an important fixture on the *Blloku* see-and-be-seen circuit. ▸ H-4, Rr. Ibrahim Rugova, tel. +355 69 706 63 70, www.mullirivjeter.al. Open 06:30-24:00.



Nightlife

Bars on Rruga Matohiti. Photo by Denis Ismailaj on Unsplash

Tirana's nightlife offers a lot of variety within easy walking distance. For many, the fun starts with the lively, traditional *xhiro* (mass evening stroll), and ends more often than not somewhere in the bustling *Blloku* area in the early hours of the morning. Tirana has seen a gradual adoption of hipster culture in recent years, and their taste for quality and craft beers is a welcome addition to a scene that for long has been dominated by the botoxed-up crowd with their sweet pink drinks. Albanians still prefer sipping coffee to serious drinking, with foreigners often being the only ones knocking back the hard stuff.

Bars

Cheers Irish Pub

Pandering to every popular culture stereotype imaginable, this perfectly adequate place to drink and be merry features an admirable stockade of German beer behind the bar, burgers and other pub food on the menu, and is more often than not overflowing with customers during the evening. The stage at the back regularly hosts DJs and live music. ▸ H-3, Rr. Pjetër Bogdani 39/1, tel. +355 67 203 60 11. Open 07:00-02:00.

Hemingway

Operating along the lines of a Hemingway-Cuba theme but throwing in a lot of other cultural references along the way, find chairs and suitcases stuck to the walls and a happy crowd of drinkers. Friday evenings herald a weekly live music event which tends to attract big crowds. Hemingway also organizes the Jazz Fest, held every July. ▸ E-3, Rr. Kont Urani 2, tel. +355 69 202 2303, www.hemingway.al. Open 05:00-1:00; Fri 06:00-1:00; Sat 07:00-1:00; closed Sun.

Illyrian Saloon

A favoured location for the rocker crowd in Tirana, you'll often find live music at weekends featuring local acts, with no cover charge. Cheap drinks are the aim of the game here, and there is great sense of camaraderie amongst patrons, as long as you fit the vibe. Set below street level, the saloon atmosphere is certainly evident from the wooden features, flowing whiskeys and of course the Wild Wild West-style doors, made for a dramatic entrance. ▸ I-4, Rr. Perlat Rexhepi, tel. +355 69 211 68 00. Open 12:00-02:00.

Kino

This vintage-cinema-themed bar is one of the wildest and biggest nightlife hotspots in Tirana, and parties pump 'til the early hours, with densely packed weekends putting you in an unparalleled realm of closeness to others. Also one of the best places in town to catch a rare glimpse of someone daring to groove to the music. ▸ Rr. Pjetër Bogdani, tel. +355 69 471 95 95. Open 09:00-02:00.

MyWay
The unofficial headquarters of Tirana's alternative crowd, MyWay in Blloku is one of the best places in town to mingle with the locals - it may be the only bar in town where it's actually socially acceptable to talk to strangers. Drinks are cheap, the waiters are friendly, and this pet-accommodating venue even has its own resident cat. ▸ Rr. Pjetër Bogdani 11, tel. +355 69 227 05 54. Open 08:00-12:00.

Noor
A cosy bar with a small terrace next to the historical Toptani Seraj building, serving Spritz cocktails and fine Italian food, including pasta, panini and risotto. There are occasional music-themed nights, but it's Thursdays that deserves a mention here for the free finger food - within reason, dear readers - that comes with your drinks from 20:00. ▸ F-5, Rr. Abdi Toptani, tel. +355 69 700 70 08. Open 07:00-23:00.

Nouvelle Vague
This popular establishment isn't marked by a sign, but is unmissable nevertheless due to the wild and happy colour scheme used for the furniture, walls and air ducts. Hammocks dangle for the ceiling, and the bearded gentlemen behind the bar mix a great selection of shakes cocktails to a backdrop of interesting music. They also like inviting bartenders from neighbouring countries to shake it up a bit. ▸ H-3, Rr. Pjetër Bogdani, tel. +355 69 933 3622, www.nouvellevaguetirana.com. Open 08:30-02:00.

Radio Bar
Perhaps Tirana's most popular bar, Radio has been delighting Tirana's alternative youth with music, beer and cocktails since 2009. The front room is home to a good collection of Albanian memorabilia, like old radios, photographs of film stars and magazines. Towards the back, the semi-open terrace is packed during the weekend evenings, when DJs liven up the place even more. Find Radio slightly hidden away, set back from the street. ▸ H-4, Rr. Ismail Qemali, Tirane 1000, www.radiobar.al. Open 10:00-12:00.

Shisha Room
Lighting and livening up an otherwise dour street, this relaxed bar pulls in locals and foreigners alike with its relaxed vibe, varied food and drinks menu, and most of all its almost gourmet shisha selection. Let the waiter recommend some special flavours, and puff away. ▸ H-5, Rr. Themistokli Germenji, tel. +355 68 800 8888, www.shisharoom.com. Open 07:00-24:00.



Street art. Photo Nicolas Vollmer, CC BY 2.0

Tiki Bar
Offering a tropical island castaway vibe, this two-floored beach hut of a bar complete with wooden face masks and lampshades made from seashells is about as close as it gets to a Caribbean cocktail bar in contemporary Tirana. Besides beer, there's a range of colourful mixed drinks and freshly squeezed fruit juice, and regular live music gigs. ▸ I-4, Rr. Perlat Rexhepi, tel. +355 68 518 00 05. Open 07:00-24-00.

Beer bars

Birrari Ke Tori
Down a few steps from street level, this fabulous beer bar has everything you need: freshly grilled meat dishes, a small terrace, a friendly owner and cold local beer. Perfect for anything from a quick lunch or dinner to a night of revelry. ▸ G/H-4, Rr. Vaso Pasha, tel. +355 69 238 76 07. Open 10:00-24:00.

Hops Bar
A hopping bar offering more than 100 types of beer from bottles or on tap, together with an excellent range of pub food and occasional live music. Besides an insane range of Belgian beers, Albanian microbrews worth sampling here include the *Dyst* IPA from Tirana (which is recommended with a portobello pulled pork burger) and the quirky *Birra e Gjyshit* "grandpa's beer" from Pogradec. ▸ H-5/6, Rr. Elbasanit 85, tel. +355 69 207 7772. Open 07:00-24:00.

The Taproom by Pan's Microbrewery
A relaxed brewery bar just west of the city centre that's made for artisan beer lovers, livened up with occasional music and sports viewing nights. Pans brews and serves very reasonably priced lager beer, the Vagabond IPA and the Midas Belgian white, as well as fermented kombucha drinks. Albanian Puka beer is on tap too. Ask for the tasting glasses to try them all before settling on your favourite brew. ▸ H-3, Rr. Komuna e Parisit 2, tel. 069 202 8516.

Live music

Perla Tattoo Pub

With an intoxicating mix of great music and craft beers, Perla is a centre for Tirana's alternative scene. This rock bar features excellent live music nights, with jazz and blues played on Thursdays and occasional open mic nights for punters to show their talents. Should you be in the mood for a tattoo, they can arrange this for you as well. ▸ G-3, Rr. Nikolla Tupe 3, tel. +355 69 694 2431. Open 11:00-23:00, Sat & Sun 24hrs.

Tudor 59

Perhaps Tirana's most convivial little bar, Tudor 59 is a cosy live music venue, where owner Artur, his friends and a few stray cats simply hang out and play music all night, with and for whoever rocks up - instruments are often handed out to guests. Beers, raki, cocktails and snacks fuel the night. Half open air with a wood stove for cool nights, don't expect it to open when it rains. A most excellent place. ▸ E-3, Rr. Kajo Karafili, tel. +355 68 226 65 42. Open 08:00-24:00.

Clubs

Keep an open mind, don't expect the cutting-edge South London or Berlin vibe when it comes to clubbing in Tirana, and you'll have a great night. Keep an eye on social media and for posters advertising the bigger events. In summer, most of Tirana's club scene decamps to the south coast, together with all the students.

Techno Sphere

Proud to be the only techno underground club in Tirana, this is where techno and trance fans who like to dance are catered to. A small space with a friendly crowd, it's a short walk east of the national stadium in the student district. Check their insta or posters around town for information on club nights and visiting DJs. ▸ Rr. e Elbasanit 8. Open Thurs 22:00-04:00, Fri, Sat 23:00-05:00.



Inside the Piramida

Cocktail bars

Juliette Cocktail Bar

Nowhere is as well-known for live music as Juliette; all tastes and genres are covered, with events including rock shows, Latin nights and karaoke (on Tuesdays and Wednesdays). But best just wander in to see what's going on. Weekends can get wild and see the party popping until the early morning. ▸ Rr. Pjetër Bogdani 37, tel. +355 69 578 5200. Open 11:00-02:00.

Mugo

Part of the Mulliri empire, this very elegant lounge bar serves everything from brunch with coffee in the morning, to burgers, sushi and Mediterranean or exotic dishes later at night, all accompanied by expertly mixed cocktails. There's a DJ at hand on weekend nights too. ▸ H-4, Rr. Pjetër Bogdani, tel. +355 69 401 07 11, www.mugo.al. Open 19:00-24:00.

Irish pubs

Meduza Irish Pub

An insanely popular Irish pub with Guinness on tap and dozens of other bottled beer options, a wide range of pub food and a cosy interior with the usual collection of beer ads. The punters and staff are all extremely friendly, the terrace has the propensity to keep you glued to your seat until well after bedtime and, perhaps best of all, they screen all the major international soccer matches. ▸ H-5, Rr. Mustafa Matohiti, tel. +355 69 335 1654. Open 06:30-24:00; Fri 07:00-02:00; Sat, Sun 08:00-04:00.

New Irish Pub

Hidden away from the street, the New Irish Pub is a fun, large bar decked out exactly as you would expect, offering Irish beers, good music and pub food. There are regular lively events like karaoke on Tuesday, and live music on Thursday. ▸ H-4, Rr. Pjeter Pogdani 36/1, tel. +355 69 223 33 24, www.newirishpub.al. Open 17:00-2:00AM.

Wine bars

Vena

Wine lovers rejoice! Whilst many wine bars have come and gone over the past years, the intimate Vena bar has proved that it's got what it takes to stay. The owner is passionate in his love of grapes and the staff are extremely knowledgeable regarding their selection of varietals. Find your new favourite sip whilst enjoying a plate of delicious cold-cut meats and cheeses or, if feeling more famished, dig into their signature pastas and risottos. ▸ Rr. Komuna e Parisit 3/1, tel. +355 67 490 4376. Open 08:00-24:00.



Shopping

Pazar i Ri market. Photo by Linda Gerbec on Unsplash

Tirana has caught up with the rest of us and now boasts more or less everything the modern shopper requires, much of it for sale in modern shopping centres. A more authentic Albanian retail experience can be had in the cheap and cheerful neighbourhood shops staffed by grinning proprietors, many of them more concerned with where you're from, and if you have a husband or wife, than what you want to buy. Around the Pazar i Ri market, the bustling streets cater to singular tastes such as bicycles, second-hand clothes and furniture.

Books

Adrion International Books

The best selection of English-language books in and about Albania, including a wide selection of novels, art books, guidebooks, maps, and an ever-increasing selection of translated Albanian literature and titles on local history and culture. Also with an outlet in the airport. ▸ E-4, Sheshi Skënderbej, Palace of Culture, tel. +355 4 450 26 06, www.adrionltd.com. Open 09:30-21:30.

Koteci Bookstore

A small store with a large selection of second-hand English-language books. The friendly service and tips from the owners, reasonable prices, and resident cat make it well worth a visit. ▸ F/G-2, Rr. Nikolla Lena, tel. +355 68 341 46 08.

Librari Babel

A bookshop café housed in one of the boxes scattered around the Pyramid, Babel is a bright '*kafe letrare*' with friendly staff, comfy seating by the window, and a decent selection of English books and manga comics. ▸ G-5, Rr. Papa Gjon Pali II 2, tel. +355 69 703 42 41. Open 08:00-22:00.

Gifts & Souvenirs

The best souvenir shopping is in Kruja, where shops are full of jewellery, antiques and knickknacks. In Tirana, the Pazar i Ri market has good souvenir options and kiosks at the southern end of Rr. Barrikadave sell Albania mugs, dolls and bunker ashtrays. Albanian cheese and other foodstuffs also make excellent gifts if you can get them home without eating them all on the plane.

Shopping centres

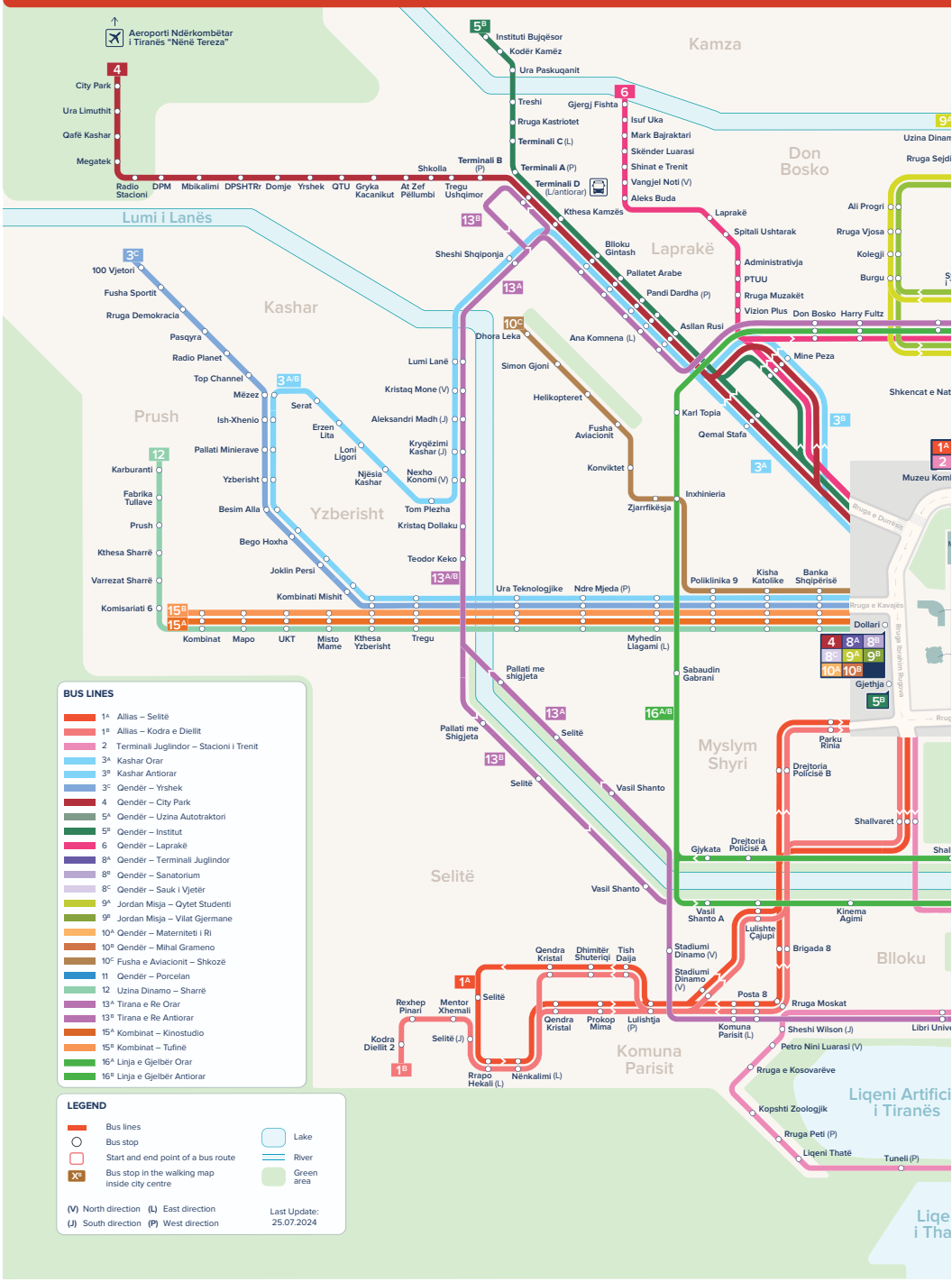
Until fairly recently, Tirana's shopping centres were predominantly upmarket affairs pandering to the sophisticated tastes of the city's fashion-conscious wives and girlfriends. This all changed with the opening of TEG, a massive complex on the edge of the city, reminiscent of any European shopping centre.

TEG (Tirana East Gate)

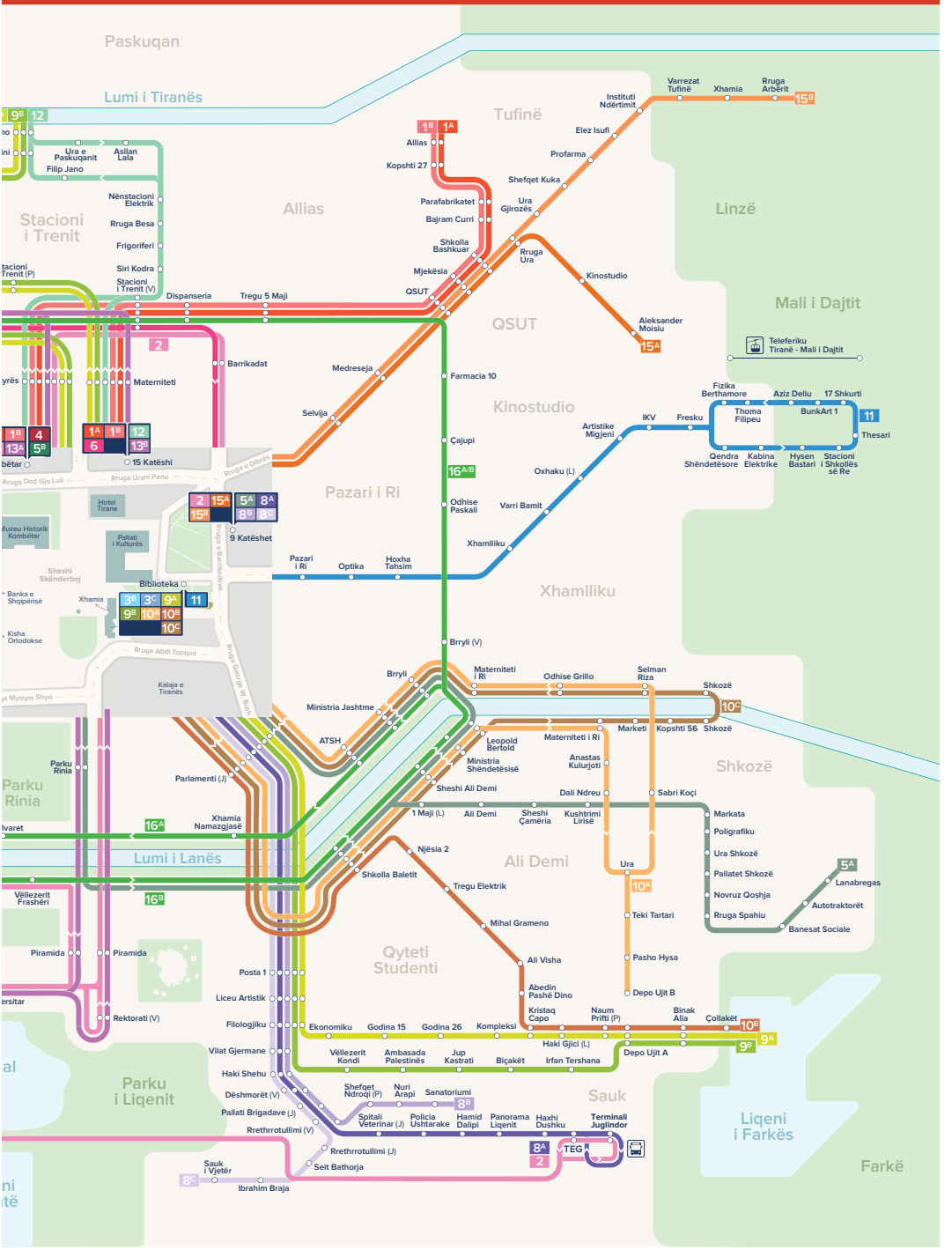
The largest and most popular shopping centre in Albania features two floors of shops, a food court, cafés, a huge Interspar hypermarket and a cinema. Also the location of the bus station serving eastern, southern and international destinations. Reached on bus 8A from the city centre. ▸ Rr. Nacionale, Highway Tirane-Elbasan, tel. +355 68 808 2934, www.teg.al. Open 10:00-22:00; Sat, Sun 09:00-22:00.

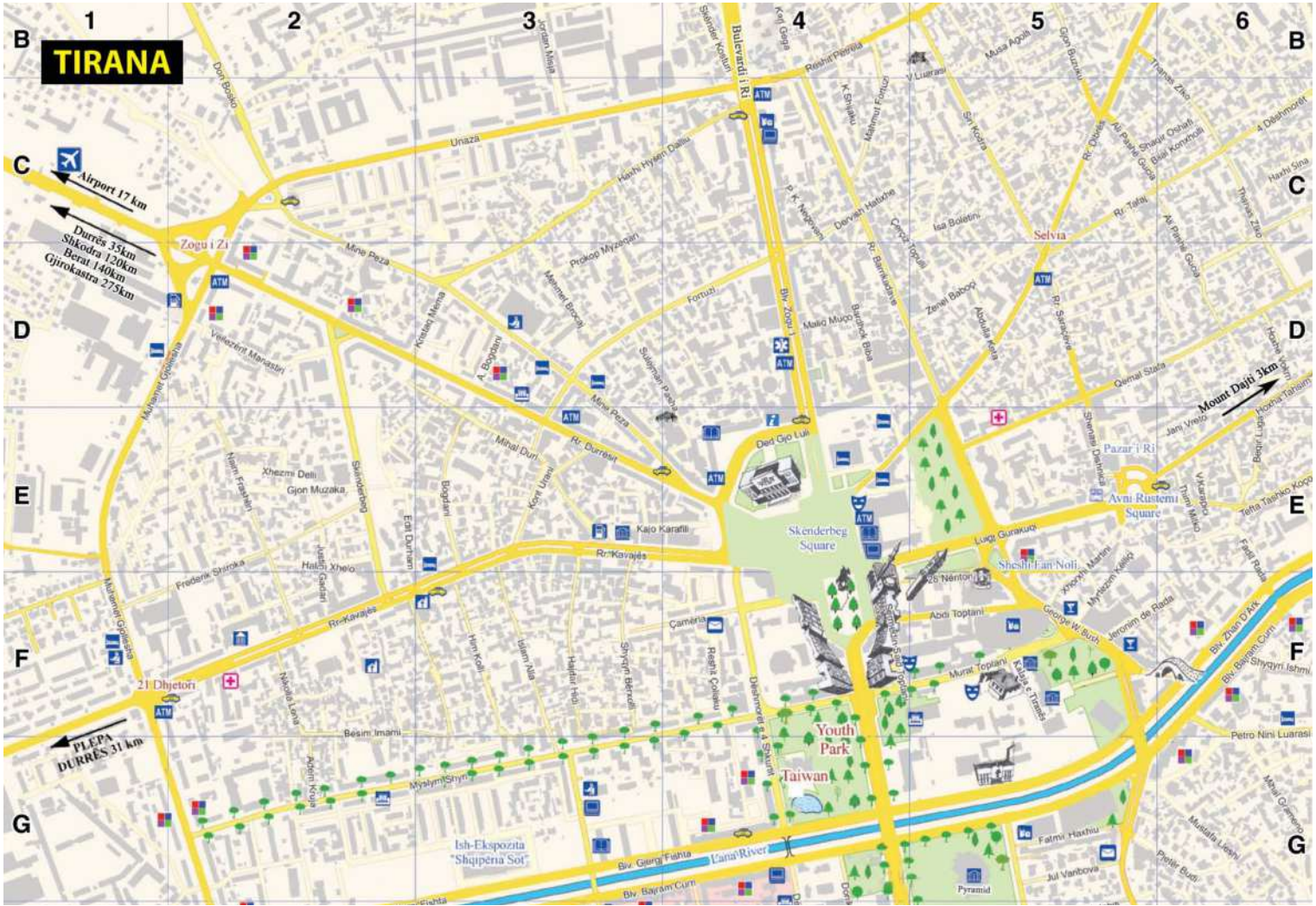
Toptani Shopping Center

The best mall in the city centre has 6 levels of shops, and great views over Tirana from the top floor, where there's also a kids' play area and few food options such as a Nona buffet restaurant. A supermarket and ATMs can be found downstairs. ▸ F-5, Rr. Abdi Toptani, tel. +355 4 454 09 99, www.toptani.com.al/en. Open 09:00-22:00.


Aeroporti Ndërkombëtar i Tiranës "Nënë Tereza"
Kamza
Don Bosko
Lumi i Lanës
Kashar
Laprakë
Prush
Yzberisht
Selitë
Myslym Shyri
Blloku
Komuna Parisit
Liqeni Artificial i Tiranës
Radio Stacioni
DPM
Mbikalimi
DPSHTRr
Domje
Yrshek
QTU
Gryka Kacanikut
At Zef Pëllumbi
Tregu Ushqimor
Shkolla
Terminali B (P)
Terminali A (P)
Terminali D (L/antiorar)
Terminali C (L)
Instituti Bujqësor
Kodër Kamëz
Ura Paskuqanit
Treshi
Gjergj Fishta
Rruga Kastriotet
Isuf Uka
Mark Bajraktari
Skënder Luarasi
Shinat e Trenit
Vangjel Noti (V)
Aleks Buda
Kthesa Kamëz
Sheshi Shqiponja
Blloku Gintash
Pallatet Arabe
Pandi Dardha (P)
Asllan Rusi
Ana Komnena (L)
Dhora Leka
Simon Gjoni
Helikopteret
Fusha Aviacionit
Konviktet
Inxhinieria
Zjarrfikësja
Karl Topia
Qemal Stafa
Spitali Ushtarak
Administrativja
PTUU
Rruga Muzakët
Vizion Plus
Don Bosko
Harry Fultz
Ali Progri
Rruga Vjosa
Kolegji
Burgu
Rruga Sejdi
Uzina Dinam
Mine Peza
Shkencat e Nat
Muzeu Komi
Rruga e Durrësit
Rruga e Kavajës
Dollari
Gjethja
Poliklinika 9
Kisha Katolike
Banka Shqipërisë
Ura Teknologjike
Ndre Mjeda (P)
Myhedin Llagami (L)
Sabaudin Gabrani
Pallati me shigjeta
Pallati me Shigjeta
Selitë
Vasil Shanto
Vasil Shanto A
Gjykata
Drejtoria Policisë A
Drejtoria Policisë B
Parku Rinia
Shallvaret
Kinema Agimi
Lulishtë Çajupi
Brigada 8
Stadiumi Dinamo (V)
Stadiumi Dinamo (V)
Posta 8
Rruga Moskat
Sheshi Wilson (J)
Libri Univ
Petro Nini Luarasi (V)
Rruga e Kosovarëve
Kopshti Zoologjik
Rruga Peti (P)
Liqeni Thatë
Tuneli (P)
Qendra Kristal
Dhimitër Shuteriqi
Tish Daija
Prokop Mima
Lulishta (P)
Qendra Kristal
Rexhep Pinari
Mentor Xhemali
Selitë (J)
Kodra Diellit 2
Rrapo Hekali (L)
Nënkalimi (L)
Kombinati Mishit
Joklin Persi
Teodor Keko
Kristaq Dollaku
Tom Plezha
Nexho Konomi (V)
Njësia Kashar
Kryqëzimi Kashar (J)
Aleksandri Madh (J)
Lumi Lanë
Kristaq Mone (V)
Loni Ligori
Erzen Lita
Serat
Mëzez
Ish-Xhenio
Pallati Minierave
Yzberisht
Besim Alla
Bego Hoxha
Kthesa Sharrë
Varrezat Sharrë
Komisariati 6
Fabrika Tullave
Karburanti
Prush
Top Channel
Radio Planet
Pasqyra
Rruga Demokracia
Fusha Sportit
100 Vjetori
Kombinat
Mapo
UKT
Misto Mame
Kthesa Yzberisht
Tregu
4 City Park
Ura Limuthit
Qafë Kashar
Megatek
BUS LINES
1A Allias – Selitë
1B Allias – Kodra e Diellit
2 Terminali Juglindor – Stacioni i Trenit
3A Kashar Orar
3B Kashar Antiorar
3C Qendër – Yrshek
4 Qendër – City Park
5A Qendër – Uzina Autotraktori
5B Qendër – Institut
6 Qendër – Laprakë
8A Qendër – Terminali Juglindor
8B Qendër – Sanatorium
8C Qendër – Sauk i Vjetër
9A Jordan Misja – Qytet Studenti
9B Jordan Misja – Vilat Gjermane
10A Qendër – Materniteti i Ri
10B Qendër – Mihal Grameno
10C Fusha e Aviacionit – Shkozë
11 Qendër – Porcelan
12 Uzina Dinamo – Sharrë
13A Tirana e Re Orar
13B Tirana e Re Antiorar
15A Kombinat – Kinostudio
15B Kombinat – Tufinë
16A Linja e Gjelbër Orar
16B Linja e Gjelbër Antiorar
LEGEND
Bus lines
Bus stop
Start and end point of a bus route
Bus stop in the walking map inside city centre
Lake
River
Green area
(V) North direction (L) East direction
(J) South direction (P) West direction
Last Update: 25.07.2024

s Lines Map


Paskuqan
Lumi i Tiranës
Stacioni i Trenit
Allias
Tufinë
Linzë
Mali i Dajtit
QSUT
Kinostudio
Pazari i Ri
Xhamlliku
Shkozë
Ali Demi
Qyteti Studenti
Parku Rinia
Lumi i Lanës
Parku i Liqenit
Sauk
Liqeni i Farkës
Farkë
Ura e Paskuqanit
Asllan Lala
Filip Jano
Nënstacioni Elektrik
Rruga Besa
Frigoriferi
Siri Kodra
Stacioni i Trenit (V)
Dispanseria
Tregu 5 Maji
Barrikadat
Materniteti
15 Katëshi
Rruga Ura
Rruga e Dibrës
Rruga Urani Pano
Hotel Tirana
Muzeu Historik Kombëtar
Pallati i Kulturës
Sheshi Skënderbej
Banka e Shqipërisë
Kisha Ortodokse
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9 Katëshet
Rruga e Barrikadave
Rruga Abdi Toptani
Kalaja e Tiranës
Rruga George W. Bush
Rruga Myslym Shyri
Parlamenti (J)
Xhamia Namazgjasë
Vëllezerit Frashëri
Piramida
Rektorati (V)
Posta 1
Liceu Artistik
Filologjiku
Vilat Gjermane
Haki Shehu
Dëshmorët (V)
Pallati Brigadave (J)
Rrethrrotullimi (V)
Sauk i Vjetër
Ibrahim Braja
Rrethrrotullimi (J)
Seit Bathorja
Spitali Veterinar (J)
Shefqet Ndroqi (P)
Nuri Arapi
Sanatoriumi
Policia Ushtarake
Hamid Dalipi
Panorama Liqenit
Haxhi Dushku
Terminali Juglindor
TEG
Vëllezerit Kondi
Ambasada Palestinës
Jup Kastrati
Biçakët
Irfan Tershana
Depo Ujit A
Ekonomiku
Godina 15
Godina 26
Kompleksi
Haki Gjici (L)
Kristaq Capo
Naum Prifti (P)
Binak Alia
Çollakët
Depo Ujit B
Abedin Pashë Dino
Ali Visha
Pasho Hysa
Mihal Grameno
Teki Tartari
Tregu Elektrik
Shkolla Baletit
Njësia 2
Ura
Markata
Poligrafiku
Ura Shkozë
Pallatet Shkozë
Novruz Qoshja
Rruga Spahiu
Autotraktorët
Lanabregas
Banesat Sociale
Sabri Koçi
Dali Ndreu
Sheshi Ali Demi
1 Maji (L)
Ali Demi
Sheshi Çamëria
Kushtrimi Lirisë
Ministria Shëndetësisë
Leopold Berfold
Anastas Kulurjoti
Materniteti i Ri
Marketi
Kopshti 56
Shkozë
Selman Riza
Odhise Grillo
Brryli
Ministria Jashtme
ATSH
Brryli (V)
Oxhaku (L)
Varri Bamit
Odhise Paskali
Çajupi
Farmacia 10
Medreseja
Selvija
Qendra Shëndetësore
Kabina Elektrike
Hysen Bastari
Stacioni i Shkollës së Re
Thesari
Fizika Berthamore
Thoma Filipeu
Aziz Deliu
BunkArt 1
17 Shkurti
Artistike Migjeni
IKV
Fresku
Teleferiku Tiranë - Mali i Dajtit
Aleksander Moisiu
Kinostudio
Instituti Ndërtimit
Varrezat Tufinë
Xhamia
Rruga Arbërit
Elez Isufi
Profarma
Shefqet Kuka
Ura Gjirozës
Bajram Curri
Parafabrikatet
Allias
Kopshti 27
Shkolla Bashkuar
Rruga Ura
Mjekësia
QSUT
Pazari i Ri
Optika
Hoxha Tahsim
Xhamlliku
Rruga e Barrikadave


TIRANA
Airport 17 km
Durrës 35km
Shkodra 120km
Berat 140km
Gjirokastra 275km
PLEPA
DURRËS 31 km
Mount Dajti 3km
Bulevardi i Ri
Unaza
Zogu i Zi
21 Dhjetori
Skenderbeg Square
Youth Park
Taiwan
Selvia
Avni Rustemi Square
Pazar i Ri
Ish-Ekspozita "Shqipëria Sot"
Lana River
Pyramid
Rr. Kavajës
Rr. Durrësit
Bvd. Zogu I
Mine Peza
Ded Gjo Luli
Kaio Karafili
Sheshi Ean Noli
Abdi Toptani
Besim Imami
Fatmi Hashiu
Jul Variboba
Petro Nini Luarasi
Shyqyri Ishmi
Bvd. Zhan D'Ark
Bvd. Benjamin Curri
Bvd. Gjergj Fishta
Bvd. Bajram Curri
Rr. Dibres
Rr. Barrikadave
Rr. Tafaj
Rr. Skenderbeu
Rr. Reshit Petrela
Rr. Myslym Shyri
Rr. Abdyl Frashëri
Rr. Ismail Qemali
Rr. Luigj Gurakuqi
Rr. Sami Frashëri
Rr. Mihal Duri
Rr. Fortuzi
Rr. Dervish Hatixhe
Rr. Ibrahim Rugova
Rr. Hasan Prishtina
Rr. Frederik Shiroka
Rr. Nikolla Lena
Rr. Hamdi Kolli
Rr. Hajdar Hoti
Rr. Reshit Çollaku
Rr. Dëshmorët e 4 Shtatorit
Rr. Gjon Buzuku
Rr. Thanas Ziko
Rr. Haxhi Sina
Rr. Isa Boletini
Rr. Zenel Babogj
Rr. Qemal Stafa
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Rr. Bilal Komoshi
Rr. Vaso Pasha
Rr. Ndre Mjeda



Street register

All Tirana streets below are prefexed 'Rruga' (Rr.); boulevards are listed as 'Blv', squares as 'Sheshi'.

4 Dëshmorët	C-6
28 Nëntori	F-4/5, E-5
Abdi Toptani	F-4/5
Abdulla Keta	D-5
Abdyl Frashëri	I-3/4/5
Adem Kruja	G-2
Ali Pashe Gucia	C-5/6, D-6
Andon Zako Çajupi	H-3
Asim Zeneli	H-5/6
Bardhok Biba	D-4
Barrikadave	B/C-4, D-4/5
Beqir Luga	E-6
Besim Imami	F-2/3
Bilal Konxholli	C-5/6
Blv. Bajram Curri	H-1 to G-6
Blv. Dëshmorët e Kombit	F-4 to I-5
Blv. Gjergj Fishta	H-1 to G-4
Blv. Zhan D'Ark	G-5 to E-6
Blv. Zogu I	C/D/E-4
Bogdani	E-3
Brigada VIII	H-3/4
Çamëria	F-3/4
Çerçiz Topulli	C-4, D-5
Ded Gjo Luli	E-4
Dervish Hatixhe	D/C-4
Dervish Hima	I-5/6
Dëshmorët e 4 Shkurtit	G/H/I/J-4
Dhimitër S. Shuteriqi	J-1/2
Dibrës	C/D-5, B5/6
Don Bosko	B/C-2
Donika Kastrioti	G/H-4
Dora D'Istria	K/J-4
Durrësit	D-2/3, E-3/4
Edit Durham	E-2
Elbasanit	G-5, H-5/6, I-6
Emin Duraku	I-2, H-3
Fadil Rada	I-2, H-3
Faik Konica	I-6
Fatmir Haxhiu	G-5
Fortuzi	D-3/4
Frederik Shiroka	F-1/2, E-2
Gjin Bue Shpata	H/I-3
Gjin Kuqali	I/J-3
Gjon Buzuku	B/C-5
Gjon Muzaka	E-2
Gjon Pali II	G/H/I-5
Grigor Heba	I-2, J-2/3
Hajdar Hidi	E/F-3
Haki Mborja	J-1
Halim Xhelo	E-2
Haxhi Hysen Dalliu	D-3, C-3/4
Haxhi Sina	C-6
Him Kolli	F-3
Hoxhe Vokrri	D-6
Hoxha Tahsim	E/D-6
Ibrahim Dervishi	I-1
Isa Boletini	C/D-5
Islam Alla	E/F/G-3
Ismail Qemali	H-3/4/5
Jani Vreto	E-5/6
Jeronim de Rada	F-5
Jordan Misja	A/B/C-3
Jul Varibova	G-5
Justin Gadari	E/F-2
Jusuf Vrioni	I-2
K. Shijaku	B/C-4
Kajo Karafili	E-3/4
Kalaja e Tiranes	F-5
Karl Gega	B-4
Kavajës	F-1/2/3, E-3/4
Komuna e Parisit	H-2/3, I-2
Kont Urani	E-3
Kristaq Mema	D-2/3
Lek Dukagjini	I-5, J-4
Lidhja Prizrenit	I/J-4
Liman Kaba	J-2/3, K-2
Luigj Gurakuqi	E-4/5
Mahmut Fortuzi	B/C-4
Maliq Muço	D-4
Margarita Tutulani	J-3/4
Medar Shtylla	I/J/K-2
Mehmet Brocaj	D-3
Mihal Duri	E-3
Mihal Grameno	G-6
Milto Tutulani	I/J-3
Mine Peza	C-2, D-2/3, E-3
Muhamet Gjollesha	D-1/2, E-1, F-1, G-1/2, H-2
Murat Toptani	F-4/5
Musa Agolli	B-5
Mustafa Lleshi	G-6
Mustafa Matohiti	G/H-5
Myrtezim Këlliçi	E/F-5
Myslym Shyri	G-2/3, F-3/4
Naim Frashëri	E/F-2
Nasi Pavllo	H/I-6
Nikolla Lena	F-2
Nikolla Tupe	I-3/4, H-4
Papa Kristo Negovani	C-4
Perlat Rexhepi	C-4
Petro Korçari	I-1
Petro Nini Luarasi	F-6
Pjetër Bogdani	H-3/4
Pjetër Budi	H-6
Prek Bibë Doda	H-2
Presidenti George W. Bush	F-5
Prokop Myzeqari	D-3
Qemal Guranjaku	H-6
Qemal Stafa	E-5, D-5/6
Ramzan Farka	B-6
Reshit Collaku	F-4
Reshit Petrela	B/C-4
Robert Shvare	I-1
Sami Frashëri	G-3 to J-4
Saraçëve	D-5
Sermedin Said Toptani	F-4
Shaqir Ofshafi	C-5/6
Sheh Ahmet Pazari	I-6
Shenasi Dishnica	D/E-5
Sheshi 21 Dhjetori	F-1
Sheshi Avni Rustemi	E-5
Shesi Fan Noli	E-5
Sheshi Italia	I-5
Sheshi Nënë Tereza	I-5
Sheshi Skënderbeg	E/F-4
Sheshi Zogu i Zi	C/D-2
Shyqyr Bërxolli	E/F-3
Shyqyr Ishmi	F-6
Siri Kodra	B-4
Skënder Kosturi	B/C-4
Skënderbeg	D/E/F-2
Stavro Vinjau	H/I-6
Sulejman Delvina	H-2, I-2/3
Sulejman Pasha	D-3/4, E-4
Tafaj	C-5/6
Tefta Tashko Koço	E-6
Thanas Ziko	B-5/6, C-6
Themistokli Gërmenji	H-5/6
Thimi Mitko	E-6
Unaza	C-2/3/4
V. Karapici	E-6
V. Luarasi	C-4/5, D-5
Vaso Pasha	G/H/I/J-4
Vëllezërit Manastiri	D-2
Viktor Eftimiu	H-1, I-1/2
Xhezmi Delli	E-2
Xhorxhi Martini	E/F-5
Ymer Kurti	I/J-3
Zenel Baboçi	D-5



Intercontinental Hotel

Skyscraper city

Boomtown Tirana is undergoing a radical redesign, with new towers rapidly being added to the skyline. Looking around Skanderbeg Square, it's hard to imagine that the modest, 56-metre-high **Tirana International Hotel** (56m, 1979) was the tallest building in Albania for 21 years after its completion… its nickname Pesëmbëdhjetëkatëshi, 'fifteen storey building' was almost longer than it was high. The rapid and literal rise of Tirana since the mid-2000s is demonstrated by the massive yellow sister **Intercontinental Hotel** (133m, 2025) dwarfing the old hotel. Dozens of other towers, recently completed, under construction or under discussion, are set to change the look of the city, designed by famous international architect companies who have often taken a playful approach. Many of these towers are controversial, due to dubious financing methods, architecture that is considered frivolous, or for altering the look and feel of the historical centre. Here are some of Tirana's most remarkable highrises.



Maritim Hotel Plaza

Tirana's Rock (89m, 2025) is featured on the cover of this issue, and overlooks Tirana's main square. Its balconies form the head of national hero Skanderbeg, and are equipped to allow plants to grow along the facade. The **Book Building** complex (77m, 2025) with its curious arched balconies rises in a corner of the main square, unfortunately somewhat overshadowing Tirana's prettiest building, the Et'hem Bey mosque, in front of it. Next door, the concrete-panelled **Maritim Hotel Plaza** (85m, 2007) is already one of the older highrises, changing from an ellipse at ground level to a square at the top. It manages to elegantly include the Ottoman-era Kaplan Pasha tomb in one corner. Across the square, the cantilevered **Eyes of Tirana** tower (135m, 2025) represents playfully stacked and slightly wonky cubes. The Alban Tower (107m, 2023) has a tree-shaped design consisting of four green and blue towers, overlooking the Orthodox Cathedral.

Along the river stands the monolithic bulk of **Downtown One** (150m, 2025), with pixel-like protruding bay windows that form the map of Albania. Down the road stands the **ABA Business Center** (83m, 2009) with colourful slats and a regrettable videoscreen, and the striking **Marriott Hotel** tower (112m, 2019) in the Albanian national colours red and black and attached to the national stadium. Behind the stadium, the quirky **Vertical Forest** building (75m, 2024) is inspired by Milan's Bosco Verticale and is planted with 3,000 shrubs and 145 trees.

Come back in a few years and you'll also be able to enjoy the sight of the **Puzzle** building near the lake, a jigsaw consisting of stacked house shapes, the 13 stacked cubes of the **Vertical Hora** (142m), the two buckling, hugging **Bond Tower** skyscrapers (200m) and the massive **Grand Park Skyline Tower** (266m) and **Mount Tirana** (206m) projects. Nothing however, is as megalomaniac as the proposed **Society Towers**, a three-pronged skyscraper which will top out at 300 metres. Tirana will never be the same again.



Downtown One



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