

TIRANA

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2013/2014

Postblloku

The new Checkpoint memorial

Jewish Tirana

A story of survival

Out of town

Travel to Ottoman-era Berat

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HOTEL KOTONI
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Hotel Boutique Kotoni the first boutique hotel in Albania. Set in the heart of Tirana's prestigious Blloku area, Hotel Boutique Kotoni offers elegantly decorated, modern rooms with free Wi-Fi.

The à-la-carte restaurant serves traditional Albanian and international cuisine, prepared with organic ingredients. During summer days guests can enjoy al fresco dining on a large terrace. Decorated in warm tones, rooms are bright and spacious.

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A skyscraper under construction – JvM

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The Holy Trinity Church in Berat – JvM

Europe's quirkiest capital city has changed at breakneck speed since we started publishing this guidebook in 2001. Tirana's city centre would be completely unrecognisable to someone beamed up from the early 1990s; buildings and skyscrapers in various stages of lingering construction or early decay pepper the city, with more planned - and there's even a bike rental scheme.

Foreign visitors can look forward to a vibrant restaurant scene with several new high-quality options. Tirana has also recently been enriched with several excellent boutique hotels, while accommodation prices on the whole have not risen much. The renovated National Art Gallery, the new Postbloku memorial on the main boulevard (depicted on the front cover) and the spruced-up Grand Park are all additional reasons to visit Tirana.

Good news for mobile phone users; Tirana In Your Pocket's free mobile version is now available at <http://m.inyourpocket.com/albania/tirana>; this has the full content of the print guide linked to interactive maps - and you're welcome to rate or comment on our reviews too. Your feedback is always welcome at tirana@inyourpocket.com. Enjoy Tirana.

Cover story



The small bunker that once guarded the main entrance of the blok area, one of thousands of such bunkers throughout in Albania, is now part of the impressive "Memorial to Communist isolation", together with some eerie concrete supports from Spaç labour camp mine and a segment of the Berlin Wall. Read more about the memorial on page 40.

Europe In Your Pocket



It's now 21 years since we published the first In Your Pocket guide - to **Vilnius** in Lithuania - in which time we have grown to become the largest publisher of locally produced city guides in Europe. We now cover more than **75** cities across the continent (with **Tbilisi**, in **Georgia**, the latest city to be pocketed) and the number of concise, witty, well-written and downright indispensable In Your Pocket guides published each year is approaching **five million**. We also publish a mobile phone site at m.inyourpocket.com, and an iPhone app which can be downloaded for free from the AppStore. Search for 'IYP Guides' by name.

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Publisher

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© Albania Experience Sh.P.K.
Rr. Elbasanit, Nd.10, H.5, 1010 Tirana, Albania
Tel: +355 4 225 56 55, fax: +355 4 227 19 60
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Editorial

Editor Jeroen van Marle
Contributors Sco, Rose Dosti
Fact-checking Bjona Troqe
Photos Jeroen van Marle, Sco
Cover photo Sco
Layout & Design Vaida Gudynaitė

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Editor's notice

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Tirana On Your Mobile:
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By plane

Tirana's modern *Nënë Tereza* (Mother Teresa) airport, 17km northwest of Tirana, is a 30 minute drive from the city centre. Beside the baggage carousel in arrivals there are ATMs, an exchange office with so-so rates, and a tourist information desk. Buy a local SIM card at the mobile phone shops. Ignore any taxi drivers harassing new arrivals, but take an official yellow airport taxi to the centre for 2,500 lek, 3,000 lek between 21:00-07:00. Alternatively, hop on the Rinas Express airport bus (250 lek) to Skanderbeg Square, departing every hour between 06:00 and 18:00.

By train

Albania has no international passenger trains. Weary rail arrivals from Shkodra, Durrës and Pogradec will find themselves deposited at Tirana's garden shed train station, at the northern end of Blv. Zogu I. It's a 15-20 minute walk down this boulevard to Skanderbeg Square, a short taxi ride, or hop on any bus heading that way from the bus stop across the street.

By bus

Despite the popularity of intercity bus travel in Albania, Tirana remains the last city in the universe without a bus station. Buses drop off passengers at various points around the city; you may need a taxi or city bus to get to the centre.

About this guide - Lidhur me këtë udhëzues

The Tirana In Your Pocket city guide is the only dedicated English-language guidebook to Albania's capital, and is part of a Europe-wide series of acclaimed city guides. In Your Pocket guides are written for foreign travellers and residents, to provide honest, critical information that makes visiting the city easier for foreign visitors. As a private and commercial initiative, Tirana In Your Pocket has been written and researched by a team of local and foreign travel guide experts. The opinions in the guide are those of the writers, and are not in any way meant to glorify or denigrate the city, merely to point out the merits and shortcomings that we think foreign travellers should know about. Every guidebook has its faults, so we appreciate any information that would lead to improving the next issue. Emails can be sent to tirana@inyourpocket.com.

Udhëzuesi i qytetit Tirana In Your Pocket (Tirana në xhepin tuaj) është udhëzuesi i vetëm në gjuhën angleze që i kushtohet kryeqytetit të Shqipërisë dhe është pjesë e një sërë udhëzuesve të njohur të qyteteve në mbarë Evropën. Udhëzuesit In your pocket janë hartuar për udhëtarët e huaj dhe për të huajt që banojnë në Tiranë, që të sigurojnë informacione të sinqerta kritike që e bëjnë vizitën në qytet më të lehtë për të sapoardhurit. Si një nismë private tregtare, Tirana In Your Pocket është shkruar dhe hartuar nga një ekip i ekspertëve vendas dhe të huajt të udhëzuesve të udhëtimit. Mendimet në udhëzues vijnë nga ata, dhe në asnjë mënyrë nuk kanë për qëllim që të lavdërojnë apo të nxjerrin në dritë të keqe qytetin, por thjesht të tregojnë meritat dhe mangësitë, të cilat ne mendojmë se udhëtarët e huaj duhet t'i dinë. Çdo udhëzues ka të metat e veta, prandaj ne do të çmonim çdo sygjerim që do të shpinte në përmirësimin e botimit të ardhshëm. E-maillet mund të dërgohen në tirana@inyourpocket.com.

By car

Driving to Albania is an option now that roads and safety have greatly improved - but don't expect to get there quickly. Coming from Greece, expect long queues and grinding bureaucracy. The Kakavija and Kapshtica crossings are open 24hrs; Qafë Boti near Konispol and Tre Urat near Permet open till 22:00.

From Macedonia, Qafë Thanë is the main crossing, though the Tushemisht crossing near Pogradec is quieter, has beautiful scenery and few delays. Together with the Bladë crossing near Peshkopi they are all open till 22:00; the Gorica crossing near Lake Prespa is open till 19:00. From Kosovo, you can quickly cross over at Qafë Morina and Qafë Prush, from Montenegro at Han i Hotit and Muriqan.

By ferry

There are ferry lines from several Italian cities to the ports of Durrës, Shengjin and Vlora. Flying to Corfu and using the daily passenger ferry to Saranda (see www.ionian-cruises.com) is often the cheapest way to reach South Albania from Western Europe.

Norman Wisdom – Mr Pitkin



Norman Wisdom
(c) C. Roberts, OTA

The late actor and comedian Norman Wisdom (1915-2010) is fondly remembered in his native England, but he's equally known and loved in Albania. Born and raised in London in an atmosphere of poverty and domestic violence, Wisdom left school at 13 and became popular for his improvised visual comedy routines and musical performances while serving in the British Army during World War Two. After the war he developed

a naïve and hapless romantic persona with a working class flat cap and tight-fitting suit, that caught the eye of the British film industry. He enjoyed a hugely successful film career between 1953 and 1966, acting as the bumbling Norman Pitkin, an unpretentious and dim-witted character forever in conflict with his aristocratic superiors. Regarded at the time as nothing more than harmless romantic comedies with very little in the way of serious social comment, these films came to the attention of the Hoxha regime in Albania, and subsequently became among the few Western films allowed to be shown in the country. In the eyes of the Albanian authorities, Norman Pitkin was seen as the archetype Western proletarian exploited by his evil capitalist rulers, turning Wisdom into an unlikely star. A cult figure to this day in Albania, and known universally as 'Mr Pitkin', Wisdom made his first visit to the country in 1995 and gained audiences with presidents, visited children's homes and, in 2001 travelled to the country with the English football team where he made more headlines than David Beckham. He was made an honorary citizen of Tirana, and his films are still shown regularly on television. Norman Wisdom touched the hearts of an extraordinary diverse range of people during his lifetime, including in the most improbable of nations in the Balkans.

Basic data

Albania's population is 2,787,615 (2013). Apart from Albanians living in Albania proper, there are more than two million ethnic Albanians in Kosovo, hundreds of thousands in Macedonia and Montenegro, and an estimated two million in the United States, Switzerland, Germany, Greece, Italy and Canada. Although Albania is often touted as a majority Muslim country in the foreign press, 70% of the population is estimated to be non-religious or non-practising. Of the others, 21% is Muslim, 6% is Orthodox, and 3% is Catholic. Tirana has 765,804 inhabitants (though the real number may be much higher), covers 42 square kilometres and lies at 110m above sea level, though two mountains of 1612m and 1828m also rise within the municipality. The city has some 30,000 students of which nearly half attend the University of Tirana.

Geography

At 28,748 square kilometres, Albania is a bit larger than Wales or Maryland. The longest rivers are the Drini, Semani and Vjosa. The largest lakes are Shkodra, Ohrid and Prespa. The highest mountain is Mt. Korabi near Peshkopi, at 2751m.

Crime & Safety

Besa, or the well-being of honoured guests (you), is a major source of concern and pride for Albanians - a tradition dating back to Illyrian times. Rather than being mugged in Albania, you're more likely to be overwhelmed with hospitality. Still, it's a good idea to apply the universal rules: stay alert, hide valuables or leave them at home, don't wander around unlit areas at night. Be careful where you walk - if there's not a missing manhole lid, there's another kind of big hole or bump, bits of sharp metal sticking out of the concrete, garbage or dog poo. And even in cities it can be pitch dark at night away from the main streets.

Driving & Roads

The roads may be improving rapidly, Albanians remain the worst drivers in Europe. Easily distracted, always using one or two hands for talking on the phone and smoking, eager to honk, disrespectful of speed limits, ignorant about the merits of seatbelts, stopping in the middle of the road to chat with a pedestrian relative, and inconsiderate to other road users, they overtake in corners at high speeds in their Mercedes as if they were still riding donkeys. That said, city-centre traffic usually only crawls along at 20-30km/hr with little risk of damage. Before 1991, only Party officials were allowed to own and drive around, and there were only about 600 cars in Albania, many of them deluxe Mercedes and Volvos. When the restriction was lifted, Albanians brought thousands of cars into the country. At the time, there were no traffic regulations, no driver's license requirements, no traffic enforcement officers and no traffic lights. Much of this has changed, but driving still requires nerves of steel and a good map. The maximum speed is 40km/hr in urban areas and villages, 80km/hr outside these areas, 90km/hr on dual carriageways and 110km/hr on highways. Drivers should have a fire extinguisher, yellow vest and first aid kit in the car, and always drive with the lights on. In mountain areas having snow chains in winter is a good idea.

Money

The Albanian currency is the lek (plural lekë). The exchange rate is pretty stable at: €1 = 137 lek, £1 = 160 lek, US\$1 = 104 lek (July 2013). Banknotes come in denominations of 200, 500, 1000, 2000 and 5000 lek, while there are coins of 5, 10, 20, 50 and 100 lek. Although hotels and some other businesses quote prices in euros or dollars, payment is mostly required in lek. When asking for prices in daily life, beware the curious habit Albanians have of telling you the price in 'old leks' with an additional zero like it was in the 1970s (so 100 lek becomes 1000 lek). Despite the obvious advantages, this is never used to rip off foreigners, which says a lot about the way visitors are treated in this country. ATMs ('bankomats') are easily found in every Albanian town, and do not charge a fee for transactions, though your home bank may. Cash foreign currency can be exchanged at banks and (better) at exchange offices. People who still believe in travellers' cheques can cash them at most banks at a fee and a long wait. The money men waving wads of banknotes on Skanderbeg Square offer competitive rates and are generally honest. Spend all your lekë before leaving the country, as they can't be exchanged abroad.

Smoking

Smoking is officially prohibited in public places such as restaurants, bars and offices, but enforcement is rather weak to say the least, and Albanians generally enjoy sitting in clouds of smoke. On public transport the ban is thankfully always adhered to.

Visas & Passports

Citizens of the EU, most other European countries, US, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and Japan can enter Albania without a visa. Other travellers need to get a visa from an Albanian embassy or consulate abroad before travelling to Albania. Before you set off, confirm your entry requirements at the nearest Albanian embassy or consulate. Check all border requirements at www.mfa.gov.al. There is no longer an entry or departure tax. Your passport needs to be valid for three months after departing Albania. Citizens of the EU, Iceland, Norway, USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand may enter Albania using an ID card, though we recommend still taking your passport anyway as airlines and officials are all too quickly confused.



Street art – JvM

By the seventh century BC, the Illyrians (the apparent ancestors of the Albanian nation) settle in what is now Albania. In 229-168 BC the Romans defeat the Illyrians and establish the protectorate of Illyricum.

4th Century

The Roman Empire is divided in 395 AD, and the territory of today's Albania falls into the Eastern (Byzantine) Empire.

14th Century

The Ottomans invade what is now Albania in 1385. Their rule lasts more than 500 years.

15th Century

Skanderbeg, the Albanian leader, wages a war of independence against the Ottomans starting in 1443 and enjoys remarkable success in keeping them at bay until his death in 1468.

19th Century

In the 1830s, the Ottomans crush Albanian autonomy. Uprisings break out over taxation policy in the 1840s. After Russia defeats the Ottoman Empire, the Prizren League is founded in 1878 to fight for autonomy and against the partitioning of Albanian territory.

20th Century

Local uprisings break out in 1909-1912. Albanians proclaim independence in Vlorë on November 28, 1912. The Treaty of London recognises Albania in 1913, but Kosovo is given to Serbia. In 1914, during WWI, Italy invades Albania. In 1920 Albania regains independence. In 1925 Ahmet Zogu becomes president of the new Republic of Albania, but in 1928 Zogu proclaims a kingdom and crowns himself King Zog I. He cooperates with the Italians, who invade again in 1939, occupying Albania until 1943, when the Germans take over until their retreat in November 1944. The Communist-led National Liberation Front takes power. Yugoslavia, Albania's erstwhile ally, tries to absorb the country, causing Albania to break with Belgrade in 1948. After 1956, when most of Eastern Europe undergoes de-Stalinization, Albania maintains a hardline stance. It criticises the Soviet Union, with which it breaks relations in 1961. In 1968 Albania withdraws from the Warsaw Pact. Albania cultivates relations with China. Imitating Beijing, Albania purges 'reactionary' influences. In its own version of the Cultural Revolution in 1967, it outlaws religion and closes all 2169 of the country's churches and mosques. In 1978 the leadership condemns even China as revisionist and is left with no friends. Party head Enver Hoxha dies on April 11, 1985.

1990

After the totalitarian regimes collapse everywhere else in Eastern Europe, Communist Party leader Ramiz Alia announces cautious democratisation in March. Reform comes slowly. The People's Assembly rescinds the ban on religion and on travel abroad in May. On December 12 the Democratic Party is founded, Albania's first non-Communist party in the postwar era. Nine days later, the authorities dismantle the statue of Stalin in Tirana.

1991

In February, students at Enver Hoxha University launch a strike, demanding reforms; weeks of protests culminate in the toppling of Enver Hoxha's statue in Skanderbeg Square. Waves of refugees flee the country in March. On March 31 the first multi-party elections in 68 years result in a victory for the Communists. In June the faults in the economy become clear when thousands of Albanians seeking asylum in Italy commandeered ships. An estimated 100,000 Albanians had fled the country in the previous 12 months.

1997

Collapsing pyramid schemes spark months of rioting and lawlessness throughout Albania in January. In June, parliamentary elections, held amidst nationwide unrest, result in a landslide victory for the Socialists. President Berisha, blamed for allowing the pyramid schemes to flourish, resigns.

1999

In response to Serb attacks on ethnic Albanians in Kosovo, NATO launches an air war on Yugoslavia on March 25. The war turns Albania into a NATO base of operations, and by May 500,000 Kosovars have flooded into the country.

2001

In October, Edi Rama, a former art lecturer and painter supported by the Socialist Party, is elected mayor of Tirana and initiates a series of projects that change the face of the city.

2005

In July, Sali Berisha's Democratic Party wins the national elections from Fatos Nano's Socialists. The election results are delayed after allegations of voting irregularities and three deaths. OSCE monitors report that the elections only partially complied with international standards. Novelist Ismail Kadare wins the first international version of Britain's Man Booker Prize.

2006

Albania signs the Stabilisation and Association Agreement with the EU, the first step towards closer cooperation with the EU.

2007

In June, US president George W. Bush gets a hero's welcome on his visit to Albania, mingling with the crowds in Fushe Kruja where his statue now graces the main square.

2008

On March 15, explosions in a factory used for defusing old munition wipe out the village of Gërdec, 14km from Tirana, killing 26 and wounding nearly 300 people. Hundreds of houses are destroyed, windows of cars on the highway are shattered, and the sound is heard as far away as Skopje.

2009

In April Albania joins NATO. In June Berisha's Democratic Party narrowly wins the national elections, which were marred by many irregularities.

2010

The EU allows visa-free travel for Albanians to Europe's Schengen countries.

2011

In January, violent opposition protests erupt after a video exposes corruption by the vice prime minister Ilir Meta; three demonstrators are killed by guards at the Prime Minister's residence.

2012

The presidential election by the parliament turns into a saga when talks between the main party leaders Edi Rama and Sali Berisha fail; two candidates withdraw before minister of internal affairs Bujar Nishani is elected with a simple majority of 73 votes. In November, 100 years of Albania's declaration of independence is celebrated. The EU integration process stalls when Albania is refused the status of candidate member.

2013

Tirana's major Edi Rama of the Socialist Party wins the June parliamentary elections with 56% of the votes, and becomes prime minister.



Steel worker statue in the excellent National Art Gallery – JvM

Event information is notoriously difficult to get - visit the websites of the venues listed here, ask the Tourist Information Center, keep an eye on posters around town and read the English-language papers for upcoming events.

Cinemas

Imperial Cinemas J-5, Rr. Frang Bardhi, Kristal Center mall, tel. +355 44 80 45 95, info@imperialcinemas.al, www.imperialcinemas.al. Big Hollywood and 3D films in two large screening rooms at the Kristal center. Also in the city centre in the Sheraton Mall and Cinema Agimi. ▶ Tickets 400-700 lek.

Marubi Film & Multimedia Academy Rr. Aleksandër Moisiu 78, tel. +355 4 236 51 88, info@afmm.edu.al, www.afmm.edu.al. Named after Shkodra's famous Marubi photographer family, the local film school has free screenings of foreign movies. See French films on Wednesday, classics on Thursday, and Spanish and Jewish-American films on Fridays; screenings are between October and June and start at 19:00. Find the academy to the northeast of the centre, near the terminus of the Kinostudio bus line. See the website for what's on. ▶ Open 08:00 - 16:00. Closed Sat, Sun. Admission free.

Millennium 2 Cinema F-5, Rr. Murat Toptani, Pallati i Pionierit, tel. +355 4 225 36 54/+355 69 204 42 37, www.ida-millennium.com. Inside the former *Pioneer Palace*, Millennium shows recent American films in their original language with Albanian subtitles. Book in advance for evening and weekend screenings. Screenings at 10:00, 12:30, 15:00, 18:00, 20:30 and 23:00. One fine day, Millennium 1 will reopen in a new building in the city centre. ▶ Open 09:00 - 23:00. Tickets 200-500 lek.

Human Rights Film Festival

The 8th edition of the International Human Rights Film Festival Albania will be held at the Marubi Academy of Film and Multimedia from 23 to 28 September 2013. Screenings are free. For more information see www.afmm.edu.al.

Cultural centres

Not only do these foreign-run centres allow locals and foreigners alike access to many materials, they are important promoters of international culture, and support many events.

Alliance Française D-4/5, Rr. Barrikadave 122, tel. +355 4 222 56 97/+355 4 227 48 41, info@aftirana.org, www.aftirana.org. Borrow French books or language-learning materials. ▶ Open 10:30 - 20:00, Sat 09:00 - 12:30. Closed Sun.

British Council E-2, Rr. Skenderbej 12, tel. +355 4 224 08 56/+355 4 224 08 57, info@britishcouncil.org.al, http://www.britishcouncil.org/albania. The UK cultural and educational centre. ▶ Open 09:00 - 17:00, Fri 09:00 - 14:30. Closed Sat, Sun.

Goethe Institut H-5/6, Rr. George W. Bush, tel. +355 4 222 20 17, goethe_bi@yahoo.de, www.goethe.de. The German cultural centre has a reading room with textbooks and literature inside the National Library.

Istituto Italiano di Cultura (Italian Institute of Culture) H-6, Rr. Pjetër Budi 58/3, tel. +355 4 237 95 79/+355 4 237 95 80, iictirana@esteri.it, www.iictirana.esteri.it. Promotes Italian culture and language with cultural events and language courses. ▶ Open 09:00 - 14:00, 15:00-17:00. Closed Sat, Sun.

US Information Service (USIS) H/1-6, Rr. Elbasanit, tel. +355 4 224 72 85. Browse American literature, history books, periodicals and more at this centre beside the US Embassy. Also at the USAID center. ▶ Open 08:30 - 16:00. Closed Sat, Sun.

Theatre, Opera & Dance

Black Box Theatre I-4/5, Sheshi Nënë Tereza, tel. +355 4 224 75 98. Mostly avant-garde and student shows inside the Art Academy. Once in a long while there's a performance in a foreign language.

Metropolitan Center (Cultural Center of Tirana) E-4, Rr. Ded Gjo Luli, tel. +355 4 225 75 28, q.metropolitane@gmail.com. A cultural centre that hosts regular performances by the Tirana City Band, the Spekter children's folklore group, the Metropolitan Theatre group (*Teatri i Metropolit*) and the Tirana Circus.

National Children's Theatre (Teatri Kombëtar i Fëmijëve) E/F-4, Sheshi Skenderbeg, tel. +355 4 222 24 46/+355 4 225 91 04, klaudjahila@gmail.com. Occasional puppet shows for children in a grand old building.

National Theatre (Teatri Kombëtar) F-4, Rr. Sermedin Said Toptani, tel. +355 4 222 30 22, info@teatrikombetar.gov.al, www.teatrikombetar.gov.al. This is Tirana's oldest theatre, built in 1940 to honour Mussolini on his visit to Albania. Performances take place between October and May, and range from Shakespeare to contemporary Albanian and foreign playwrights, though everything is in Albanian. ▶ Box office open 09:00-13:00, 18:00-20:00.

Opera, Ballet & Popular Ensemble Theatre (Teatri i Operas dhe Baletit dhe Ansambli Popullor) E-4, Sheshi Skenderbeg, Palace of Culture, tel. +355 4 222 47 53/+355 4 222 74 71, toap@albaniaonline.net. Occasional shows by Tirana's underfunded but enthusiastic opera company. ▶ Ticket office open 09:00-12:00, 15:00-19:00.

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Ruins of the synagogue in Saranda - Sco

Not the first subject that springs to mind when thinking about Albania, the country's 2,000-year-old Jewish contribution to Albanian culture always lived in the margins of history but is worth mentioning all the same.

Albania's predominantly Sephardic Jews were predated by prisoners of the Romans who according to legend were washed ashore during a storm on the coast near Saranda in 70AD. Little is known about these first Jews, although some evidence remains, most notably in the form of the ruins of a synagogue in central Saranda, believed to have been built in the 6th century, and open to visitors. The country's Sephardic Jews arrived in the region from the Iberian Peninsula when they were expelled during the Spanish Inquisition, and were settled in small communities in most major towns by the 16th century, including in Vlorë which during this period had a Jewish majority.

Jews lived peacefully alongside their neighbours during the Ottoman period, with no reports of pogroms or other disturbances – an unusual situation in Eastern European history that must have had some bearing on the extraordinary story of the Jews in Albania during the German occupation between September 1943 and November 1944. During the Second World War, the Jewish population of Albania actually increased, from around 200 to some 2,000, due to an influx of mostly German and Austrian Jews who fled after the events of *Kristallnacht* in November 1938 (interestingly, the Albanian Embassy in Berlin was the last foreign representation in the Reich to continue issuing visas).

Every single Jew living in Albania was saved during the Holocaust, a remarkable record that can be accredited to *besa*, the Albanian honour code that in this case saw a flurry of activity including the hiding of Jews and the forging of documents that 'Albanianised' the Jewish population.

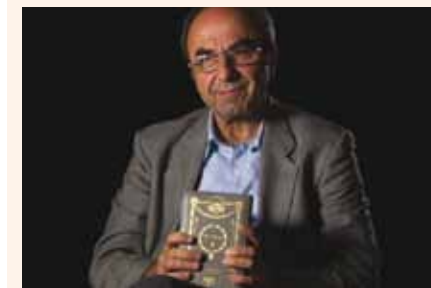
Jews were known to have actively fought with the Albanian partisans during the war, an act that was rewarded in true communist style with the complete ban on all religions, including Judaism, during the Hoxha period. After the changes of the early 1990s, most Jews left the country for Israel and the contemporary Jewish population of the country is minimal, the current figure reported to be around 200.

There's very little in the way of Jewish-related things to see in Albania apart from the above-mentioned ruins in

Saranda. Inside Tirana's National History Museum, a plaque in the corner of the Second World War exhibition room commemorates those who saved the country's Jews: "In honour of the Albanian men and women who during the Nazi German occupation, 1943-1944, guided by the principle of *besa* and at great risk to themselves, sheltered and saved the lives of all Jewish people living in Albania."

A synagogue opened briefly in Tirana in 2010 but soon closed after a number of controversies with the Jewish community. Israel opened an embassy in 2012, although its main purpose is that of commerce. There remains no official Jewish community in the country and kosher food isn't available. Literature on the subject in English or any other language for that matter is rare, the most notable author being Apostol Kotani, whose 1995 book "A History of Jews in Albania" can sometimes be found for sale online. This book contains a considerable amount of information on the Holocaust in Albania, and was one of the main inspirations behind the 2012 documentary film "Besa - The Promise".

Besa: The Promise



Rexhep Hoxha with one of the Hebrew prayer books

©JWM Productions LLC

In the 2012 film "Besa: The Promise" Jewish-American photographer Norman Gershman documents accounts of the Albanian Muslims who rescued Jews during the Holocaust. He follows Rexhep Hoxha, a toy shop owner on a quest to return a set of Hebrew books to a Jewish family that his father rescued. He sheltered this family for six months, allowing them to escape, simply because it was his *Besa*, the 'duty' from the code of honour that is observed by Albanians of all religions. The stories of these everyday heroes meet the stories of Jewish survivors. For more information on the film see www.besathepromise.com.

Earlier, Gershman published an impressive book, "Besa: Muslims Who Saved Jews in WWII", with 66 fascinating portraits of the Albanians and Jews involved, introducing their backgrounds, what happened to them in the war, and the enduring links that resulted. The interviews go to show that religious differences played no role when it came to saving fellow humans in urgent need of help. Highly recommended. "Besa: Muslims Who Saved Jews in WWII", Syracuse University Press 2008, 160 pages, ISBN 978-0815609346, available online for about €22.



Until 1991, foreigners visiting Tirana could only stay at two dreadful hotels. Things have changed dramatically, and now a wide variety of accommodation is available in and around the city centre; in 2012 and 2013 several new boutique-style hotels opened up, and the hostel scene is now pretty good too. The room prices we list include breakfast unless mentioned otherwise. Hotel categories are based on the price of the cheapest double room, not on the erratic local star system. Hotels normally quote their prices in euros, but generally you need to pay in Albanian lek.

Cream of the crop

Top-notch rooms, with doubles priced over €160.

Rogner Hotel Tirana H-5, Biv. Dëshmorët e Kombit, tel. +355 4 223 50 35, info.tirana@rogner.com, www.rogner.com/tirana. One of Albania's top hotels, for the services as well as for its reputation as a meeting point for locals and foreign visitors. The Rogner's recently renovated rooms are decked out with stylish wooden floors and furniture, and some have balconies. The highlight of the hotel is the easily accessed lush garden with its swimming pool, tennis court, putting green and playground - and even a well-preserved bunker. The excellent Apollonia restaurant and two bars are on site. ▶ 138 rooms.

Sheraton Tirana Hotel J-5, Sheshi Italla, tel. +355 4 227 47 07, reservations.tirana@sheraton.com, www.sheraton.com/tirana. The luxury glass hotel between the city centre and the Grand Park offers world-class services and amenities. The lovely large rooms come with 'sweet sleeper' beds and wooden floors, suites have seating areas and bathtubs, and all rooms have large windows overlooking the city or park. The club lounge is particularly nice for breakfasts or relaxation with a view. The American hotel chain has many global initiatives, such as the recycling programme, the health club programmes and the Social Hour wine tasting sessions (Tue/Wed/Fri at 19:00). In summer hang out at the O2 Bar by the pool. ▶ 151 rooms (singles €240, 95 doubles €260, 55 suites €380, presidential suite €2530).

Xheko Imperial I-4, Rr. Ibrahim Rugova, tel. +355 4 225 95 75, contact@xheko-imperial.com, www.xheko-imperial.com. A fascinating Albanian-style luxury hotel. The rooms in the lower front building are pretty decent, but follow a labyrinthine hall to the new section to find the over-the-top new suites that drip with glam, each named after a famous painting. The open jacuzzi bathrooms are any girl's dream, and the fairy-tale silk-draped four-poster beds are really rather extravagant. The rooms in the new tower to the rear should be ready in a few years too. Home to the wonderful Carlsberg restaurant. ▶ 29 rooms (7 singles €110, 6 doubles €150, 15 suites €250-350).

Upmarket

Reasonably priced luxury; double rooms from €90-160.

Arber E-4, Rr. Bardhok Biba 59, tel. +355 4 227 38 11, www.hotelarber.com. Mercifully quiet compared to many other city centre hotels, the Arber is a great little hotel hidden in the streets east of the main square. Inside, expect friendly service and small, efficient rooms. ▶ 25 rooms (5 singles €60, 18 doubles €90, 1 triple €120, 1 suite €150).

Symbol key	
Air conditioning	Credit cards accepted
Conference facilities	Facilities for the disabled
Dataport	Guarded parking
Fitness centre	Non-smoking rooms
Restaurant	Sauna
Swimming pool	Wi-Fi

Brilant Antik F-5, Rr. Jeronim de Rada 79, tel. +355 4 225 11 66, www.hotelbrilant.com. Central, quiet, family-run and welcoming. The Brilant Antik has grand rooms decorated with plenty of handcarved wood, and a traditionally furnished Albanian/Italian restaurant in the basement. ▶ 12 rooms (singles €60, doubles €90-100).

Chateau Linza Qesarakë, Linza, Komuna e Dajtit, tel. +355 69 203 00 03, www.chateaulinzahotel.com. Just outside the centre in the Mount Dajti foothills, the resort-style Linza hotel offers sweeping views over Tirana. Rooms and apartments are modern and spacious, there's a lovely pool, and it's well-equipped for meetings and conferences too. ▶ 21 rooms (singles €75, doubles €90, 45 apartments).

Comfort D-4, Rr. Asim Vokshi, tel. +355 4 223 32 72, www.hotelcomfort.al. Comfort offers an excellent choice of facilities both in the rooms and in the hotel in general. For the price, the rooms, which are clean and modern, are hard to beat whilst the extra offerings including a decent restaurant and a well-stocked bar ideal for late night indulgences. Try to get a room facing away from the chaos of the streets outside. ▶ 21 rooms (6 singles €50, 15 doubles €60).

Diplomat F-1, Rr. Sulejman Delvina 61, tel. +355 4 223 31 51, www.diplomathotelstirana.com. Not to be confused with its sister hotel Diplomat Fashion just around the corner, this may not be the cheapest option in town but it's certainly worth thinking about. Bursting with friendly staff, the smart, Scandinavian-style rooms come in a choice of singles, twins and doubles, all featuring en suite facilities, reliable wifi connections and free newspapers in English. Good for business and independent travellers alike, there's also a restaurant, bar and conference room. ▶ 14 rooms (5 singles €80, 9 doubles €120).

Diplomat Fashion Rr. Irfan Tomini, tel. +355 4 223 50 90, www.diplomathotelstirana.com. Tirana's first proper boutique hotel has been open for almost a decade now and continues to be a popular choice with those who can afford their magnificent standard, executive and deluxe rooms. The facilities boast everything one would expect from a hotel in this category plus there's a very good buffet breakfast on offer and an in-house spa featuring sauna, Jacuzzi and massage. ▶ 26 rooms (singles €70-80, doubles €95-120).

Grand H-3, Rr. Ismail Qemali 11, tel. +355 4 224 79 96, www.grandhoteltirana.com. The centrally placed Grand is still one of the city's best, and its small size adds to its charm. The comfy rooms are well insulated against street sounds emanating from the *bllok*, and the hotel also lays on frills like an indoor swimming pool, jacuzzi, gym and sauna. ▶ 30 rooms (singles €120, doubles €160).

ROGNER HOTEL
TIRANA

The Garden Hotel

A hotel in the center of economy, politics and hospitality.

The direct location on the Boulevard Dëshmorët e Kombit and the international standards when it comes to security and comfort, make the Rogner Hotel Tirana 'the' meeting place of the economic, diplomatic and culture elite in Albania, offering you the possibility to:

Work hard...



6 CONFERENCE & BANQUETING ROOMS - BUSINESS CORNER WITH INTERNET ACCESS - FREE WIFI

Rest harder...



138 WELL EQUIPPED ROOMS - 24 HOURS ROOM SERVICE - FITNESS ROOM - MASSAGE - BAR PIRRO RESTAURANT APOLLONIA - TENNIS COURT AND PUTTING GREEN - OUTDOOR SWIMMING POOL



Meet the concierge



Together with Tirana In Your Pocket, the city's hotel concierges and receptionists are important sources of information for travellers, and effectively ambassadors for their country. They should be able to give you

reliable restaurant, sightseeing and activity tips. With this series of interviews, Tirana In Your Pocket introduces you to the people behind the hotel desks. In this issue, we speak to Estela Killojka, concierge at the Rogner Hotel Tirana. Ms Killojka lived in the USA for 11 years before becoming the Rogner's first full-time concierge in early 2013.

This make our hotel special... The Rogner staff is really friendly, and there's a great team spirit among my colleagues. We're happy to go out of our way to meet our guest's requests in order to make their stay as comfortable and memorable as possible.

Special guests' requests... I haven't been working here that long, but I've had to arrange personal guided tours through Tirana, and I've also ordered a new suit, on short-time notice, for a business traveler whose airline lost his bags.


Special restaurants I recommend... Our guests can enjoy a unique experience at the hotel's Apollonia restaurant. Amidst classy surroundings and typical Viennese furnishings, they can taste traditional Albanian specialities made with fresh ingredients, and Austrian tradition from our head chef Michael Gruber.

Special sights I recommend... A stroll down the main boulevard is a must, in order for our guests to see Tirana's main sights. Also a cable car ride by sunset up Dajti Mountain cannot be missed, followed by the nightlife that only the *blloku* area can offer.

Tirana In Your Pocket... is a compact and most helpful guidebook, the short texts, maps and adverts are often used by our guests.



Scan this QR code to access the Rogner Hotel Tirana website

Green House G-5, Rr. Jul Varilbova 6, tel. +355 4 222 26 32/+355 68 207 22 62, info@greenhouse.al, www.greenhouse.al. A small and charming business hotel above the eponymous restaurant on a quiet street near all the action. With well-designed boutique rooms, some with shower and some also with a bath, great suites and wifi throughout, it's a comfortable base. ▶ 10 rooms (2 singles €100, 6 doubles €110, 2 suites €130-150). 

Kotoni H-4, Rr. Donika Kastrioti 3, tel. +355 4 227 48 88, www.hotelkotoni.com. Sleep in the heart of Tirana's administrative district. At Kotoni, the boutique rooms are large with high ceilings, modern facilities and effective soundproofing. The elegant hotel café terrace is where the who's who of Albanian politics comes to have coffee. ▶ 23 rooms (1 single €80, 16 doubles €100-130, 2 suites €160-180). 

Monarc F-5, Blv. Zhan D'Ark, corner Rr. George W. Bush, tel. +355 4 227 45 11, www.monarc.al. The Monarc is a classic-looking yellow building on a busy crossing in the centre, overlooking the Lana river. With only 12 rooms, ample attention has been lavished on details, and the interiors are characterised by sleek dark design. The deluxe rooms come with particularly classy Jacuzzis. Head to the top floor for the bar with a waterfall and great 360° city views. ▶ 12 rooms (singles €80, doubles €100-130). 

Mondial F-1, Rr. Muhamet Gjollështa, tel. +355 4 223 23 72, www.hotelmondial.com.al. The slightly imposing Mondial goes for the Neoclassical look and for once manages to pull the whole affair off nicely. Offering a range of standard and deluxe rooms, all of which feature a beguiling muddle of facilities, extras include a good restaurant and a couple of bars that stay open late. Not too far west of the centre, the hotel also provides a number of meeting and conference rooms. ▶ 36 rooms (20 singles €80, 16 doubles €90). 

Padam H-5, Rr. Papa Gjon Pali II, tel. +355 4 450 49 13, www.padam.al. Tirana's most impressive new boutique hotel has six comfortably furnished rooms that combine the villa's old style with contemporary artworks. Room 102 with its postmodern landscape wallpaper is certainly unique in town. Padam's restaurant and terrace bar are excellent as well. ▶ 6 rooms (2 singles €70-120, 3 doubles €130-140, 1 suit €140-160). 

Sky Hotel G/H-4, Rr. Ibrahim Rugova 5/1, tel. +355 4 241 59 95, www.skyhotel-al.com. This business hotel unfortunately only occupies the two lowest floors of the Sky Tower building, but although the view is not panoramic, the rooms are lookers themselves, decorated in black and dark purple with touches of gold. Standard doubles are large with fabulous shower heads, while suites have sliding glass doors and separate seating areas. Breakfast is served in the top-floor Sky Club. ▶ 38 rooms (2 singles €90, 28 doubles €108-160, 3 suites €210). 

The Rooms K-4, Rr. Sami Frashëri 56 (Nobis complex), tel. +355 4 555 05 01, www.the-rooms-hotel.com. Albania's most plugged-in hotel has stark white rooms with iPads to control the Apple TVs, lighting, curtains, shutters and other electronics. All rooms have balconies and Nespresso machines. ▶ 7 rooms (singles €85, 5 doubles €90, 2 suites €105-120).

Tirana International Hotel E-4, Sheshi Skënderbej 8, tel. +355 4 223 41 85, www.tiranainternational.com. Built in the 1970s with help of the Chinese, for years Tirana's main landmark was the only highrise in the country, with propaganda slogans on the roof and escape tunnels for the elite. Now thoroughly modernised, the rooms meet international standards and the hotel is especially popular for conferences. The higher floors offer great views over town. ▶ 166 rooms (singles €116, doubles €126, 50 suites €133-145). 

Vila Alba F-5, Rr. Xhorxhi Martini 10, tel. +355 4 225 59 37, www.vila-alba.com. Perhaps Tirana's best new hotel, Vila Alba has been designed to fit in its old Tirana surroundings, for a change. Thoroughly modern inside, the halls and large guestrooms are decorated with modern paintings and works of art. Breakfast is served on the wonderful rooftop café, the Krystal Bar, open for all to try Viennese pastries and snacks. ▶ 26 hotel rooms (3 singles €90-130, 18 doubles €110-150, 5 suites). 



Located amidst government buildings and embassies in the heart of Tirana, this new complex is the capital's only 5-star hotel and the unrivalled choice for international travelers and impeccable business events. Shops, bars and restaurants await you right outside in the Sheraton Plaza Shopping Mall, just moments from your room.

- 151 rooms, including 95 deluxe rooms, 55 suites and the Presidential Suite
- 50 Club rooms with exclusive access to the Club Lounge
- "Metropolitan" Restaurant offering Albanian and international cuisine
- "Infinity" Bar & Terrace
- Function rooms for over 500 guests
- Indoor and outdoor swimming pools
- Health club with fitness centre and sauna
- Shopping Mall with a variety of shops & cafés and a cinema
- "Il Pomodoro" Food Court located in the Shopping Mall



Sheshi Italia, Tirana, Albania
Tel: +355 42 274707
Fax +355 42 274711
reservations.tirana@sheraton.com
www.sheraton.com/tirana

Mid-range

Good value doubles from between €50-90.

Bermon Rr. Aleksandër Moisiu 12, tel. +355 4 237 79 39, info@bermon-hotel.com, www.bermon-hotel.com. A small, very neat hotel with simple and basic rooms. North east of the centre near Mount Dajti, just opposite the Kinostudio complex. ▶ 14 rooms (singles €40-50, doubles €50, 1 triple €60, 1 quad €60, 1 suite €70). [Wi-Fi] [TV] [P] [A]

Bristol G-2, Rr. Nikolla Jorga, tel. +355 4 222 95 37, info@hotelbristol.al, www.hotelbristol.al. Modern and centrally located between Bulevard Gjergj Fishta and the Rr. Myslym Shyri shopping street, the Bristol has clean, bright 'designer' rooms, a well-stocked bar. ▶ 20 rooms (12 singles €40, 8 doubles €60, triples €75). [Wi-Fi] [TV] [P] [A]

Broadway H-3, Rr. Emin Duraku 8, tel. +355 4 226 71 19, broadway@lcc-al.org, www.hotelbroadway-al.com. Next to the Selman Stermasi stadium, Broadway has a Vegas thing going on. A glass lift whisks you up to halls decked out with pharaonic art, with rooms in corresponding styles, and especially the suites Egyppted up quite impressively, with kitsch on all walls and a massage shower. There's a decent restaurant with a lush terrace too. ▶ 19 rooms (10 singles €60, 6 doubles €80, 4 suites €120). [Wi-Fi] [TV] [P] [A]

California E-3, Rr. Mihal Duri 2/1, tel. +355 4 225 31 91, www.hotelcalifornia-al.com. At this Hotel California, you can check out any time you like, but unlike pre-1990 Albania, you can also actually leave. It's central and efficient, with pleasant rooms and shiny bathrooms. ▶ 25 rooms (singles €50, doubles €70, 5 family rooms €70). [Wi-Fi] [TV] [P] [A]

Capital Tirana Hotel E-5, Rr. Qemal Stafa, tel. +355 4 665 85 75, www.capitaltirana.com. A new hotel between the market and the main square, with soundproofed and perfectly fine modern guest rooms. The generic international design means the hotel could have been anywhere, and we hope they add some more local touches. ▶ 29 rooms (singles €40-50, doubles €60-65, triples €75). [Wi-Fi] [TV] [P] [A]



The view from the Sky Tower – Sco

Guesthouses

Pension Andrea F-5, Rr. Jeronim de Rada 103 (Rrugica Anton Arapi), tel. +355 4 225 69 47/+355 69 209 49 15, pensionandrea@gmail.com. In a quiet location near the Parliament building, the four basic rooms at the charming Pension Andrea come with TV, a/c, free wifi and private bathrooms. The owners are involved in the local arts scene and the rooms are often used by musicians playing at Tirana's bars. Breakfast is not included, but guests can use the communal kitchen and there are plenty of cafés nearby. The pension is signposted down the alley next to the Brillant hotel. ▶ 4 rooms (singles €20, doubles €30). [Wi-Fi] [TV] [A]

Stephen Center B&B E-5/6, Rr. Hoxha Tahsim 1, tel. +355 4 225 39 24, stephencenter@stephencenter.com, www.stephencenter.com. The 'Christian environment' provided in the cosy guestrooms of the Stephen Center is available to missionaries and other travellers and consists of simple but well-furnished rooms with twin beds, private bathroom and adequate heating. There's laundry, wifi and airport pickup service too. ▶ 6 rooms (singles €30, doubles €40). [Wi-Fi] [TV] [P] [A]

City H-5, Rr. Ismail Qemali 8/1, tel. +355 4 224 77 99, reservations@hotelcitytirana.com, www.hotelcitytirana.com. Clean, quiet and efficient rooms and friendly staff in a small business hotel down an alley off the street. The views are uninspiring as it's jammed in between highrise, but alternative vistas are offered by the elegant photos of cities around the world that decorate the rooms and halls. Ask for the larger top-floor rooms with balconies when you book. ▶ 15 rooms (singles €32-60, doubles €75). [Wi-Fi] [TV] [P] [A]

Doro City D-1, Rr. Muhamet Gjolleha, tel. +355 4 223 22 06, reservations@hoteldorocity.com, www.hoteldorocity.com. Along the busy ring road near the Durrës highway, Doro has quality rooms fitted with plenty of wood, and some boasting large terraces. It's a few minutes drive west of the city centre. ▶ 53 rooms (8 singles €60-80, 45 doubles €70-110, suites €100). [Wi-Fi] [TV] [P] [A]

Elysée H-5/6, Rr. Themistokli Gërmenji 2/173, tel. +355 4 222 28 80, info@hotelysee-al.com, www.hotelysee-al.com. A quality mid-range hotel, with friendly service and a top location between the US and Italian embassies. Rooms are modern and quiet, with king-sized beds and iron balconies, though there's no lift to get you between the four floors. There's wifi, but guests can also use a PC with internet at the reception. ▶ 20 rooms (singles €50-65, doubles €75-85, triples €105). [Wi-Fi] [TV] [P] [A]

Ferari B-2, Rr. Don Bosko, tel. +355 4 235 64 02/+355 69 257 51 72, hotel_ferari@hotmail.com. This unprepossessing but comfortable four-story hotel best serves those who want to get away from the city centre. It serves a nice Italian breakfast and staff are polite. ▶ 26 rooms (doubles €50-60). [Wi-Fi] [TV] [P] [A]

Firenze D-4, Biv. Zogu I 72, tel. +355 4 224 90 99, firenzehotel@albm.com. A surprisingly good business hotel on the boulevard just north of the main square. Firenze has charming staff, modern and well-furnished rooms, some even with fireplaces, and abstract art on the walls. Breakfast is served in the street-side restaurant. ▶ 7 rooms (singles €50, doubles €70). [Wi-Fi] [TV] [P] [A]

Hotel de Paris H-4, Rr. Brigada e VIII, N°7, tel. +355 4 226 50 08, www.hoteldeparis.al. A new boutique hotel in set a villa in the *bllok*, that for years was hogged by a French NGO. The lovely building now features nice large rooms with wooden floors and balconies. Pick room N°4 if you want a bathtub as well, or one of the attic rooms for wooden beams. The small, lush garden and the hotel bar with fireplace are great for relaxing - but the hotel's location next to some popular bars means you may need earplugs at weekends. ▶ 13 rooms (3 singles €80, 6 doubles €100, 4 suites €130). [Wi-Fi] [TV] [A]

Idea Hotel & Spa Bul. Zogu I, tel. +355 4 223 55 88/+355 66 200 00 98, info@hotelida.al, www.hotelidea.al. Still putting the finishing touches in place when we stumbled on this new offering just north of the centre, we didn't get to see anything beyond the reception area as the management decided the risk of a free review for thousands to read wasn't worth taking. Assuming they let other people including potential guests over the threshold, have a look at their website, but be warned their claims of being located in a stylish area should be taken with a large pinch of salt - lugubrious would perhaps be a better word to describe its immediate surroundings. ▶ Check out time: Until 12.00. [Wi-Fi] [TV] [P] [A]

Iliria I-6, Rr. Elbasanit, tel. +355 4 237 17 00, info@hotel-iliriatirana.com, www.iliriahotelitirana.com. Iliria's smart and soundproofed rooms are all fitted out with satellite TV and internet. There's a restaurant and pleasant café terrace too. It's located along Rruga Elbasanit, a short walk southwest of the city centre, convenient for various embassies, the university and the Grand Park. ▶ 20 rooms (doubles €80-120, suites €100-140). [Wi-Fi] [TV] [P] [A]

Kruja D-3, Rr. Mine Peza, tel. +355 4 223 81 06, reservations@hotelkruja.com, www.hotelkruja.com. A decent business hotel north of the main square, with standard rooms overlooking the calm street out front. There's also a restaurant and pleasant pavement café outside. ▶ 16 rooms (1 single €35, 11 doubles €50, 3 apartments €75). [Wi-Fi] [TV] [P] [A]

Lugano E-3, Rr. Mihal Duri 24/7, tel. +355 4 222 20 23, luganohotel@yahoo.com, www.hotel-lugano-tirana.com. Located on a relatively quiet street close to the centre, the Lugano offers a small selection of splendid rooms and not much else, run by a friendly family. Lacking many of the extras provided by other hotels of its ilk in the area, the rooms do at least come with plenty of gadgets, en suite bathrooms and wifi. ▶ 8 rooms (singles €40, doubles €65). [Wi-Fi] [TV] [P] [A]

Miniri E-4, Rr. Dibrës 3, tel. +355 4 223 09 30, hotel_miniri@yahoo.com, www.miniri.com. Dwarfed by the Tirana International Hotel nearby, this small hotel off the main square has standard peach-coloured rooms with a small TV, phone and couch. The Croatian restaurant on the premises is the redeeming factor. ▶ 30 rooms (singles €25, doubles €40, triples €75). [Wi-Fi] [TV] [P] [A]

Albania, New Jersey, USA

Impress your American friends by reminding them that Albania was once in the USA. After the Dutch had lost their New Netherlands colony to the British in 1664, King Charles II transferred the area to the Duke of York, who renamed it into Albania. In 1702, the province was turned into the royal colony of New Jersey, later becoming the US state of New Jersey.

Pension Andrea

Rruga Jeronim de Rada 103, Tirana
Rrugica Anton Arapi
pensionandrea@gmail.com
Tel. +355 4 225 69 47
+355 69 209 49 15

Nirvana E-3, Rr. Kavajës 96/2, tel. +355 4 223 52 70/+355 68 24 11 641, hotelnirvana@hotmail.com, www.hotel-nirvana.com. Do you think they would notice if you booked a room under the name Kurt Cobain? This large villa set back from the busy road has rooms in gaudy colours with fitting cosy furniture - go all the way and get the one with the jacuzzi. Opposite the Catholic Church. ▶ 15 rooms (singles €60, doubles €80, 1 suite - apartment €120). [Wi-Fi] [TV] [P] [A]

Nobel E-4, Rr. Urani Pano 1/9, tel. +355 4 225 64 44, reservations@hotelnobelitirana.com, www.hotel-nobelitirana.com. Friendly staff, cheerfully coloured and affordable rooms, and a central location - Nobel ticks all the boxes. Tucked behind the Tirana International Hotel, the Nobel has modern furnishings, wireless internet and a little café on the ground floor. ▶ 9 rooms (singles €35-40, doubles €50). [Wi-Fi] [TV] [P] [A]

Novhotel Rr. Gjiri Bue Shpata, tel. +355 4 227 49 02, www.nov-hotel.com. Albania's first Best Western chain hotel, overlooking the Dinamo stadium, has perfectly adequate rooms with balconies and generic art on the walls. The suites are grander affairs, with nice sitting corners and fireplaces. ▶ 12 rooms (6 singles €70-90, 6 doubles €90-130). [Wi-Fi] [TV] [P] [A]

Palma H-3, Rr. Sami Frashëri 2, tel. +355 4 223 56 31, info@hotel-palma.com, www.hotel-palma.com. A small, modern hotel in a central location in the *bllok*, with decent rooms and a restaurant. Good value for money. ▶ 12 rooms (singles €40-55, doubles €50-65, 2 suites €80). [Wi-Fi] [TV] [P] [A]



The ancient Tanner's Bridge - JvM

Serenity E-3, Rr. Bogdani 4, tel. +355 69 279 38 12.

This new hotel on a fairly quiet street five minutes from the action provides a range of sleeping options in mildly ostentatious surroundings, with all rooms featuring en suite facilities with showers only, satellite TV, minibars and free wifi. When we visited breakfast was being served in the bar next door.

Sokrat G/H-5, Rruga e Elbasanit 81, tel. +355 4 237 82 94, info@hotelsokrat.com, www.hotelsokrat.com.

On the busy road that leads out of the city towards Elbasan, just east of the main action, the newly opened Sokrat is a pleasant boutique hotel in a small white villa. The rooms are light and spacious, all featuring impressive bathrooms and minibars and some coming with balconies. There's a rather swanky wine bar with nice views of the surrounding palm trees in the hotel's private garden. ▶ 1 rooms (singles €75-90, doubles €90-105, triples €100-115). [P] [P] [P] [P] [P]

Theranda H-3, Rr. Andon Zako Çajupi 6-7, tel. +355 4 227 37 66, reservations@therandahotel.com, www.therandahotel.com.

A charming small hotel of high standards. There are two modern buildings (of which one pavilion-like space is used for meals), bright rooms, and experienced staff. One street west of the *bllok* area. ▶ 14 rooms (singles €70-90, doubles €90-100, 3 suites €90-100). [P] [P] [P]

Victoria C-5, Rr. Dibrës 445, tel. +355 4 236 15 94, hotel.victoria@interalb.net. The modern Victoria, and its pizzeria, is run by a family who spent several years in Italy, and has pleasant if somewhat chintzy rooms. The reception can be found upstairs beyond the restaurant. ▶ 10 rooms (singles €50, doubles €70). [P] [P] [P]

Vila 3 G-5, Rr. Papa Gjon Palli II, 3, tel. +355 4 226 65 82, vila_3@yahoo.com, www.vila3.com.

Seven smart rooms in a small 1930s villa set away from the street. Fitted out with flatscreen TVs, sparkling en suite bathrooms and wifi, it's perfect for business trips. The two top floor rooms are large but have slanting ceilings and only skylights for windows. There's a good restaurant and pizzeria downstairs.

▶ 7 rooms (singles €65, doubles €65-80, 2 suites €80-100). [P] [P] [P] [P]

Vila 60 Rr. Fadil Rada 60, tel. +355 4 52 60 60, www.vila60.com.

This recently restored villa from 1931, designed by engineer Harry Fultz, has large double rooms with wooden floors. The superior rooms on the top floor are larger, though you won't be able to look out of the high windows. The lovely glass-walled hotel café behind the building makes up for that. ▶ 12 rooms (singles €40-75, doubles €50-85, 2 suites €100). [P] [P]

Vila Belvedere F-5, Rr. Murat Toptani 25, tel. +355 4 225 19 35, vilabelvedere@albcomport.com.

Perfectly located in the centre along a pedestrianised street, Belvedere doesn't offer much of a view, but the rooms are affordable and comfy. There's a PC parked in the hall for guests to use too. ▶ 8 rooms (singles €40, doubles €60). [P] [P] [P] [P]

Vila Kërçiku E-5, Sheshi Avni Rustemi 14, tel. +355 4 225 39 99, vilakerciku@yahoo.com.

The charmingly renovated red building overlooking the fruit market has a handful of quirky rooms done up in bright colours. Guests can pop downstairs to make use of the small basement pool and fitness area - using the sauna cabin, the hamam or the massage services costs extra. ▶ 7 rooms (singles €50, doubles €70).

Vila Park K-4, Rr. Ibrahim Rugova, Grand Park, Kodrat e Ilqenit, tel. +355 4 225 65 97, info@vilaparkhotel.com, www.vilaparkhotel.com.

Tirana's most tranquil hotel is set 100 metres inside the Grand Park, where the balconied rooms - furnished in a rather modern style with lots of bright colours - overlook people strolling amongst the trees. There's a top class gym and sauna in the adjacent building that guests can use for a fee. Note that car access is restricted; the hotel's golfcarts pick you and your bags up. ▶ 12 rooms (6 doubles €60-70, 6 suites €80-100). [P] [P] [P] [P] [P] [P]

Vila Tafaj D-3, Rr. Mine Peza 86, tel. +355 4 222 75 81/+355 4 223 42 80, vilatafaj@yahoo.com, www.tafaj.com.

Run by the Tafaj family, this is supposedly Albania's first private hotel, containing the first private restaurant. We think the modern and well-equipped rooms should perhaps be a little larger for the price - though the minibar is included. The restaurant churns out some great Albanian food as well as pizza in a wood oven, plus there's the added bonus of a medium sized pink meeting room. ▶ 25 rooms (8 singles €50, 15 doubles €60-90, 2 suites €90-100). [P] [P] [P] [P] [P] [P]

Budget

Why pay more, indeed? Double rooms up to €50. In winter, it's important to ask if the heating in cheaper hotels runs on electricity, and if the hotel has a back-up generator in case the power goes pow.

Alpin C-5, Rr. Siri Kodra, vila nr 40 Tirane, tel. +355 4 222 10 84/+355 69 406 62 85, alpin.hotel@yahoo.com.

Double rooms with small bathrooms (shower only) and balconies along a busy road. Some English is spoken at the reception. ▶ 24 Hour 7 rooms (5 double, 1 triple, 1 twin). [P] [P] [P]



In the midst of the green garden of Te Stela Resort blooms Te Stela Hotel. This oasis of tranquility, located far from the noise of the capital yet only minutes away from it, offers fifteen double rooms, eighteen single rooms and three junior suites, all with abundant natural lighting. All of the rooms overlook the outdoor pool or the landscaped garden.

**Services included**

- Hotel Accommodation
- Breakfast and Dinner
- Access to the Indoor Pool and the Summer Pool during the Summer Season

- Access to the Sauna, Turkish Bath, and Fitness Room
- Dedicated Parking Space

** For children between 6 and 12 years old, Half Board and Full Board Packages are offered at 50% discount.*



Address: Te Stela Resort: Tirana - Durrës highway, 7th km.
Mob: 067 20 333 81 **Tel:** (0)4 240 6 517
hotel@testela.al, www.testela.al

Areela C-4, Rr. Mahmut Fortuzi 5, tel. +355 4 222 65 79, areela@hotelareela.com, www.hotelareela.com. Close to the train station on an unpaved street and badly signposted to boot, locating the Areela may be a struggle but as with so many Albanian hotels the eventual discovery is rewarding. The rooms are spacious and kitsch with lots of pink polyester curtains, slippery bedspreads, air conditioning and dubious paintings of maidens on the walls. Also find free wireless internet, minibars, en suite bathrooms and edible breakfasts included in the price. ▶ 12 rooms (singles €25, doubles €30, triples €45). [Wi-Fi] [TV] [P]

Briker D-4/5, Rr. Barrikadave 3/24, tel. +355 4 222 95 43, hotelbriker@hotmail.com. A modern hotel not far from the main square, with wooden floors, colourful furniture and large blue-glass windows in the rooms. The room price is the same regardless of the number of occupants. ▶ 9 rooms (singles, doubles €40, triples €50). [Wi-Fi] [TV] [P]

Dafina C-4, Rr. Papa Kristo Negovani 17, tel. +355 4 223 07 77. On a calm side street, halfway the centre and the train station, the Dafina has a handful of simple and quiet rooms. ▶ 7 rooms (singles €12, doubles €25). [Wi-Fi]

Eder F-2, Rr. e Kavajës, tel. +355 4 223 91 70, hoteleder@gmail.com. A small hotel with just five rooms of varying styles, well-equipped for travellers on a budget. Opposite the Catholic church, a short walk from the main square and just around the corner from a clutch of embassies, it's well placed if you need to pray, play or get away. ▶ 5 rooms (3 singles €40, 2 doubles €60). [Wi-Fi] [TV] [P]

Guva e Qetë F-5, Rr. Murat Toptani, tel. +355 4 223 54 91, guvaeqete@gmail.com. Small, basic rooms along a central, pedestrianised street. There are en suite bathrooms and TVs, but breakfast is not included. ▶ 12 rooms (singles €15, doubles/triples €30). [Wi-Fi] [TV] [P]



Art along Rr. Abdyl Frashëri – JvM

Airport Hotels

Hotel Airport Tirana Rinas, tel. +355 4 830 01 90, info@hotel-airporttirana.com, www.hotel-airporttirana.com. The best (and best-named) of several options by the airport, this hotel is near the terminal yet quite a slog around the perimeter fence, so call for a free pickup. The fire- and soundproof rooms have bright colours, and bathrooms are ready for take-off with their space-age shower cabins. A garden restaurant with pool at the rear is also available for those simply waiting for flights. ▶ 50 rooms (singles €60-70, doubles €80-100, 4 suites €140). [Wi-Fi] [TV] [P] [P] [P] [P] [P] [P]

Vila Aeroport Rinas, tel. +355 68 207 70 98, info@vilaaeroport.com, www.vilaaeroport.com. This hotel's 'Aircraft Restaurant' is the coolest you've seen in your life. Right here in Tirana. Built to look like a big silver cartoon plane, it's parked along the main road north of the airport. Beside it, the hotel building has large rooms and a good pool and spa area. ▶ 20 rooms (doubles €40, 4 suites €50-80). [Wi-Fi] [TV] [P] [P] [P] [P] [P] [P]

Haxhiu E-5, Rr. Qemal Stafa 391, tel. +355 4 236 05 47, reservation@hotelhaxhiu.com. This family-run hotel is tucked away off the main street and set behind potted trees and flowers. It's got a light and airy feeling and views of old tile roofs. The relative lack of amenities is compensated by the management's eagerness to please. Taxis to the centre are provided free. So are coffee and tea. The breakfast buffet features fresh fruit and pastries. ▶ 11 rooms (6 singles €30 and 5 doubles €30). [Wi-Fi] [TV] [P]

Kalaja F-5, Rr. Murat Toptani 9, tel. +355 4 225 00 00/+355 68 202 13 25. Kalaja amounts to a good budget choice. In this hostel-like setup, you can either share a room or be selfish and take one all for yourself. Rooms are quiet and clean, with tile floors, basic bathroom, a TV and a fan. Best of all, the hotel is ensconced inside the ancient walls of Justinian's Fortress. ▶ 8 rooms (singles €10, doubles €15, triples €20). [Wi-Fi]

Parlamenti F-5, Rr. Jeronim e Rada 75, tel. +355 4 226 50 24, www.hotelparlamenti.com. An affordable hotel on a quiet central street, indeed near the parliament building. Spacious rooms with attached bathrooms overlook the terracotta roofs of old houses that somehow survived Tirana's recent boom years. ▶ 6 rooms (singles €25, doubles €30-35). [Wi-Fi] [TV] [P]

Pike Loti G-6, Rr. Mihal Grameno, tel. +355 4 223 51 55. Not far from the city centre, this family-run hotel offers small, clean and comfortable rooms. All come with private bath, modern-compatible telephones, TV and minibar. Some English is spoken. ▶ 7 rooms (5 singles €25, 2 doubles €33). [Wi-Fi] [TV] [P]

Republika C-5, Blv. Zog I, 66, tel. +355 4 222 24 00, republikahotel@yahoo.it. On Tirana's busy boulevard, the Republika has shared rooms, some with en suite bathrooms, some using clean shared facilities. Handy for both the centre and the city's transport options, but get a room at the back for a quiet night's sleep. ▶ 10 rooms (doubles €10-20, triples €30). [Wi-Fi]

Te Stela Resort Tirana-Durres highway, km7, tel. +355 4 240 65 17/+355 67 203 33 09, info@testela.al, www.testela.al. A beer-lovers paradise. Owned by the Stela brewery (right next door), this glam resort has a large

outdoor pool, a popular beer garden and restaurant. Inside, the comfortable and very good-value rooms with views of the garden are decked out in light wood, and come with modern facilities. ▶ 36 rooms (singles €30, doubles €44, 3 suites €58). [Wi-Fi] [TV] [P] [P] [P] [P] [P]

Vila Verde B-4, Rr. Karl Gega, tel. +355 4 224 82 32. Perhaps the cheapest place to stay in Tirana, near the train station, down the quiet street running parallel to the tracks. Expect low-standard rooms with en-suite facilities that are bearable if you need to catch an early train or a bus heading north. ▶ 7 rooms (singles €8, doubles €15). [Wi-Fi] [TV] [P]

Hostels

Albania is the perfect country for backpackers, and this has resulted in several hostels open in the past few years, some of them very good indeed. Tirana now has a decent selection, each hostel with a variety of rooms, and basic breakfasts included in the low price. Note that the Kalaja hotel (see *Budget hotels*) has a few rooms that are available as dorms.

Freddy's Hostel E-4, Rr. Bardhok Biba 75, tel. +355 4 226 60 77/+355 68 203 52 61, www.freddyshostel.com. Unquestionably among the best places to stay in the centre of Tirana considering they almost give the rooms away for free, Freddy's is a marvellous family-run venture. Actually resembling a two-star hotel more than a hostel, the rooms are basic to say the least but there's en suite bathrooms and Freddy himself, the amiable, English-speaking owner who's often on hand to give advice on anything. The price includes a small breakfast which at the time of writing came in the form of a croissant, a glass of fruit juice and fabulously strong coffee. ▶ 8 rooms (€12-16 per bed). [Wi-Fi] [TV] [P]

Hostel Albania E-6, Rr. Beqir Luga 56, tel. +355 672 78 37 98, lira@hostel-albania.com, www.hostel-albania.com. A villa in a quiet residential area east of the city centre has been converted into a pleasant hostel, with solid bunkbeds made in Kruja and a cool basement room. The large garden has an oriental lounge corner and a beach bar with couches and palm trees. Indoor parking is available for two vehicles. ▶ 5 rooms (dorm beds €11-12, singles €15, doubles €30). [Wi-Fi] [TV] [P]

Millingona Rr. Riza Cerova 197/2, tel. +355 69 204 98 36, www.millingonahostel.com. 'The ant' is a modern hostel with clean dorms, bunk beds and shared facilities on each floor. There's a kitchen, a garden and a roof terrace where regular music and film nights are held. At 20 minutes walk from the main square and 30 minutes from the *bllok*, it's not as close to the action as the other hostels, but at least the area is interesting enough. Find it just off Rruga e Dibres, near the Frenki restaurant. Note that there is no air conditioning, only fans. ▶ 8 rooms (42 dorm beds €11-12, double €30). [Wi-Fi]

Tirana Backpacker Hostel G-3, Rr. Myslym Shyri 7, tel. +355 68 468 23 53, tiranabackpacker@hotmail.com, www.tiranahostel.com. Albania's first and best hostel is currently housed in a former hotel, meaning most of the 4- and 6-bed dorm rooms have private bathrooms and several also have balconies. But what makes the TBH great are the welcoming parties in the ground-floor bar (see *Nightlife*; it closes at midnight to give guests a peaceful night), and affordable day trips such as biking down Dajti mountain (€20) and hiking to Pellumbas Cave (€15). Mountain bike rental is €5 per day; helmets available. Set back from Rruga Myslym Shyri, 50 metres behind the Alpet petrol station. In summer also check out their Vuno village hostel on the southern coast. ▶ 5 rooms (30 dorm beds €12-13, 2 doubles €28-40). [Wi-Fi]



Stay at Freddy's in the city centre and discover Tirana. Comfortable modern rooms for 2-4 people, from €12 per person. Cable TV, wifi and a/c in all rooms.



75 Bardhok Biba Street
Tirana, Albania
Tel. (+355)(0)68 203 52 61
alfredsalku@yahoo.com
www.freddyshostel.com



www.albaniantrip.com

Address: Villa with Star,
Rruga e Dibrës, Nr 261, Tirana, Albania

Tel (Elton): +355 68 40 58 529
English, French, Italian, Shqip:

Tel (George): +355 69 22 63 333
German, English, Italian, Shqip

UK contact (Michele Elifeet) English:
Tel + 44 (0) 7732852195

Skype: Albaniantrip
contact@albaniantrip.com

albaniantrip.com

Trip'n Hostel D/E-6, Rr. Musa Maci 1, tel. +355 68 304 89 05, www.tripnhostel.com. A lovely new hostel in a colourful old villa surrounded by drab apartment buildings and run by welcoming locals. Rooms are colour-coded and the communal rooms are filled with antiques and curiosities. Each bunk bed has a locker, there are small shared showers and a double room with shared facilities. The two gardens have shady spots for relaxation, and the basement room is cool in summer and cosy with a fireplace in winter. Ask to see the Communist-era air-raid shelter behind the building. Enter the passageway opposite the Lincoln Language Centre.
▶ 5 rooms (36 dorm beds €10-12, single €15-17,50, double €30-35). ☎ ☎

Apartments

Albaniantrip D-4, Rr e Dibrës, 261, Vila me yll, tel. +355 68 405 85 29/+355 69 226 33 33, contact@albaniantrip.com, www.albaniantrip.com. Modern self-catering studios and apartments sleeping 3-9 people, in four locations across the city centre, including in a villa. They can be rented per room (with private or shared bathrooms) or as a whole, have wifi and a kitchen with washing machine and fridge. ☎ ☎

Salku Serviced Apartments E-4, Rr. Bardhok Biba 75, tel. +355 68 203 52 61, alfredsalku@yahoo.com, www.salkuservicedapartments.com. Clean, renovated rooms equipped with fridge, microwave and wifi. A simple breakfast is included, and cheap airport transfers are available. Central and great value for money. ▶ 6 rooms (2-4 bed rooms €45-75). ☎ ☎

Out of Town

Tirana's playgrounds are in the green valley southeast of town along the road to Elbasan, and in the foothills of Mount Dajti, directly to the east of the city. Many modern hotels and popular restaurants can be found here, though keep in mind that you won't get much sleep on weekend nights - always check that they don't have a massive party planned during your stay.

Belvedere (Dajti Tower) Mount Dajti, top cable car station, tel. +355 67 401 10 35, marketing@dajtitower.com, www.dajtitower.com. A space-age construction beside the top station of the Mount Dajti cable car, Belvedere sits at 1,420 metres above sea level and offers grand views over Tirana from its modern rooms. The suites come with Jacuzzi baths and comfy sofas, and tables in the top-floor breakfast bar rotate around the windows. When the cable car is closed on Mondays and during bad weather, guests are shuttled to town by minibus. ▶ 24 rooms (4 singles €25, 18 doubles €60-100, 2 suites €60). ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎

Dajti Park Tirana-Dajti road, km 8, tel. +355 4 230 22 33, info@dajtipark.com, www.dajtipark.com. A large, modern complex on the flanks of Mount Dajti, just 9km east of Tirana and 800 metres above sea level, the Dajti Park offers great views of the city and is a pleasant place to chill out, enjoy the pool or let the kids romp around. The guest rooms have balconies and are well-equipped. Free pickup from the airport.
▶ 24 rooms (singles €40, doubles €50, triples €60). ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎

Albanian cuisine is surprisingly good and tasty, a mix of Mediterranean and Balkan traditions, with plenty of fresh fish and produce. Standards are often high, with many members of the Albanian emigrant diaspora returning with years of experience in the catering industries around the world. Dining in Tirana is still affordable and even more up-market restaurants a main course will not cost too much.

Albanian

Bantia H-4, Rr. Vaso Pasha, tel. +355 4 224 46 57. Excellent traditional Albanian food served in a large restaurant with nice photos of old Tirana (with English captions no less). Try the *tavë* oven dish served with Korça meatballs or the speciality, *petulla te fshjra*, or village pie. If you're bringing hungry friends, consider ordering a *lakror*, a large flat hearty pie stuffed with onion, leek, creamy cheese, or vegetables. Pilsner Urquell is on tap. ▶ Open 10:00 - 01:00. \$\$ ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎

Emblema I-2, Rr. Komuna e Parisit, tel. +355 4 224 56 79. With chunky wooden tables, an open fireplace and walls lined with odds and ends you could be at your granny's house, if your granny were Albanian. The usual selection of pasta and pizza are available but stick to the traditional Albanian food; try the oven-baked *saç* meat dish. ▶ Open 12:00 - 23:00. \$\$ ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎

Era H-3, Rr. Ismail Qemali 33, tel. +355 4 225 78 05/+355 69 406 66 61, era_delivery@yahoo.com. Meaning 'wind', this popular and foreigner-friendly spot makes for a good casual lunch or dinner. The Albanian food is excellent; try the stuffed eggplant and peppers, and *fërgesë* (fried minced lamb, feta cheese and garlic). It's often crammed, so best book ahead. Near the corner with Rr. Sami Frashëri. ▶ Open 11:00 - 24:00. \$\$\$ ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎

Mirzi i Zanave F-5, Rr. Presidenti George W. Bush 1, tel. +355 4 226 99 31/+355 68 207 44 49. Mirzi i Zanave restaurant is named after Gjergj Fishta's Renaissance-era sonnet book *Valley of Goddesses*. Enjoy excellent traditional Albanian cuisine here in modern surroundings reminiscent of a tavern, with flagstone floors, plenty of wood, and live music on weekends. If that's not enough, the owner has a cooking show on TV. To find it, walk east along Bulevardi Zhan D'Ark from the Tanners' Bridge and turn left into the first street. ▶ Open 07:00 - 23:00. \$\$ ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎

Oda E-5, Rr. Luigj Gurakuqi, tel. +355 4 224 95 41. Eat Ottoman-style in a true traditional restaurant, sitting on ottoman stools at low tables in a reconstructed *oda* (guest room) in an old house. Surrounded by shelves with dishes, strings of garlic and peppers and old photos, it's best to allow the waiters to suggest a succession of appetisers and mains. The food is fresh and delicious (try the *lakror në saç* oven-baked pie), unforgettable even after washing it all down with their home-made raki. Find Oda down the first alley west of the market. ▶ Open 11:00 - 23:00, Sun 13:00 - 23:00. \$ ☎ ☎

Sarajet F-5, Rr. Abdi Topani 7, tel. +355 4 224 30 38, www.sarajet.com. The restaurant/bar might have a tough time living up to glory of this 19th century villa wooden villa that once housed the legendary Toptani family. One imagines cigarette smoke-filled rooms sparkling with music, dance and conversation. Back to the mundane menu, you have the predictable traditional and contemporary selection of pasta, fish and meat, some typical Albanian *gjel* casseroles and a few exceptions, such as fried cornbread and fritters. ▶ Open 07:00 - 24:00. \$\$ ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎

Symbol key

☎ Air conditioning	☎ Outside seating
☎ Credit cards accepted	☎ Guarded parking
☎ Occasional live music	☎ Take away
☎ No smoking	☎ Wi-Fi
☎ Child friendly	☎ Home delivery

Restaurant prices

As an indication of cost, in each review we've indicated the average price of a main course, without drinks:
\$ up to 500 lekë
\$\$ between 500-1000 lekë
\$\$\$ over 1000 lekë

Serenata E-3, Rr. Mihal Duri 22, tel. +355 4 273 08 89/+355 69 209 49 32. With a nicely low-key decor of traditional art and costumes, Serenata is the home of dishes from the southern Devoll region, centred on the town of Korça, which is famous for its serenades and spicy, saucy and full fat food. Try *lakror*, a flat pie stuffed with green beans, tomatoes, herbs and spices or *tavë me qofte*, spiced meatballs baked in a clay bowl. Next to Hotel California. ▶ Open 09:00 - 23:00. \$\$ ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎

Sirius I-4, Rr. Abdyl Frashëri. This place doesn't end with the rattan/jungle patio. A step into the bar area sets the mood for romance in the comfy, cosy crevices of leather couches. Then up the knee-cracking stairs there is a restaurant serving fish and a handful of Albanian specialities (*pace koke*, *tasqebab*). But if you're looking for a bargain, check the blackboard, and don't miss one of the best chicken noodle soups you'll find in town. ▶ Open 07:00 - 23:00. \$\$.

Taverna Argjiro I-3, Rr. Sulejman Delvina, tel. +355 4 223 20 78. A jovial village taverna in the middle of Tirana. Come with a group and start the feast with a family-size order of meze salads ranging from grilled vegetables to cheese. Meat lovers can get a whole lamb roasted on a spit, veal, beef and charred pork. The adventurous can order *paca* and *plendes* (offal) for breakfast. Near the Dinamo stadium. ▶ Open 07:00 - 24:00. \$\$.

Vila 31 E-2, Rr. Gjon Muzaka 31, tel. +355 4 227 81 41/+355 69 20 83 317. A definite contender for Tirana's most charming restaurant and also up there on the list of places that are a nightmare to find, Villa 31 really is marvellous. Enter through a small gate with a useful number 31 next to it and choose to eat in the immaculately kept garden or venture inside to one of their equally gorgeous dining halls of which one features a wall full of shelves stuffed with model submarines. Another room has a big open brick cooking place. Quite frankly there's absolutely nothing even remotely negative to say about the place. The staff are friendly and helpful, and the extensive menu has something for everyone. From Rruga Kavajës walk down Rruga Naim Frashëri and look for the sign down the fourth alley on your right. ▶ Open 08:00 - 23:00. \$\$ ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎

Vila 3 Café G-5, Rr. Papa Gjon Palli II, 3, tel. +355 4 226 65 82. Part of the hotel of the same name in the centre of the city, even if you're not gracing the owners with nightly appearances in your pyjamas, you might want to give their outdoor café the once-over. Mostly hidden away from the street along a refreshingly cool alley lined with roses and other flowers, this is a good place for a quick refreshment stop, especially their freshly squeezed orange juice which is both cheap and rather delicious. ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎

Upmarket

Even at the fanciest places in Tirana a meal won't break the bank.

Apollonia H-5, Blv. Dëshmorët e Kombit, Rogner Hotel Tirana, tel. +355 4 223 50 35, www.rogner.com/tirana. Apollonia excels in Albanian, Austrian and Mediterranean specialities, with for example steak salad, (meatballs) and Austrian (noodles with cheese). The domed restaurant has a stylish setting, with additional outdoor seating in the lush hotel garden. ▶ Open 06:30 - 15:00, 18:00-23:00. \$\$\$.

Carlsberg I-4, Rr. Ibrahim Rugova, Xheko Imperial Hotel, tel. +355 4 224 68 52. The classy restaurant in the Xheko Imperial Hotel is deservedly popular with the foreign crowd. Brick arches surround the diners, while some of the country's best cooks and waiters ensure a quality meal. We're especially taken with the steaks, the salad bar and the decadent selection of cheese. In summer head for the open-air rooftop restaurant, a dazzlingly white classicist pleasure garden complete with fountains, amazing views and the classy *White Camellia* conservatory. ▶ Open 07:00 - 01:00. \$\$\$.

Il Gusto G/H-4, Rr. Donika Kastrioti, tel. +355 4 227 80 75, www.ilgustoalbania.com. Right behind the Twin Towers building, Il Gusto is a very nicely designed restaurant with a terrace and excellent Italian/Mediterranean dishes, paired with wines from France, Italy and Spain. There's a seafood display so you can point out your fish, and a cheese cart and a huge leg of prosciutto for carving off your starter. There regular live jazz music too. Pity they allow smoking inside, though. ▶ Open 12:00 - 24:00. \$\$.

Metropolitan J-5, Sheshi Italia, Sheraton Hotel, tel. +355 4 227 47 07. Set underneath a groovy wave roof, the Sheraton's Metropolitan restaurant has excellent Albanian and international fusion dishes. In summer there's also a barbecue every day on the terrace, with fresh fish, meat chops and more. On Sundays there's a lavish brunch buffet with Mediterranean and traditional Albanian food. ▶ Open 12:00 - 23:00. \$\$\$.

Otium H-3, Rr. Brigada e VIII, tel. +355 4 222 35 70, www.otium-restaurant.com. One of our favourite places, Otium is a deliciously unpretentious place for a great meal. So go up the steps and be wowed by the fast and knowledgeable staff. The salads feed two, the pasta dish that we had was excellent and we heard more good things about the lamb confit. ▶ Open 11:30 - 23:30. \$\$\$.

Vinum E-5, Rr. Qemal Stafa 60, tel. +355 4 223 06 22. Exclusive, expensive and difficult to find, Vinum's chef deserves a medal for creativity. Where else do you find quail stuffed with ricotta and foie gras? Or a salad of mango, figs and walnuts, or a soup made with carrots and orange? Even the bread is original - beet, olive and walnuts, oven fresh and very good. It's down the alley, 50 metres east of the Capital hotel. ▶ Open 12:00 - 23:00. \$\$\$.

Viva H-4, Rr. Brigada e 8, tel. +355 4 224 63 76, lokativiva@live.com. Here's a simple, central, affordable home cooking restaurant that pleases all with good food, friendly service and nargila pipes. For something local, order the *tave dheu*, an oven dish with meat and cheese, or try the Elbasan version, *tava kosi* that's with yoghurt. Or the brain cutlets. It's all good. ▶ Open 07:00 - 24:00, Fri, Sat 24 hours. \$.

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. Note that La Boheme also serves Japanese dishes.

Bamboo F-5, Rr. George W. Bush, tel. +355 4 223 01 51, www.svejkbeergarden.al. Overlooking the Svejk Beer Garden, Bamboo serves up variations on Chinese food, with sea food such as squid well represented. The balcony is a lovely place to sit if the weather allows, and there's good beer from the Svejk brewery to wash down the meal. ▶ Open 10:00 - 24:00. \$.

Da Shang Hai I-4, Rr. Ibrahim Rugova 25/1, tel. +355 4 227 19 87. Good Chinese food served in wonderfully chintzy surroundings, just the way the Chinese like it. The English-language menu lists a good value set menu deal as well as several fish dishes. Find Da Shang Hai signposted down an small alley near the Xheko Imperial Hotel. ▶ Open 12:00 - 23:00, Sun 12:00 - 17:00. \$.

Far East H-5, Rr. Asim Zeneli 6, tel. +355 4 227 19 38, www.far-east.al. A pan-Asian restaurant with elements of many Oriental cultures reflected in both the design and the menu. You're greeted on the white terrace by a Japanese stone lantern overlooking a gurgling stream, while inside it's all Chinese woodwork, moon gates and fish tanks. The menu has everything from sushi to Indonesian beef satay and a Korean-style sizzler barbecue. Confusingly, it's part of a Greek restaurant chain. ▶ Open 10:00 - 01:00. \$\$\$.

Mimi I-5, Rr. Dervish Hima, tel. +355 4 226 99 47/+355 69 219 91 01, tiranachinesefood@yahoo.com. An unusually named Chinese restaurant near the Qemal Stafa stadium. There's friendly service and a full range of chicken, pork, noodle and beef standards. The seafood specialities include calamari and shrimps. ▶ Open 12:00 - 23:00. \$.

Shang Hai F-5, Rr. Murat Toptani, tel. +355 4 225 70 12/+355 69 218 70 81. Good and affordable Chinese food is offered at Tirana's second Shang Hai restaurant, found beyond a set of carved wooden pillars in a courtyard opposite the Millennium 2 cinema. The menu has well over 100 options, all available in the dining hall, on the terrace or for take-away. The set menus with 5-8 dishes are good value. ▶ Open 09:00 - 23:00. \$.

Yamato I-4, Rr. Abdyl Frashëri, QTU City mall, tel. +355 4 225 82 38, yamato@manetci.com.al. Albania's only Japanese restaurant is so well-hidden, unmarked above the Euromax supermarket in the QTU City mall, that several locals have written to us to say it does not exist. But it does, and serves pretty decent sushi, sashimi, tempura and teriyaki dishes made in the open kitchen - though the exact menu depends on which fish were netted that morning. ▶ Open 12:00 - 23:00, Sun 18:00 - 23:00. \$\$\$.



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French

Pâtisserie Française G/H-4, Rr. Ibrahim Rugova 1, tel. +355 4 25 13 36. A small corner of Paris in central Tirana. It's all great; the fancy décor, filter coffee, the Salade Nicoise, the brioche and baguettes, the fabulous fruit tarts and even the French accent of the charming owner. The open front of the café allows you to be entertained by busy street outside. ▶ Open 07:00 - 22:00. \$\$\$.

Food with a view

ABA Twentyfirst H-5, Rr. Papa Gjon Palli II, tel. +355 4 450 17 17, twentyfirst@ababusinesscenter.al. One of Tirana's top places, quite literally as this cool leather and glass restaurant is perched up on the city's tallest building with wrap-around views of the city. It's worth the steep price of the drinks and food. The tempting 6,000 lek tasting menu designed by chef Ignazio Campanale includes foie gras and red mullet. ▶ Open 08:00 - 24:00. \$\$\$.

Ballkoni Dajtit Mount Dajti, upper cable car station, tel. +355 67 401 10 21, marketing@dajtiekspres.com, www.ballkonidajtit.com. A lovely Alpine-style wooden restaurant with excellent views over Tirana. There are several dining rooms, though it's worth asking for a table in the enclosed balcony room for the views. The restaurant serves Albanian and Italian meals such as *fergesë me specë* (a dish with eggs and cheese), oven dishes, and in season also wild boar and rabbit. Note that the cable car does not operate on Mondays. ▶ Open 12:00 - 22:00. \$\$\$.

Kristal Bar Rr. Xhorxhi Martini 10 (Vila Alba) F-5, tel. +355 4 225 59 37, www.vila-alba.com. The rooftop café of the Vila Alba hotel may not be the highest in Tirana, but the views of the old rooftops is utterly charming, and the Viennese specialities such as *apfelstrudel* pie and *Sachertorte* cake are wonderful. A great place to get tipsy on fine wines and raki, too. ▶ Open 07:00 - 24:00.

La Bohème I-4, Rr. Abdyl Frashëri (Vesa Center), tel. +355 4 227 88 77, www.laboheroofgarden.wordpress.com. Reached via a fun glass elevator ride, La Bohème's exclusive restaurant on the 10th floor of the Vesa Center building has great views of the *bllok* area, and a good menu with Albania and international dishes; try the 6-course sampler menu. It's also one of the few places serving decent Japanese sushi and ramen. One floor up, the rooftop Guru Bar is great for watching sunset, cocktail in hand. ▶ Open 12:00 - 23:00. \$\$\$.

Sky Club G/H-4, Rr. Ibrahim Rugova 5, tel. +355 4 222 16 66, ext 143, skyclub@albaniaonline.net. Perched on top of the 17-storey Sky Tower building in the very heart of the city, this magnificent restaurant offers equally inspiring views of the city and nearby mountains and is worth the heart-stopping trip in the lift even if you're only looking for an espresso. The not surprisingly wallet-emptying menu is packed with international and Albanian dishes that by all accounts are worth every penny if you're hungry and looking for a meal with an unbeatable view. ▶ Open 08:00 - 24:00. \$\$\$.

German

Brauhaus G-4, Rr. Reshit Çollaku 38, tel. +355 4 223 79 55, www.brauhaus.al. A loud and cheerful German-themed brewery restaurant and pub, with a home-made selection of beers, varying from *Helles* (blonde), *Märzen* (red) and *Weizen* (wheat) to Bockbier. Have the Bavarian-style pork shoulder, German sausages and *Apfelstrudel* to pad your stomach for yet more beer. Events include live music and screenings of sports events. ▶ Open 07:30 - 03:00.

International

Amor F-1, Rr. Muhamet Gjollësja, tel. +355 4 224 15 73/+355 69 407 81 06. No menu here, just what the chef/owner decides to make that day, all cooked fresh. Great home made pasta, excellent meat, superb desserts and all at reasonable prices. Don't miss the chocolate mousse. It's only a little place so booking is advisable for dinner. ▶ Open 12:00 - 22:30. Closed Sun. \$\$\$.

Billionaire G-5, Rr. Jul Varibova 13, tel. +355 4 227 37 16. Situated on one of the few streets in central Tirana still lined with old-fashioned villas, Billionaire adds to the atmosphere by providing a restful terrace and garden where you can smell the flowers as you sip your drink or dine on mainly Italian food. ▶ Open 11:00 - 23:30. \$\$\$.

King House I-4, Rr. Ibrahim Rugova, tel. +355 4 225 55 59, kinghouse@king-house.net, www.king-house.net. There's nothing outstanding about the King House; just reliably good Albanian and Italian food served in pleasant surroundings by friendly and attentive staff. Home of the informal Friday night Tirana expat meeting. Near the Xheko Imperial hotel. ▶ Open 07:00 - 24:00. \$\$\$.

London D-4, Blv. Zogu I, N°51, tel. +355 4 223 88 51/+355 69 207 00 81, rest.london@yahoo.com. Wandering Brits should feel right at home here in this small Albanian corner of Blighty, where British and Italian food is served. A favourite for expats and visitors alike. ▶ Open 11:00 - 23:00. \$\$\$.

Millennium F-5, Rr. Murat Toptani, Pallati i Plonierit, tel. +355 4 226 93 16. Decent international dining in a modern space above the cinema, with a glass pavilion surrounded by greenery, garden fragrances twitting birds in summer. ▶ Open 12:00 - 24:00. \$\$\$.

Natyral H-3/4, Rr. Pjeter Bogdani 13, tel. +355 4 225 11 22, www.naturalfarming.al. One of Tirana's only organic restaurants, this clinical-looking space at the rear of a residential building has a narrow terrace and photos of cows. The international dishes served here are good, and of certified origin. ▶ Open 08:00 - 23:00. \$\$\$.

Pastarella H-5, Rr. Mustafa Matohiti 18, tel. +355 4 226 55 98, pastarella.alb@gmail.com. What a pleasant spot to meet friends and enjoy a *sufflaqe* or Spanish paella, if not just a cup of coffee or a glass of cognac, in this airy beige and white Mediterranean bar café in a converted villa. Pastas, salads, a few Greek dishes, fish and meats all fall into the normal realm of expectation, but nothing more. ▶ Open 07:00 - 24:00. \$\$\$.

Tirana On Your Mobile:
m.inyourpocket.com

Piazza E-4, Sheshi Harry Truman, tel. +355 4 223 07 06, piazzatirana@yahoo.com. Tirana's very first truly elegant restaurant. The Piazza restaurant is still a good spot to try well-prepared Italian dishes and watch people – you'll often see ambassadors and ministers pop in for lunch. The best thing about the place is the lush terrace amidst flower beds and below the palm trees, away from the traffic noise. Next door the Piazza café serves simple snacks. ▶ Open 12:00 - 17:00, 19:00-23:00. \$\$\$.

Royal G/H-4, Blv. Dëshmorët e Kombit, Twin Towers, tel. +355 4 228 03 28, restaurantroyal@hotmail.com. Located on the fourth floor of the Twin Towers, this restaurant combines fine dining with a nice view of the main boulevard and the city skyline. Come on a warm night and dine al fresco in the glow of the pyramid. A good selection of wines is available to accompany a large variety of mains. ▶ Open 08:00 - 22:30. \$\$\$.

Serendipity I-4, Rr. Ibrahim Rugova 26/1, tel. +355 4 225 93 77. The Hard Rock Cafe decor in this popular café is as much a mish-mash as its menu. You've got Marilyn, Jackie, the Beatles, odd flags, rock album covers - the works - plastered on the walls, and you've got a menu with a dizzying number of cuisines. Mexican, Italian, Mediterranean, Albanian. People flock to this placed for the chimichanga and heart-shaped pizza. ▶ Open 08:00 - 24:00. \$\$\$.

Shakesbeer H-4, Rr. Brigada VIII, tel. +355 4 224 44 13/+355 69 207 64 54. It's not just the beer that's shaken; the menu at this lively restaurant is as mixed-up as can be, with exotic dishes from Mexico, Thailand, Spain (paella), Germany (bratwurst) and even Jamaica. There's local grilled fish and meat too for those who want to eat closer to home. The villa has several large rooms, but it's nicest to sit in the lush garden. ▶ Open 08:00 - 03:00. \$\$\$.

Steak House G-4, Rr. Ibrahim Rugova (Taiwan complex). This sleek first-floor steak restaurant is decked out with light wood and has a pleasant terrace overlooking the park. The menu has items such as the Mosaic mixed grill and sirloin Angus steak, but also has a range of other non-steak meals. There's knowledgeable service too. ▶ Open 12:00 - 02:00. \$\$\$.



Hopsotch in the Grand Park – Sco

Castle dining

Kalaja e Petrelës (Petrela Castle) Petrelë, tel. +355 69 208 81 38/+355 68 231 83 33. A fantastic setting for a very good restaurant. The Petrela castle restaurant has tables both outside and in the little tower, all with great views of the surrounding valleys and hills. The food is traditional Albanian, served with a smile. Half an hour's drive east of Tirana along the road to Elbasan. ▶ Open 11:00 - 23:00, Sat, Sun 10:30 - 23:00. \$\$\$.

Viking H-5, Rr. Asim Zeneli 7, tel. +355 4 227 12 98. Slowly acquiring the status of a Tirana institution, the arbitrarily named Viking has about as much in common with ancient Scandinavia as a Japanese monk, but that doesn't stop people from visiting. Decked out in lots of dark greens and crimson and featuring a range of dining areas including one with a lovely old tin stove, the menu barely needs explaining, although to their credit they do also venture into the world of pasta. The recommended breakfast menu, available until 13:00, offers everything from sandwiches to omelettes. ▶ Open 07:00 - 24:00. \$\$\$.

Vila 100 Rr. Myslym Shyri 100, tel. +355 68 207 45 76, www.vila100.com. Perhaps the nicest addition to Tirana's dining scene, the lovely Vila 100 has a lush walled garden with banana plants, fragrant lemon trees and bamboo lamps. Good vibes emanate from the relaxed crowd listening to quality music drifting through the garden. The innovative menu has a pear-brie risotto, an octopus-nut penne dish, game and grilled fish. A good wine list rounds it all off. Find it signposted south off the street, 150 metres from Rinia park. ▶ Open 08:00 - 24:00. \$\$\$.

Vila Amsterdam H-5, Rr. Asim Zeneli 9, tel. +355 4 226 74 39. Logically located right opposite the Netherlands embassy building, this pleasant restaurant has great semi-covered terrace seating where you can plot the downfall of the Dutch government. Or perhaps just tuck into Albanian food and pizzas. ▶ Open 07:00 - 23:00. \$\$\$.

Vila Metropolitan H-4, Rr. Ibrahim Rugova, tel. +355 68 33 02 07. Right beside the dictator's old villa, this nicely converted villa is the largest city-centre venue with a café on the ground floor and the terrace around, and a stylish restaurant upstairs. There's traditional and modern art on the walls, and a varied menu; for vegetarian *viagra* try the 'aphrodisiac salad'. ▶ Open 19:00 - 24:00. \$\$\$.

Xibraku Rruga e Elbasanit, tel. +355 4 245 25 42, www.xibraku.al. You might need a tour guide to navigate this meandering, multi-level collection of bars, restaurants and conference hall in the plush hinterland of Tirana's famous road to Elbasan. But if you don't mind lots of stairs, there is something for everyone's taste, from country kitchen to its ultramodern bar. Opposite the Presidential Residence. ▶ Open 11:00 - 24:00. \$\$\$.

Italian

ABA Fifth H-5, Rr. Papa Gjon Palli II, tel. +355 4 450 17 20, fifth@ababusinesscenter.al. This bar/restaurant is Twentyfirst's little sister, on the fifth floor above the Coin mall. Its grand patio gives patrons a bird's eye view of the Qemal Stafa football stadium as well as a spectacular three-corner panorama of Tirana. Here you'll want to stay for the smoothies or the bargain breakfast or bistro lunch, or dinner which includes wok dishes. ▶ Open 07:30 - 24:00. \$\$\$.

Menu decoder

Meat & Fish	Mish & Peshk
beef	mish lope
chicken	pułë
lamb	qengji
pork	derri
sausage	suxhuk
veal	mish viçi
schnitzel	shnitcell
fish	mish peshku
salmon	salmon
sea food	fruta deti
trout	troftë
Fruits and vegetables	Frutat dhe perimet
apple	mollë
banana	banane
cabbag	lakër
carrot	karrotë
eggplant	patëllxhan
mushrooms	këpurdha
orange	portokall
peppers	speca
tomatoes	domate
Drinks	Pijet
beer	birrë
juice	lëng
wine	verë
water	ujë

Al Brigantino H-5, Rr. Themistokli Germenji 3/1, tel. +355 69 224 18 34. A neat Italian restaurant with a seafaring theme – paintings, nautical maps on the ceiling and a huge model ship between the tables. The food is fresh and good. Opposite the Romanian embassy. ▶ Open 08:00 - 24:00. \$\$\$.

Artigiano I-4, Rr. Abdyl Frashëri, tel. +355 69 209 23 58. Lively, noisy and deservedly popular, Artigiano serves some of the best pizzas in town. Smiling waiters efficiently zip around the tables in the large open space. Special pizzas include white ones, without tomato sauce, and there's also a good range of pastas, salads and burgers. While you wait, free entertainment is provided by the pedestrians and traffic crossing the busy intersection outside. ▶ Open 07:00 - 01:00. \$\$\$.

Casa di Pasta G-4, Rr. Ibrahim Rugova, Taiwan complex, tel. +355 4 225 11 75/+355 4 225 11 78, www.kompleksitalwan.com. Many foreign visitors end up eating at this large Italian eatery occupying half the Taiwan complex, as it's obvious and central. The food is absolutely fine, though the interior makes it look like a small Italian anywhere in the world, and the service can be numbingly slow. Try some lamb chops, pizza or fish dishes. ▶ Open 12:00 - 02:00. \$\$\$.

Ceni's K-4, Rr. Sami Frashëri, tel. +355 67 406 61 66. Wonderful and fresh Italian and Albanian food in a small basement restaurant near the Grand Park. The owner also runs a butchery, and his meat cuts are some of the best in town. The menu changes every day; we had the amazing tagliatella with rucola. The 300 lek antipasto lunch buffet has a range of excellent regional dishes. ▶ Open 12:00 - 23:00, Sun 12:00 - 17:00. \$\$\$.

Fiore I-5, Rr. Dervish Hima 4, tel. +355 4 223 63 94, info@fiore-restaurant.com, www.fiore-restaurant.com. The focal point of this old world Italian restaurant is the open kitchen pizza oven, but customers head for the fish display case where the catch includes jumbo shrimp, *levrek* and *barbun*, among others, at expected prices. Otherwise you'll find the usual pizza, pasta-risotto with a surprise or two in the meat line-up (roasted rabbit), all fairly priced, as are the Albanian and Italian wines. ▶ Open 12:00 - 23:00. \$\$\$.

Green House G-5, Rr. Jul Varibova 6, tel. +355 4 222 26 32, www.greenhouse.al. A 1930s villa with a quiet courtyard hidden behind high hedges seems the perfect place to have Mediterranean meals, accompanied by a good selection of wines. The outside seating area has a tropical feel to it, while inside it's all minimalist chic with delicate spot lighting. ▶ Open 09:00 - 24:00. \$\$\$.

La Cantinella H-4, Rr. Brigada VIII, tel. +355 69 207 00 82. Set back from the street, the courtyard of this elegant Italian grill house is a pleasant and quiet place to try a grilled meat or Albanian speciality. Inside, there are tables with red-cushioned seats, a pot stove, and wines displayed along the walls. ▶ Open 12:00 - 23:00. \$\$\$.

La Tavernetta H-4, Rr. Ibrahim Rugova, tel. +355 4 225 48 34. Lurking in a cellar below a modern high-rise lies this rustic Albanian tavern with wooden beams, medallions, large spoons and lutes. The reasonable Italian food here is complemented by an excellent salad bar. ▶ Open 24hrs. \$\$\$.

Mamma Rosa H-3, Rr. Sami Frashëri 20/1, tel. +355 69 317 70 84. An excellent Italian eatery with great pastas and steaks, in a house halfway along the street. The bathroom uniquely has a real bath. ▶ Open 11:00 - 24:00. \$\$\$.

Napoli D-2, Rr. Durrësit 79, tel. +355 4 223 15 67, www.restaurantnapoli.com. One of the first private restaurants to open in 1991 and strategically placed near the clutch of embassies along Rr. Skenderbeg, Napoli is a good spot for diplomats and other passers-by. Its scrumptious pizzas and seafood are conjured up by a chef who trained in Italy. ▶ Open 08:00 - 24:00. \$\$\$.



Delicious byrek – Sco

Pirro Mani Rr. Ali Demi 131, tel. +355 4 234 75 67. Famed locally for the Italian food on offer, Pirro Mani is named after the celebrity owner and has no aronist links whatsoever. There's a large seating area in the garden, while the rustic interior is also capable of holding a wedding party or two. On weekends, call in advance to check it's not booked full. Just east of the city centre. ▶ Open 12:00 - 24:00. \$\$\$.

Vila Logoreci I/J-3, Rr. Gjon Pali II, tel. +355 4 224 71 90, vilalogoreci@yahoo.it. A superb-looking restaurant in an old villa, with cosy indoor rooms and a terrace with a pond. The Italian food here is a cut above the rest and the daily special is certainly worth trying. It's best to come early or avoid the Vila on very busy nights. ▶ Open 07:30 - 23:30. \$\$\$.

Mexican

Tirana Mexican Cantina (TMC) K-4, Rr. Sami Frashëri (Nobis complex), tel. +355 4 481 85 73, www.mexican-cantina.al. Tirana's first Mexican joint serves up a surprisingly large variety of nachos, salads, soups, rice dishes, chile beans, tortillas and oven dishes, all as authentic as you can expect in the Balkans. ▶ Open 09:00 - 24:00. \$\$\$.

Park restaurants

Lining Tirana's Grand Park are several large restaurants where you can relax in the cool fresh air and say hello to a bear.

Dreri Rr. Elbasanit, Grand Park, tel. +355 4 237 47 45, www.restorantdreri.com. Anything but dreary. Serenely set in the park, the terraced landscapes around the main building of 'the deer' are an excellent place for a relaxed meal. Opposite the geology faculty. ▶ Open 12:00 - 17:00, 19:00-24:00. \$\$\$.

Juvenilja Castelo J-6, Rr. Gjeneral Niko Pushkini, tel. +355 4 226 66 66, www.juvenilja.com. These fine purveyors of Italian and Albanian specialities, a multi-talented salad bar and gigantic pizza inhabit a customised castle on the edge of the park. Excellent dining in large rooms, all-encompassing balconies or tiered-terraces overlooking the greenery. ▶ Open 10:00 - 24:00. \$\$\$.

Lion Park Rr. e Elbasanit, tel. +355 4 237 52 99. No lions here, just a huge restaurant villa with a nice garden. Inside, the piano bar has a stage for live music. Unsurprisingly, Albanian and Italian dishes feature on the menu. A place to come with a group and time on your hands. Near the Iliria Hotel. ▶ Open 12:00 - 23:00. \$\$\$.

Queen Park Tirana-Elbasan road, km 5, tel. +355 68 202 10 23. The grand building set on the edge of the park offers two floors with a big terrace for dining, and is popular with the locals for festive events. It may not be fit for a queen, but it's certainly not bad. ▶ Open 10:00 - 24:00. \$\$\$.

Sofra e Ariut (Bear's Lair) Rr. Elbasanit, tel. +355 4 237 29 04, info@sofraeariut.com, www.sofraeariut.com. A well-known destination for Albanian meals near the Martyrs' Cemetery, designed to look like a Swiss chalet, with elegant interiors. The cages containing Liza the bear, some monkeys, eagles and chickens around the terrace may cause the animal rights activist in you to raise your eyebrows, but they're housed in much better conditions than the poor creatures in the local zoo. ▶ Open 07:00 - 24:00. \$\$\$.

Restaurant talk

Waiter!	Kamarier!
A table for two	Një tavolin për dy
Non-smoking / smoking	Ndalohej duhani / Lejohet duhani
The menu please	Menue ju lutem
I'd like to order	Do doja ta bëjja porosin
Do you have vegetarian food?	Keni ushqim vegjetarian
Surprise me!	Më befaso
The bill, please	Faturën ju lutem

Pizza

Bogova G-3, Rr. Myslym Shyri 47, tel. +355 4 223 52 00. One of just a few restaurants in a street full of female fashion and shoe shops, Bogova is a great place to plonk down your shopping bags and have a break with a fresh pizza. It's named after a beautiful river in southern Albania. ▶ Open 12:00 - 22:00. \$.

La Voglia F-4, Rr. Ibrahim Rugova nr 56, tel. +355 4 225 88 99/+355 69 566 84 60, info@lavogliatirana.al, www.lavogliatirana.al. La Voglia draws a chic young Albanian crowd to the restaurant occupying a square that is the closest thing that Tirana has to an Italian piazza. DJs spin chill tunes outside in summer. Just across the square, the restaurant has another outlet, imaginatively named La Voglia 2. ▶ Open 09:00 - 01:00. \$.

Venecia I-5, Sheshi Italia, tel. +355 4 223 32 33. Excellent pizza, but also a great place for coffee and cakes. If weather allows, sit outside on the nice terrace with interesting views of the ragged arse of the Qemal Stafa stadium. ▶ Open 07:00 - 24:00. \$.

Snacks & Fast food

Concentrations of grease can be found around the intersection of Rr. Ibrahim Rugova and Rr. Abdyl Frashëri. See also the café reviews for healthier snacks.

Big Bite I-4, Rr. Abdyl Frashëri 16, tel. +355 4 222 00 00/+355 68 205 66 00. Love it or hate it, no other restaurant gets as many reader comments (both good and bad) on the *Tirana In Your Pocket* website. The second most popular fast-food chain in town has burgers, chips and pizza, non-stop. ▶ Open 24hrs. \$.

Goody's Rr. Abdyl Frashëri, tel. +355 4 450 30 00, www.goodynet.com. Greek-flavoured fast food: burgers, sandwiches, fries, salads and more, served in a modern restaurant with seating. ▶ Open 09:00 - 24:00. \$.

Il Pomodoro Food Court H-5, Sheshi Italia, Sheraton Plaza Mall, tel. +355 4 22 74 07 83 83. A food court inside the mall attached to the Sheraton hotel, with three cuisines on offer: Mexican, Italian and Asian. Popular for office lunches and for a quick dinner. ▶ Open 07:30 - 23:00. \$.

Kolonat I-5, Sheshi Italia, tel. +355 4 225 51 27. One of those places you either love or hate; Albania's original US-style fast food chain has huge four-person super-pizzas, *Skanderburgers* (named after the national hero) and 'Big Supreme' menus – and comes complete with plagiarised McD logo and packaging. The main outlet is a large tent wedged behind the colonnade at the southern end of the boulevard. ▶ Open 08:00 - 24:00. \$.

Mr. Chicken I-4, Rr. Abdyl Frashëri, tel. +355 4 225 77 08. It's hot and it's busy, but the delicious freshly cooked rotisserie chicken is worth waiting for. You can also get decent chips and kebabs here. Sit in the cheap and cheerful dining section or take it away to smear grease all over your face elsewhere. ▶ Open 09:00 - 24:00. \$, ☑, ☑

NYT Bagels Rr. Themistokil Gërmenji, tel. +355 69 540 75 83, www.newyorktiranabagels.com. Not surprisingly located near the US Embassy, NYT (as in New York Tirana) offers a wide selection of bagels and other snacks plus coffee, soft drinks and beer in a modern environment complete with a small outdoor terrace. The bagels themselves come in two sizes, feature several bread options and a range of fillings that can be mixed to the customers' wishes. The prices are extremely reasonable and the menus are in English. Delivery too. \$, ☑, ☑, ☑, ☑

Urban Burger House H-3/4, Rr. Brigada e VIII, tel. +355 69 737 36 61. Fast food in the bllok: burgers, hot dogs, salads, omelets and more. The five speciality burgers include the Sultan, with Kosovar suxhuk sausage. ▶ Open 07:00 - 24:00. \$, ☑

Turkish

Istanbul H-4, Rr. Dora D'Istria 10, tel. +355 67 217 18 24. A modest-looking Turkish restaurant near the lake that nevertheless serves up some great food. Besides kebabs and pita dishes, do try the sticky desserts. ▶ Open 12:00 - 21:00. \$\$, ☑, ☑

Sofra Turke F-2, Rr. Kavajës 170, tel. +355 4 222 68 18. An oasis of welcome calm in an otherwise madly chaotic street, this vaguely upmarket restaurant specialises in original *kuzhina turke* as opposed to the Albanian-tinged lookalike food available in most restaurants in Tirana. Complete with old radios, pictures of old Istanbul and plenty of carpets on the walls of the kind weak-willed tourists bring back from Turkey in their luggage, several of 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. ▶ Open 08:00 - 23:00. \$\$, ☑, ☑, ☑, ☑



Chess in the park – Sco

€1=137 lek, £1=160 lek,
US\$1=104 lek (July 2013)



Tirana's backstreets – Sco

Seafood

Magic Blue H-4, Rr. Vaso Pasha, tel. +355 4 227 35 55, magic.blue.restaurant@gmail.com. A modern seafood restaurant in the *blloku* fitted out rustic-style. The catch of the day can be inspected fresh on a bed of ice beside the entrance and you can simply choose the fish of your liking, or you could order one of the many seafood options on the menu, which includes octopus, calamari, shrimps, salmon and more. There's live piano music every Wednesday, Friday and Saturday evening. ▶ Open 12:00 - 24:00. \$-\$\$\$., ☑, ☑, ☑, ☑, ☑, ☑

Markata e Peshkut E-5, Sheshi Avni Rustemi (Pazari e Ri), tel. +355 68 903 08 54. A surprisingly good-looking seafood restaurant in the rather dishevelled surroundings of the main market hall. The seafood here is as fresh as can be, witness the stalls laden with ice and fishy things all around. Seafood is displayed at the entrance, with per-kilo prices ranging from 1600 lek for calamari squid to 4500 lek for lobster. ▶ Open 10:00 - 22:00. \$\$.

Rozafa E-5, Rr. Luigj Gurakuqi 89, tel. +355 4 222 27 86/+355 4 223 91 14, www.rozafa.al. With fish and other seafood coming fresh from their own fish market across the street, you can choose between superb cheap seafood or superb expensive seafood at the two Rozafa restaurants, both located in one building. Treat yourself at least once to the upmarket version (down the alley and through the wooden door on the left); try the seafood buffet, piled high with more tentacles and suckers that you can count. ▶ Open 12:00 - 24:00. \$-\$\$\$., ☑, ☑, ☑, ☑

Rozafa Markatë Peshku H-3, Rr. Sami Frashëri, tel. +355 68 209 21 53. The fast food outlet of the well-known Rozafa fish restaurant has affordable seafood served in a flash. There are all kinds of fishburgers, but you'll see often locals going for the shrimp dishes. Perfect for the linguistically challenged - you can just point at things to order. ▶ Open 09:00 - 24:00. \$, ☑, ☑, ☑

All cafes and bars offer espresso (*kafë ekspres*) or Turkish coffee (*kafë turke*). More upscale places will also serve American-style coffee (*kafë filter*). Starbucks-type coffee can be found at Gregory's and NY-T.

Artist Lounge H-5, Rr. Ismail Qemali 12, tel. +355 4 481 60 18, www.lartistcatering.com. A unique, bright and spacious café serving fresh fruit juices and smoothies, coffee, sweet and hearty crepes, sandwiches, pasta, salads and baguettes. Recommended for a healthy snack or lunch, though service can be slow. ▶ Open 07:00 - 24:00, Sat, Sun 07:30 - 24:00. \$, ☑, ☑, ☑, ☑

Bardhë e Zi H-3, Rr. Sami Frashëri, tel. +355 4 224 70 89. The biggest attraction in 'Black and White' is the huge black-and-white photograph collection of Albanian artist Artur Gorishti. Modern and comfortable, this café serves a damn good cappuccino. Near the corner with Rr. Ismail Qemali. ▶ Open 24 hours. \$, ☑, ☑, ☑

Café Albert E-3, Rr. Durrësit 59, tel. +355 69 218 70 66. The walls of this cosy and artsy café halfway down the long street are hung with dozens of cartoon caricatures of local politicians and other media stars; well worth a glance if you're following the Albanian news. There's a selection of wines and some croissants and other snacks. ▶ Open 07:00 - 15:00, 18:00-23:00. \$, ☑, ☑, ☑

Central Café G-5, Blv. Bajram Curri, Galeria Mall, tel. +355 69 206 37 17, www.centralcafetirana.com. On the third floor of the Galeria shopping mall, the Central Cafe is a good place for a quick coffee in between your shopping spree. Decked out in trendy orange colours and with a lounge and bar area, it's not your average mall café. ▶ Open 09:00 - 22:00. ☑, ☑

Cicerimat I/J-3, Rr. Sami Frashëri, tel. +355 69 218 62 58. Parents rejoice; this colourful café is completely dedicated to small children. So while you enjoy your coffee, cake or beer on the terrace, the kids can romp around the indoor play area. ▶ Open 09:00 - 24:00. ☑, ☑

City Lounge H-5, Rr. Mustafa Matohiti, tel. +355 69 404 02 00. There's an artsy copper theme to the City Lounge, where you can head to a relaxing upstairs balcony. As well as the usual range of drinks you can also choose from a very reasonable lunchtime menu of the day. ▶ Open 07:00 - 24:00. \$, ☑, ☑

Delikatesë H-5, Rr. Ismail Qemali 12, tel. +355 4 224 54 24, www.pasticeridelikatase.com. Delicious home-made cakes and sweet chocolatey things served in a restaurant that also has Italian dishes on the menu. Perfect for an indulgent lunch. ▶ Open 07:00 - 23:30, Sun 08:30 - 23:30. ☑, ☑

Gregory's Coffee H-4, Blv. Dëshmorët e Kombit, Twin Towers, tel. +355 4 228 04 81, info@gregorys.gr, www.gregorys.gr. Get your coffee, Greek sandwiches and snacks at this modern self-service café on the ground floor of the Twin Towers. The fresh paninifillings include omelet, chicken and Albanian-style meatballs and cheese, and there's pie too. The fantastic hot or cold chocolate drinks are worth a try too. ▶ Open 06:00 - 19:00, Sat 06:00 - 15:00, Sun 06:00 - 14:00. \$, ☑, ☑, ☑

Juna I-4, Rr. Ibrahim Rugova. Sited in one of the busiest areas of town by the university bookstore, Juna is busy all day long. Could be the location, or the good fresh coffee they serve. ▶ Open 08:00 - 23:30. ☑

Kaloj 41 Rr. Mustafa Lleshi 41, tel. +355 4 234 21 77, www.kaloj41cafe.blogspot.de. Lost in a maze of small streets, Kaloj 41 panders to a somewhat predictable collection of locals and foreigners in their 20s. Also functioning as a traveller information centre and games room, the place is known for its burger which although claiming to be the largest in the city isn't that great, but for friendliness Kaloj is hard to beat. They sell products featuring the work of artist Ibrahim Kodra (1918-2006). You can also buy bright yellow stickers with the words 'I Park Like An Idiot' in Albanian - don't get arrested. ▶ Open 09:00 - 24:00. \$, ☑, ☑, ☑

Kevin Rr. George W. Bush, tel. +355 78 208 92 91. Tirana's efforts to pedestrianise some city centre streets has encouraged some bar owners to create nice outside seating areas, and Kevin's terrace has a prime location, with a view of the old Ottoman bridge. The brand new classicist building it is housed in is worth a closer look for its remarkable knight and caryatid statues. ▶ Open 06:30 - 23:00. ☑, ☑

Pasticeri International I-4, Rr. Abdyl Frashëri, tel. +355 4 225 67 50, pasticeri.internacional@yahoo.com. The only thing international about this place might be your presence - but it's still one of the better places to go to get your sugar-and-coffee fix. Wolf down tarts and various other pastries - if you can find a seat, that is. The children will love the small playground in the adjacent park. ▶ Open 07:00 - 24:00. \$, ☑, ☑, ☑

Pasticeri Twin Towers G/H-4, Blv. Dëshmorët e Kombit, tel. +355 4 228 02 89. A good location in the Twin Towers looking out over the Pyramid, this place is bright, modern and airy. Ice cream and cakes complement the rather overpriced coffee, and you can while away the time enjoying the erratic spellings of the Scotch whisky on the menu. ▶ Open 07:00 - 23:00. ☑, ☑



The fairground at Skanderbeg Square - Sco

Pirro H-5, Blv. Dëshmorët e Kombit, Rogner Hotel Tirana, tel. +355 4 223 50 35, www.rogner.com/tirana. The Rogner Hotel's relaxed lobby café/bar is something of a meeting place for diplomats, businesspeople, and other hobnobbing foreigners. Apart from newspapers and fast wifi, Pirro has a great shaded terrace overlooking the tropical garden. On Thursdays there's live Jazz music from 21:00. ▶ Open 06:00 - 24:00. ☎ ☑ ☒ ☓ ☔ ☕ ☖

Quaffe G-5, Rr. Jul Varilbova. The quintessential 21st-century Albanian café-bar complete with impeccably dressed waiters whose lack of professionalism is more than made up for in friendliness, quirky light fittings, a fantastic terrace for watching the world go by and a limited range of drinks. Among the latter are an impressive roll call of cocktails and an equally massive selection of green teas. ▶ Open 08:00 - 24:00.

Quo Vadis H-4, Rr. Ismail Qemali 21, tel. +355 4 226 65 90. A popular café at the *bllok*'s main crossroads. The deep red walls provide the perfect backdrop for the hip, young and rich to do their thang. We recommend ordering a coffee, a pint of hair gel and a clipped goatee. ▶ Open 07:30 - 00:30. ☎ ☑ ☒ ☓ ☔ ☕ ☖

Relax H-5, Rr. Mustafa Matohiti, tel. +355 68 213 86 41. Another fine place for lingering over a cup of coffee and reading the paper in the *bllok* district. This rather relaxing café has big windows and a bright interior with lots of light wood. There's a selection of magazines, should you get bored. ▶ Open 07:00 - 23:00. ☎ ☑ ☒ ☓ ☔ ☕ ☖

Sky Club Café G/H-4, Rr. Ibrahim Rugova 5, tel. +355 4 222 16 66. The floor of the glass box on top of Albania's highest building revolves slowly to give a 360-degree panorama of the city. ▶ Open 08:00 - 23:00. Groups: admission 250 lek/person. ☎ ☑ ☒ ☓ ☔ ☕ ☖



Drinking partizan, Grand Park – JvM



Flowers in the Grand Park – JvM

South Park K-4, Rr. Sami Frashëri (Grand Park). A busy terrace bar in the red residential building at the western end of the Grand Park. A great place to recover from a gentle walk in the park, the bar has a good selection of wines to choose from, as well as the usual coffee and cake options. ▶ Open 06:00 - 23:00. ☎ ☑ ☒ ☓ ☔ ☕ ☖

Stephen Center Café E-5/6, Rr. Hoxha Tahsim 1, tel. +355 4 223 47 48, www.stephencenter.com. Set up by evangelical missionaries who certainly know how to run a good café, this is one of Tirana's best, a cosmopolitan meeting place for locals and foreigners alike. There's a pleasant terrace and a cosy smoke-free interior with a poster of New York's twin towers. There's free wifi, fresh juice, 90 lek bottomless coffee, salads, pastas, sandwiches, pancakes, burgers, pizza, Mexican dishes, English breakfast and on Saturdays waffles. Amen! ▶ Open 07:00 - 23:00. Closed Sun. (600-750 lek). \$. ☎ ☑ ☒ ☓ ☔ ☕ ☖

Tea Room G-3, Bul. Gjergj Fishta 12, tel. +355 69 475 87 02. In this nation of caffeine addicts, this delightful little café offers a selection of quality tea varieties, cake, and snacks such as paninis made with local pide bread. In the evenings, have some bruschetta or pasta with your wine. Tea Room doubles as a meeting place for free-spirited men. ▶ Open 08:00 - 24:00. \$. ☎ ☑ ☒ ☓ ☔ ☕ ☖

Book cafés

Epër7shme G-5, Rr. Jul Varilbova 2, tel. +355 4 227 12 88, eper7shme@gmail.com. Without question one of the highlights of the city, Eper7shme functions not only as a beautiful place for snacks and drinks both inside and out (the terrace at the back comes highly recommended) but is also an antiquarian bookshop with a handful of paperbacks in English. The simple breakfasts are a real hit. The name means 'suitable' - and it's more than that. Recommended. ▶ Open 08:00 - 23:30. \$. ☎ ☑ ☒ ☓ ☔ ☕ ☖

Friend's Book House G-3, Rr. Sami Frashëri, palatet e Lanës, tel. +355 4 226 67 77/+355 4 226 66 64, friendbookhouse@yahoo.com. Forget about reading at this bookshop café; there's nothing in English. But literary insomniacs can be found here day and night, sipping coffee and planning their next novel. If you must read or study, there's a quiet reading room in the basement. Near the main police station, just north of the river. ▶ Open 07:00 - 00:30. Open 24hrs. \$. ☎ ☑ ☒ ☓ ☔ ☕ ☖

Tirana's nightlife scene is not bad at all, and is improving fast. The fun starts with the lively *xhiro* (mass evening stroll), and ends at the bustling *blloku* area. There's a fine line between cafés, bars and clubs (and indeed workplaces) in Albania, and some venues that we have listed as cafés or bars are known to morph into clubs on weekend nights. You'll know when the sound gets cranked up and long-legged gogo girls climb onto your table. Note that Albanians prefer sipping coffee to serious drinking, and foreign types are often the only sad souls knocking back the hard stuff.

Bars

Birreria Ke Tori G/H-4, Rr. Vaso Pasha, tel. +355 4 224 99 98. A lovable, grubby little basement beer bar next to Steelwings, serving quality regional beers (Birra Korca from the south, and Peja from Kosovo) together with greasy sausage and potato beer snacks. ▶ Open 10:00 - 24:00. ☎ ☑ ☒ ☓ ☔ ☕ ☖

Cannon H-4, Rr. Pjetër Bogdani. A bar with plenty of wood, good beers and Tirana's lively indie-rock youth crowd packed in like sardines. Wait for the DJ to man the decks and join the party. ▶ Open 08:00 - 23:00, Fri, Sat 08:00 - 03:00. ☎ ☑ ☒ ☓ ☔ ☕ ☖

Caramel Lounge H-4, Rr. Dëshmorët e Kombit, Twin Towers. A bar set on the second floor of the Twin Towers, with cracking cocktails, lounge music and views over to the Pyramid. At weekends, drop by for the lively Salsa parties. ▶ Open 07:00 - 03:00. ☎ ☑ ☒ ☓ ☔ ☕ ☖

Charl's Bistro H-4, Rr. Pjetër Bogdani 36, tel. +355 69 202 29 01, info@charlsbistro.com. An eclectic, fashionable thirtyish crowd populates this fantastic lounge bar with 1960s-80s inspired music in the *bllok* area. The somewhat oddly spelt bar regularly puts on live music acts from across the region and various other events from Thursday to Saturday, but the cocktail bar in the lush small garden spits out great drinks all week. Excellent food, too. ▶ Open 08:00 - 24:00, Sat 08:00 - 03:00. ☎ ☑ ☒ ☓ ☔ ☕ ☖

Checkpoint Charlie H-4, Rr. Brigada e VIII. Named after the famous Berlin border crossing and decorated with Wall tourist mementos, Checkpoint Charlie is a raucous party bar full of people grinding to rock and pop. There are snacks like fries and chicken wings, but it's usually all about affordable beer here which curiously enough is sold auction-style, changing price every now and then, depending on demand. Find it down the alley near the Hotel de Paris. ▶ Open 18:00 - 24:00, Fri, Sat 18:00 - 04:00. ☎ ☑ ☒ ☓ ☔ ☕ ☖

Code I-4, Rr. Abdyl Frashëri. Finally, a bar for slightly more mature visitors that's not packed with youngsters who could be your drunk children. The Code is a spacious arched bar with a library corner, sofas and Tuborg on tap. Regular parties include the Jazz & Gold Hits evenings, with live bands. ▶ Open Sept-May, 07:00-01:00. ☎ ☑ ☒ ☓ ☔ ☕ ☖

Converse G/H-4, Rr. Vaso Pasha. The students, artists and intellectuals that visit this tiny basement 'social club' to sip coffee and play chess seem the exact opposites of the loud hairy men slamming down shots at Steelwings next door. A good place to pick up conversation with young Tiranians, recite poetry or pin your own home-made artwork on the walls. ▶ Open 09:00 - 03:00. ☎ ☑ ☒ ☓ ☔ ☕ ☖

Daily G/H-4, Rr. Ibrahim Rugova, tel. +355 69 204 27 00. To the young students here, it's all about seeing or being seen. The large bar up on the first floor has big windows all around for watching the crowded streets and terraces below. ▶ Open 07:00 - 24:00.

Diesel Hall Rr. Mustafa Matohiti 12, tel. +355 69 525 02 55. A combined bar, café, club and restaurant, Diesel Hall attracts the Fashion TV and 4WD crowd. Laid out in different areas and using different themes, we like certain things about the place including the lively outdoor terrace and the fabulous bar complete with a vertical garden. A great location for a sophisticated natter over a cold beer or glass of champagne. Perhaps the best thing about this place is that if you don't like it, there are plenty of other places nearby. ▶ Open 07:00 - 02:00. ☎ ☑ ☒ ☓ ☔ ☕ ☖

Flares H-4, Rr. Brigada VIII, tel. +355 69 209 99 10. Everyone knows that alcohol and singing go very well together, especially if you are the one tipsy and singing, rather than someone in the audience. Flares is a fun bar that turns into a crowded karaoke den at weekend nights, run by Denis and Nardi who work hard to make this a welcoming spot. ▶ Open 07:00 - 01:00, Thu, Fri, Sat 07:00 - 03:00. ☎ ☑ ☒ ☓ ☔ ☕ ☖

Hemingway Rr. Kont Urani 1, tel. +355 69 202 23 03. Vaguely 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 crowd of mostly student-aged drinkers frequenting this recently opened bar just northwest of the city centre. Good for a drink and a bit of networking if little else, Friday evenings herald a weekly live music event which tends to attract big crowds. A bizarre anomaly in an otherwise dusty Albanian side street. ▶ Open 16:00-02:00, Sept-May 07:00-02:00. ☎ ☑ ☒ ☓ ☔ ☕ ☖

Dancing in Tirana

Partner dancing is becoming increasingly popular in Albania, and there's a good number of places to learn the moves, or shake your stuff on the dancefloor. The scene is still young, and foreign dancers are welcomed with open arms.

Latin

Latin dance parties are organised by Love & Dance (tel. +355 69 24 38 584, facebook: LoveDance-KurseKercimi), with Salsa, Bachata, Merengue, Cha Cha Cha, Hip-Hop and more, on Wednesdays at Charl's Bistro, and Fridays and Saturdays at Caramel in the Twin Towers. Admission is free. They also offer courses on the second floor of the Galeria Tirana mall on Rruga e Barrikadave. At the Latin Beat Club dance school (Rr. Themistokli Gernmenji, Pegaso building, tel. +355 69 722 75 89, facebook: latinbeatclub) there's parties every Friday and Saturday from 22:30, film screenings every Sunday at 19:00, and dance lessons the rest of the week.

Tango

Every Friday at 22:30, Argentine tango enthusiasts gather in the piano bar on the top floor of the Observator building (Rruga e Dibres, Sheshi Selvia, +355 66 402 22 20) to float over the wooden dance floor. Beforehand there are classes; for information check www.tangotirana.webs.com or facebook: TangoTirana.

Swing dance

The budding swing dance scene in Tirana, practising East Coast Swing, Lindy Hop and Charleston, does not organise regular parties yet, but swing dance enthusiasts are very welcome to drop by their practise sessions near the Stermasi stadium, every Tuesday and Friday. Contact Andi on facebook (andi.loshi) or tel. +355 68 333 25 80 for details.

Wine bars

Sophisticated interiors, quiet music and a good selection of wines to sample.

Alcora G/H-4, Blv. Dëshmorët e Kombit, Twin Towers, tel. +355 4 228 01 42. A popular and stylishly upmarket wine bar on the fourth floor of the Twin Towers complex. The locals come here for the see-and-be-seen factor and nip coffee and wine or taste the antipasta dishes. There's a very nice terrace with views of the treetops, budgies in a cage and a tree lit up pink. ▶ Open 08:00 - 24:00. ☎ 📍 📱 🍷

Bonaparte G/H-4, Rr. Ibrahim Rugova, tel. +355 69 407 47 03. The most upmarket wine bar in town comes highly recommended by online *Tirana In Your Pocket* readers. On the first floor of the building, overlooked by a portrait of Napoleon, visitors can get sozzled on a dizzying array of quality French wines, cognac and over 30 types of whiskey. Exclusive Armagnac brandy is also served at €1500 a bottle or a mere €150 per glass. Snacks are served, as are Cuban cigars that may be smoked here. Pity about the smoke. ▶ Open 09:00 - 01:00, Sun 17:00 - 01:00.

Wine Spirit I-3, Rr. Andon Zako Çajupi, tel. +355 69 227 49 81, koncept4@hotmail.com. Hidden deep in the *bllok* area near the Conad supermarket, this wine bar has a dark wood interior with old carpets and a grand piano. The walls are lined with bottles, as they should be, and the selection of Italian, French and other foreign wines is complemented by a selection of Albanian reds, and Italian food. ▶ Open 11:00 - 23:00. \$\$. ☎ 📍 📱 🍷

Infinity J-5, Sheshi Italia, Sheraton Hotel, tel. +355 4 227 47 07. The Sheraton's elegant piano bar and lounge is a peaceful place for a beer, or something stronger, sometimes accompanied by live music. ▶ Open 06:30 - 23:30. ☎ 📍 📱 🍷

Izzy Living H-3, Rr. Andon Zako Çajupi. A quirky living room style interior and a nice garden terrace on the street corner attracts punters to Izzy Living. At night DJs take over the decks during cocktail time. ▶ Open 07:00 - 04:00.

Living Room F-5, Rr. George W. Bush 16. A few years back, this was one of Tirana's very first modern international-style bars. It may have much more competition nowadays, Living Room remains a great place for a night out. Head up to the multilevel rooftop overlooking the city for cocktails, light meals (in summer) and DJ parties. In winter, retreat to the first floor of the building with its living room style bar. ▶ Open 19:00 - 03:00. ☎ 📍 📱 🍷

Lizard H-4, Rr. Pjetër Bogdani, tel. +355 69 202 27 92. A large shed of a place that regularly gets crammed with young locals, delighted with the live rock music. Drop by Wednesdays for the hot Latin nights. ▶ Open 24hrs. ☎ 📍 📱 🍷

Meduza H-5, Rr. Mustafa Matohiti, tel. +355 4 222 35 98. An insanely popular Irish pub that like all good Irish pubs has almost nothing to do with Ireland and Irish culture, Meduza does at least serve draught Guinness but that's where the resemblance ends. The interior design features the usual collection of beer ads and stupid jokes, the punters are all extremely friendly (but then again where

aren't they in Albania?), 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 football. ▶ Open 06:00 - 01:00. ☎ 📍 📱 🍷

Monarc Bar F-5, Blv. Zhan D'Ark, tel. +355 4 227 45 11, www.monarc.al. The bar on the top floor of the hotel is worth mentioning for the dazzling views across town from its wrap-around terrace, and the waterfall that cools drinkers in summer. ▶ Open 08:00 - 24:00. ☎ 📍 📱 🍷

Music Box G-4, Rr. Ibrahim Rugova, Rinia Park, tel. +355 4 225 11 75. A spacious bar on the first floor of the Taiwan complex, with a nice terrace overlooking the fountain. Leave your coat at the garderobe and sag in a couch to listen to DJ music. ▶ Open 07:00 - 02:00.

Noel F-5, Rr. Murat Toptani, tel. +355 4 224 36 38. A film lover's den of delights, Noel is appropriately owned by the director of the local film institute, and is set in a basement opposite the Millennium 2 cinema. A mature crowd of culture vultures can be found sitting eating and drinking at tables amidst hundreds of magazine photos of movie icons and scenes. Food on offer includes traditional *tava* and *qofte* meatballs. ▶ Open 11:00 - 24:00. Closed Sun.

Nouvelle Vague H-3, Rr. Pjetër Bogdani, tel. +355 69 668 01 91. This popular bar is not 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 decorate the ceilings inside, and the bar has a great selection of cocktails, and plays groovy music. ▶ Open 09:00 - 24:00. ☎ 📍 📱 🍷

Piccadilly Rr. Kont Urani, tel. +355 69 202 04 14. Guarded by two fake red telephone boxes and decorated with Union Jack tables, this new bar opposite the Lugano hotel serves drinks and light snacks to a predominantly young Albanian crowd for want of something better to do. The pop art on the walls should keep visitors amused for a drink or two but there's nothing here that's likely to turn it into a regular drinking spot. ▶ Open 08:00 - 24:00. ☎ 📍 📱 🍷

Playhouse J-4, Rr. Perlat Rexhepi 6, tel. +355 69 532 46 42. If just drinking beer all night long sounds boring, head to this colourful bar where for 100 lek you can borrow games all night long to play with your friends or random locals. A selection of over 80 games is available, including an Albanian version of Monopoly. ▶ Open 10:00 - 01:00.

Public House J-4, Rr. Ibrahim Rugova (Grand Park), tel. +355 69 525 86 60. Hidden in the fringes of the Grand Park, on a footpath just off Sheshi Shopen, the Public House bar is a big hit with Tirana's students. Looking like a garden shack, it's informal to say the least. DJs play alternative and rock music while the bartenders mix up some excellent and affordable cocktails. The swing in the garden is the favourite Tirana spot for many a visitor. ▶ Open 08:00 - 02:00. 📍 📱 🍷

Radio H-4, Rr. Ismail Qemali 29/1, tel. +355 69 28 44 24. Tirana's alternative youth can often be found hanging out at Radio, where old radio station logos, a Guernica painting, a typewriter on a stool and a few antique radios decorate the front room. Out back, the semi-open terrace looks less enticing but is still full on weekend nights. In the apartment building set back from the street. ▶ Open 09:00 - 01:00.

Rock 'n Roll I-6, Rr. Dervish Hilma. A small bar with classic green and red wallpaper and a great atmosphere, very popular with locals and foreigners alike. Mercifully, no house music is played here, just honest blues, country and the odd rock 'n roll song, with DJs sometimes dropping by to spin their discs. The usual drinks are served, with a good selection of whiskeys to fuel the night. ▶ Open 08:00 - 02:00. 📍 📱 🍷

Rockwood H-5, Rr. Papa Gjon Pali II, N°11/1. A small and friendly bar on the ground floor of a tall office building serving endless coffees by day and playing rock and other music styles at night. ▶ Open 07:00 - 02:00.

Si n'shpi H-3, Rr. Sami Frashëri, tel. +355 66 563 93 93, www.si-nshpi.al. A large and lively open-fronted bar, overlooking a large terrace. Downstairs, a classic-looking bar dominates the main room, upstairs there are cosy corners to retreat and more terrace seating. ▶ Open 07:00 - 24:00.

Steelwings (Harley Davidson Bar) G/H-4, Rr. Vaso Pasha, tel. +355 69 525 36 23, steelwingsalbm@gmail.com. The presence of members of the Steelwings Albania Motorcycle Club is easily spotted, as the street outside is regularly parked full of cool bikes. Inside, this rocking bar is decorated with all the usual Americana, and owners Tani and Dani stress that everyone is welcome. Visit on Thursdays for the unplugged sessions or on weekend nights for rock karaoke and live rock and country music. ▶ Open 08:00 - 02:00. ☎ 📍 📱 🍷

Svejk Beer Garden F-5, Rr. George W. Bush, tel. +355 4 223 01 51, www.svejkbeergarden.al. Tirana's first true beer garden is named after the unlucky Czech soldier from the eponymous book. Peer through the windows beside the large terrace and you'll see the two copper brewing vats and the 6 huge fermentation vats of the home brewery, where potent Czech-style beer is produced in light and dark varieties (150 lek for a glass). Fortify yourself with solid Albanian and Italian food. ▶ Open 08:00 - 01:00. \$. ☎ 📍 📱 🍷



The National History Museum

Bowling

Blur (Qendra Argetuese Blur) Lunder, tel. +355 48 810 132, info@blur-al.com, www.blur-al.com. An entertainment centre along the road to Elbasan with UV-lit bowling, snooker, pool, a restaurant, bumper cars and bouncy castles. ▶ Open 09:30 - 24:00. ☎ 📍 📱 🍷

Spare Time G-4, Rr. Ibrahim Rugova, Taiwan complex, tel. +355 4 225 11 75, www.kompleksitaiwan.com. Several bowling lanes on the two lower floors of the Taiwan complex. 250 lek per person per game, 350 lek after 18:00. ▶ Open 09:00 - 24:00. ☎

Tempus Club H-4, Rr. Ismail Qemali, tel. +355 69 564 60 98. A café and bar behind Enver Hoxha's old villa that really comes alive during the Friday and Saturday night karaoke sessions - warble along to your favourite Albanian or foreign song together with the *Magic 4* group. The karaoke starts at 22:30. ▶ Open 07:00 - 24:00, Fri, Sat 22:30 - 05:00.

Tirana Backpacker Bar G-3, Rr. Myslym Shyri 7, tel. +355 68 468 23 53, www.tiranahostel.com. Perhaps the best place for travellers in Tirana to kick off a night out, this hostel bar is a great melting pot of nationalities and alcoholic drinks. Drop by for films on Tuesday (often classics or documentaries), lively jam sessions on Thursdays, poetry on Fridays, or just any old night for animated encounters with the staff, other guests and potent cocktails. In summer, there's barbecue night every Tuesday and Friday too. It closes early, but the *bllok* is just a short walk away. ▶ Open 07:00 - 23:00. 📍 📱 🍷

Tirana Rock I-4, Rr. Abdyl Frashëri, tel. +355 69 260 06 57, tiranarock@gmail.com. One of Tirana's best bars, the Rock has a lot of wood, wild parties and loud live music played every Wednesday (unplugged), Thursday (new bands), Friday and Saturday (rock). Their classic Tirana Rock Café T-shirts sold out in no time, ask to see if they're available again. Admission is free, though beer costs more when bands play. Closing times are very flexible. ▶ Open 07:00 - 02:00, Sun 17:00 - 03:00. ☎ 📍 📱 🍷

Vogue Lounge H-4, Rr. Ibrahim Rugova, tel. +355 67 300 22 73. Vogue Lounge is the latest former office villa in the *bllok* to be converted into a hip bar. With a glass-fronted façade, comfy chairs, designer lamps, mellow music and a terrace with pond underneath the palm trees it's crammed with the city's beautiful at night. ▶ Open 07:30 - 02:00. ☎ 📍 📱 🍷

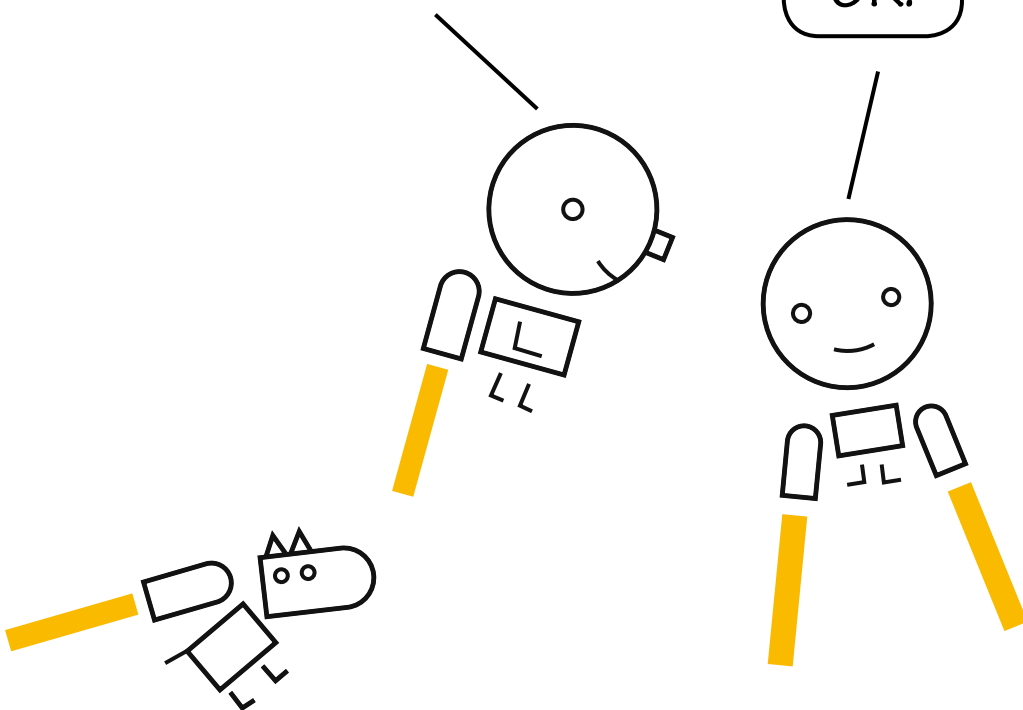
Zanzibar H-5, Rr. Mustafa Matohiti. Despite the name there is nothing very African about this place apart from the mural of the Sahel plain that runs the length of one wall and a few random elephant carvings. One of six bars in a row in a crazy building, it's fun to sit outside and compare your waiter's performance with the rest. ▶ Open 07:00 - 23:00. ☎ 📍 📱 🍷

Casinos

Regency Casino G-4, Rr. Ibrahim Rugova, Taiwan complex, tel. +355 4 227 47 39, www.regencycasino.al. The casino inside the Taiwan complex has 20 gaming tables and 250 slot machines. To get in you'll need to be older than 18 and to have ID. Casual dress is fine. ▶ Open 14:00 - 06:00.

Check out the programme at www.riga.org

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Clubs

Crazy Calvin Rr. Elbasanit 118/1, tel. +355 66 662 22 22. Come jiggle with the glittering girls. A large and lively club catering to lovers of Turbofolk (traditional Balkan music on speed), Crazy Calvin delivers when it comes to making crowds jump around. Just east of the centre. ▶ Open 08:00 - 01:00. [i] [w]

Folie F-5, Rr. Murat Toptani, tel. +355 68 609 16 68, www.myspace.com/foliebar. Playing 'selected music for good people' in an extravagant three-storey space with plenty of glass balconies for making yourself seen, Folie is one of Tirana's best clubs. Set beside the Millennium cinema, it has a fantastic outdoor terrace area too. Watch the posters for their themed nights. [i] [w]

Lollipop H-4, Rr. Pjetër Bogdani 36, www.myspace.com/lollipoptirana. Tirana's coolest crowds head for this achingly cool club for cocktails, gossip and the latest in house and dance music. Inside there's lots of brushed steel, sofas in vivid red, and blinding white and polka dots on the walls. At the weekend the DJs come out and do their thing, competing with the live bands at Charl's Bistro across the street. ▶ Open 12:00 - 05:00. Closed Sun. [i] [w]

Mumja F-5, Rr. Murat Toptani, tel. +355 68 609 16 68, www.myspace.com/mumjaclub. Originally located in the pyramid (hence the name) and now near the Millennium cinema, Mumja is a hopping club playing a wide variety of music on weekend nights to a wild crowd of students. ▶ Open Fri, Sat 23:00-06:00. [i]

Raum H-4, Rr. Vaso Pasha. How loud can a student bar get? Raum does its best to put this to the test, and the crowd dancing away the night in this first-floor bar must be deaf for days after the party. Expect friendly students, cheap cocktails, sweaty moves on the dance floor and ruptured eardrums. ▶ Open 18:00 - 02:00.

RockStock E-4, Sheshi Skenderbeg (Tirana International Hotel), tel. +355 67 381 18 11. An entrance at the side of the Tirana International Hotel leads to Rock Stock, a cosy live rock and pop music club, set up by local celebrity Elton Deda. Keep an eye on their facebook page for the schedule. [i]



Grilling sheep heads at the market – Sco



Bush street – Sco

Sharm Club I-5, Sheshi Italia, www.sharm-club.net. With a large outdoor space for cooling down on warm nights, Sharm is a disco club done up in outrageous colours and materials (think glass floors, padded walls and Ionian pillars), and playing the usual house hits to a happy crowd. Just east of the Sheraton. ▶ Open Fri, Sat 22:00-03:00. [i] [w]

Pubs & Sports Bars

Cheers Rr. Pjetër Bogdani 39/1. This lively, standard-looking Irish pub surprises with its good selection of German beers; there are three types of Bavarian Paulaner beer on tap, making it a great place to have something else than the ubiquitous pilsner-type beer. DJs rock the place on weekend nights. ▶ Open 07:00 - 02:00. Beer 300 lek. [i] [w]

Duff Rr. Themistokli Gërmenji, tel. +355 69 260 73 88. An American-themed establishment placed suspiciously close to the US embassy, Duff (as in the beer drunk in the Simpsons) is essentially a sports bar with an American bias that couldn't be more patriotic if it tried. Featuring walls plastered in photographs of American sporting idols and a menu including chicken wings and nachos, they do at least offer a good selection of European beer alongside a baffling choice of cocktails. The terrace tends to get packed on a warm evening, not least when there's something sports-like flickering away on their many television screens. Alongside the endless showings of basketball and American football they do also show other sports including plenty of quality European soccer. ▶ Open 07:30 - 02:00. [i] [w]

Pub talk

Where is the nearest club?	<i>Ku ndodhet klubi më I afërt?</i>
I need a...	<i>Dua një</i>
... beer	<i>birrë</i>
... wine	<i>verë</i>
... cocktail	<i>koktell</i>
... cigarette	<i>cigare</i>
... lighter	<i>çakmak</i>
... ashtray	<i>tabak</i>
... man	<i>burr</i>
... woman	<i>grua</i>
Where can I find a taxi?	<i>Ku mund ta gjejë një taksit?</i>
You have beautiful eyes.	<i>Keni sy të bukur.</i>
Your place or mine?	<i>Vendi im apo I yti?</i>
Where I come from, that's illegal.	<i>Prej nga unë vij, kjo është jo legale.</i>

Essential Tirana

Tirana's sights are quite low-key, and therefore the must-sees can nearly be counted on one finger. If time allows you to take in some culture, follow our short city walk (see opposite), visiting the **Et'hem Bey Mosque** and the **National Art Gallery** or **National History Museum** before getting a coffee in the *bllok* area.

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Churches

Heart of Christ Church (Kisha Zemra e Krishtit)

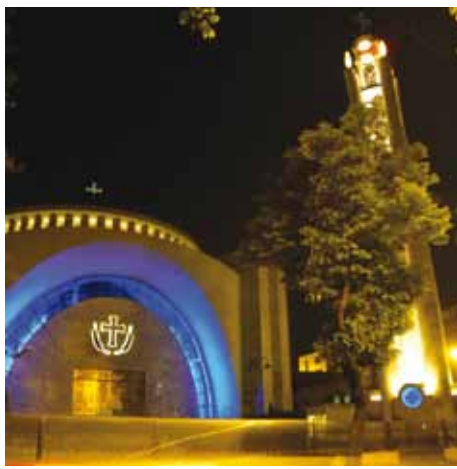
F-3, Rr. Kavajës, tel. +355 4 224 86 91. Tirana's oldest surviving Catholic church is the Romance-style Jesuit church, built by Giovanni Santi (from Udine in Italy) in 1939. In 1967, when all religious activity in Albania was banned, it was stripped of its frescoes and turned into a cinema. It reopened as a church in 1991, with two chapels repainted in 1999. Visitors are welcome in the morning and afternoon hours.

Orthodox Cathedral F-4, Rr. Ibrahim Rugova.

Opened in 2012 and now the main centre for the Albanian Orthodox Church, the mighty Christ's Resurrection Cathedral has a floor plan of some 1,660 square metres and is dwarfed by its 46-metre bell tower. The church conforms to no traditional ecclesiastical style, and is quite simply ostentatious and vulgar in equal amounts. To see it at its best, make a visit after dark when the entire structure lights up like a Las Vegas casino.

Orthodox Church (Kisha Ortodokse) F-2, Rr. Kavajës 151, tel. +355 4 223 50 95/2234117, www.orthodoxalbania.org.

The Orthodox Church of the Holy Annunciation was built in 1964, but closed in 1967 and was then used to house the Tirana Sports Club. Services resumed in 1990. The Orthodox Church of Albania first became autocephalous in 1937 and again in 1992.



Orthodox Cathedral – Sco

St. Paul's Cathedral (Katedralja e Shen Palit) G-5,

Blv. Zhan D'Ark, tel. +355 4 223 46 55. 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 features a relatively plain interior. The stained glass windows at the front feature both Mother Teresa and Pope John Paul II. A range of classical concerts are held inside the building throughout the year. ▶ Open 06:00 - 12:00; 14:00-19:00. Open 08:30-12:30, 17:00-19:00, winter afternoons 16:00-19:00.

Museums & Galleries

Archaeological Museum (Muzeu Arkeologjik) I-5,

Sheshi Nënë Tereza, tel. +355 4 224 07 11. Archaeology buffs who aren't satisfied by the finds on display at the National History Museum will find even more fragments of various finds here, from pottery and animal statuettes to arrowheads and jewellery. ▶ Open 10:30 - 14:30. Closed Sat, Sun. Admission free.

Culture & Continuity Museum F-4/5, Sheshi Skenderbej.

A small but beautiful collection of 40 Albanian crafts artefacts dating back to 1920. Items include silk shirts, velvet embroidered with gold thread, and the best socks you've seen in your life. In the small building beside the clock tower; the guard can also open the tower for you. ▶ Open 08:00 - 15:00. Admission free.

Linda Spahiu Costume Collection Tel. +355 68 304 26 64/+355 68 212 10 08, atellelinda@hotmail.com.

Linda and her son Luris are perhaps Tirana's most fervent collectors and restorers of traditional Albanian costumes; they sold the family house and moved into a rented apartment to be able to purchase more items. Although they do not have a permanent exhibition space yet, they are happy to show their collection and sell some items to interested visitors. Their top pieces, which include waistcoats, heavy woolen embroidered *xhubleta* skirts, and delicate tablecloths. Luris speaks English and French. Take a taxi or bus up Rr. Elbasanit to the first roundabout after the Martyr's Cemetery and you'll be met there. ▶ Open by appointment. Admission free, donations welcome.

Mezuraj Museum (Mezuraj Muze) E-3, Rr. Kavajës, Sun Business Centre, tel. +355 4 226 71 96, info@mezuraj.museum, www.mezuraj.museum.

Tirana's first private museum consists of 800-object Mezuraj family collection of which a changing selection is on display. Two rooms are dedicated to Albanian paintings and sculptures, with a striking Socialist Realist depiction of happy young people on a harvest campaign. There are also various archaeological artefacts on display, including Greek amphorae, beautiful bronze-age jewellery, 4th century weights, spearheads, and a plate from the sunken Italian warship 'Po'. Find the museum above the Raiffeisen bank on the first floor of the tall business centre 500m from Sheshi Skanderbeg; the entrance is hidden in the alley on the right side of the building, behind the Bistro 5 bar. ▶ Open 10:00 - 18:00. Closed Sun. Admission 300 lek.

National Art Gallery (Galeria Kombëtare e Arteve) F-4/5, Blv. Dëshmorët e Kombit, tel. +355 4 223 39 75, www.gka.al.

The city's art museum hosts an excellent and varied collection of Albanian art. The permanent exhibition shows paintings by Albania's earliest artists, starting in the 1800s. Upstairs there are realist socialist works depicting heroic partisans, Albania's industrial might, and factory workers, produced from 1944 to 1990 when even the size

of canvas and subject matter were dictated. Edison Gjergo's 1971 painting 'Epic of the morning's stars' for example was criticised as being pessimistic, and the artist was arrested. On the top floor the contemporary modern art includes the wonderful 'Dusk' by Agron Bregu. As a special bonus, at the rear of the building you'll find some still-defiant Communist-era partisan statues clenching their fists at the sky, as well as huge statues of Lenin and Stalin, now wrapped in protective plastic. ▶ Open 10:00 - 18:00. Closed Mon, Tue. Admission 200 lek.

National History Museum (Muzeu Historik Kombëtar) E-4, Sheshi Skënderbej, tel. +355 4 222 34 46.

You can't miss the gargantuan mosaic on the museum facade - it represents the development of Albania's history with everyone from Illirians to Partisans represented. Inside, each hall covers one of the stages in the development of the Albanian nation. Beautiful finds from the many archaeological sites across the country include the 4th-century mosaic of a woman from Durrës. One hall focuses on the Second World War and the resistance movements, while the museum ends with the 'Pavilion of Communist Terror', a harrowing exhibition about Albania's prison and labour camp system and the thousands of men and women who were swallowed by it. Unfortunately most texts are in Albanian, so bring a translator, or at least have a look at the photos of the show trials, the bloodied shirt of a man shot while trying to escape across the border in 1990, and a reconstructed prison cell. The museum shop has a good selection of books and traditional crafts. ▶ Open 10:00 - 17:00, Sun 10:00 - 14:00. Closed Mon. Admission 200 lek.

Natural Science Museum (Museu i Shkencave Të Natyrës) F-2, Rr. Kavajës, tel. +355 4 222 90 28.

This small, old-fashioned collection in a ramshackle building includes lots of stuffed animals (of the taxidermic, not cuddly, kind), birds and various strange sea creatures, including the biggest sea turtle ever found in Albania. ▶ Open 08:00 - 14:00. Closed Sat, Sun.

Shëngjin Church Mosaic (Mozaiku i Tiranës) E-2, Rr. Naim Frashëri.

An excavated Byzantine-era church ruin that was only discovered in 1972 boasts Tirana's oldest artworks: mosaics with geometric patterns and depictions of poultry and fish. Nicely exhibited in a little park and protected by a makeshift roof, there are also various stones, some from the church iconostasis, scattered around the site. Unfortunately there's little in the way of explanations. A little obscure but well worth a look if you're in this part of town: look for the Hallall pizzeria on the northern end of the street, and walk 100 metres west. ▶ Open 08:00 - 17:00. Closed Sun. Admission free.

Tourist information

TIA Tourist Information Point Tirana Airport, tel. +355 4 238 49 80, www.tirana-airport.com.

A handy tourist information kiosk in the airport arrivals hall, with *Tirana In Your Pocket* guides and brochures. ▶ Open 09:00 - 19:00.

Tourist Information Center (Zyra e Informacionit Turistik) E-4, Rr. Ded Gjo Luli 4, tel. +355 4 222 33 13, infotourism@tirana.gov.al, www.tirana.gov.al.

The city's friendly tourist information centre is right behind the National Museum. Drop by to get information about the city and copies of *Tirana In Your Pocket*. ▶ Open 11:00 - 17:00, Sat 09:00 - 14:00. Closed Sun.

City walk

Tirana's most significant buildings are concentrated along one thoroughfare: Bulevardi Dëshmorët e Kombit, the "Boulevard of the Martyrs". The walk described below, from Skanderbeg Square to the Polytechnic University, will take you past Tirana's highlights in a flash.



Tirana's main boulevard

Starting underneath the mosaic of the National Museum on Skanderbeg Square, pass Et'hem Bey Mosque towards the elegant government buildings at the end of the square, housing ministries and the town hall. These were built in the 1930s, during the rule of King Zog.

The grand boulevard leading south from here was the brainchild of the Italian Fascists, who held parades here during World War II. It later became the venue for the locals' *xhiro* (evening stroll). In fact, it used to be closed off to traffic in evenings - what bliss that would be now. Cross the next street (Rruga Myslym Shyri) and on your left is the Art Gallery, then, hidden behind pine trees, the former Hotel Dajti. On your right is Rinia Park, which was concealed beneath illegally built bars and pizzerias in the 1990s. The municipality reclaimed the area, and with popular support bulldozed the buildings in order to restore the park.

Walk across the next wide streets (Bulevardi Zhan D'Ark; Bulevardi Bajram Curri) and perhaps without noticing you've crossed the Lana River, whose green banks were also crammed with illegal buildings until order was restored. Here you arrive at the 'pyramid'. On your right, next to the Twin Tower business centre is a small park with the busts of the three Frashëri brothers.

Just past the next crossing on your left is the Prime Minister's Residence, which was once the Communist Party headquarters. During official demonstrations and parades, Party leaders stood on the balcony here and waved to the masses below. In January 2011, this was the scene of rioting and three deaths when nervous guards opened fire on demonstrators. On the right is the former Party Committee building.

Beyond Rruga Ismail Qemali you'll pass the Postblloku/Checkpoint memorial, the Rogner Hotel Tirana, and a little further the modernist Palace of Congresses. Originally built for Party congresses, it now hosts concerts, festivals and fairs. On your right, fenced off and concealed behind trees, is the President's Palace. This building served as the Soviet embassy until 1961, when all diplomatic relations were broken off, and for a while thereafter it housed parliament.

The disproportionately large, empty square at the end of the boulevard is Sheshi Nënë Tereza (Mother Teresa Square), named for the nun who was arguably the most famous Albanian of the 20th century; her statue can be found up the steps. To the left is the Archaeological Museum; on the right, the Art Academy. At the southern end of the boulevard stands the Polytechnic University, originally erected by the Italian Fascists. Its imposing stone façade certainly seems better fitted for reviewing goose-stepping soldiers than for studying in. Going further down the paths on either side of the university whisks you out of urban Tirana and into the Grand Park.

Tours

City walks with Albi albikusuri@yahoo.com. Explore Tirana with an enthusiastic young local who simply enjoys showing foreigners around his home town. Albi Kusuri usually meets visitors on Fridays around 17:00 for an informative three-hour stroll past all the main sights.

Tirana Ekspres B-4, Rr. Karl Gega, Blloku i Magazinaeve, tel. +355 69 360 38 75, www.tiranaekspres.wordpress.com. Tirana's most exciting 'art space' is located in a large railway warehouse building a few minutes walk from the train station. Check the facebook page for their events, which range from art exhibitions, performances, shows and film screenings to party nights. ▶ Open for events only, usually 21:00-24:00.

Zeta Gallery I-4, Rr. Abdyl Frashëri, Hekla Center, tel. +355 4 226 66 80, zeta.artgallery@yahoo.com. A windowless room on the second floor of a new building has changing art exhibitions by young local and international artists. ▶ Open 09:30-14:00, 17:00-20:30. Closed Sun.

Ottoman Tirana

Clock Tower (Kulla e sahatit) F-4/5, Sheshi Skenderbej, tel. +355 4 224 32 92. Tirana's landmark central sight is the clock tower from 1822. Brightly lit at night, it can be seen from the far end of Rr. Durrësit when entering the city. Started off by Et'hem Bey, completed by the locals and extended to 35m in 1928, when a German-made clock was also installed, it was for long the highest building in town, and the views of the city centre from the top are worth the climb. The shadow of the tower strikes the mosque at sunset, an event long used to mark the closing time of the formerly adjacent market place. Integrated with the "Culture & Continuity" exhibition. ▶ Open 08:00 - 15:00. Closed Sat, Sun. Admission 100 lek.

Et'hem Bey Mosque (Xhamia e Et'hem Beut) F-4, Sheshi Skenderbej, tel. +355 4 222 37 01. Perhaps the only real sight in Tirana, this pretty mosque is right on the city's main square, making it hard to miss. Construction of the 'Xhamia e Haxhi Ethem Beut' mosque started in 1794 and was finished in 1821 by Et'hem Bey (who evidently got all the credit). Closed under communist rule, the mosque reopened as a house of worship in 1991 without permission from the authorities. 10,000 courageous people dared to attend and remarkably the police did not interfere. The event was a milestone in the rebirth of religious freedom in Albania. Take a look at the frescoes outside and in the portico which depict trees, waterfalls and bridges - motifs rarely seen in Islamic art. Take your shoes off before entering. ▶ Open 08:00 - 11:00.

Fortress of Justinian (Kalaja) F-5, Rr. Murat Toptani. When this fortress was built in the 6th century, Albania was but an outpost on the western fringe of the Byzantine Empire. The fortress is the place where the main east-west and north-south roads crossed, and formed the heart of old Tirana. About all that's left of the fortress above ground is a 6m-high Ottoman-era wall, covered in vines, and some wall foundations that have been incorporated into the pedestrianised street.

Galeria Shijaku (Sali Shijaku House) B-5, Rr. V. Luarasi, tel. +355 4 226 14 58. A large Ottoman-era *konak* house surrounded by a lovely garden and a high wall. There's a shady café terrace in the garden, while the high main room has been converted into an art gallery. ▶ Open 09:00 - 17:00.

House of the Dervish Khorosani D-4, Rruga e Barrikadave. A pretty 19th century wooden 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 100m beyond the French cultural institute.

Tanners' Bridge (Ura e tabakëve) F-6, Rr. Presidenti George W. Bush, Intersection with Blv. Zhan D'Ark. This elegant Ottoman stone footbridge was once 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 area of skimmers and leather workers. The Lana was rerouted in the 1930s and the bridge was neglected, eventually becoming a rubbish tip. It's now restored to its former glory and is used by pedestrians again. Watch out - slippery when wet.

Teqeja Dervish Hatixhe C-4, Rr. Dervish Hatixhe. Dedicated to the female Bektashi Islamic saint Dervish Hatixhe who was the Tirana Nightingale, nursing people through a cholera epidemic. On her death in 1798 a tekke was founded near her *tyrbe* (grave). It miraculously survived the communist era and is still visited by people of varying religions, especially women. A corridor leads past a soot-blackened candle room to where the graves of Hatixhe and her family members can be seen.

Tomb of Kaplan Pasha (Tyrbe e Kapllan Pasha) F-5, Rr. 28 Nëntori. This *tyrbe*, or tomb, dates from 1817. It honours Kapllan Pasha, who ruled Tirana in the early 19th century. It consists of eight classical columns linked by arches. Left derelict, trash-strewn and half-sunk into the pavement and lit only by a blue neon lamp for many years, it is now to be renovated and graciously shielded by the concave wall of the high-rise building currently under construction next to it.

Parks & Gardens

Botanical Gardens (Kopshti Botanik) Tel. +355 4 222 52 87. Part of Tirana University's Faculty of Natural Sciences, Tirana's botanical garden is a very pleasant 15-hectare area on the slopes west of the centre. Founded in 1971, it houses about 1400 species of plants, representing about a third of the Albanian flora. Bring a picnic to enjoy the meadows and lanes of palm trees. If the gate is not open, wave at one of the gardeners. ▶ Open 08:00 - 14:00. Admission 50 lek.

Grand Park (Parku i Madh) K-5. A short stroll south of central Tirana, the Grand Park is a haven from all the traffic and dust. At one time, thousands of the city's inhabitants came here on holidays to play and picnic; now it's a place for people to snooze after lunchtime, to fish, or to swim. Reach the park by walking up the path to the west of the university building; you'll end up near Tirana Lake (romantically known as 'the artificial lake'), which is surrounded by pleasant parkland and a few restaurants. Walk west and you'll soon reach the dam, at the other end of which you'll find Tirana Zoo and a few enterprising car wash businesses using up all the lake water. Walk east uphill to find several intriguing memorials. One is the well-tended cemetery for the British troops who died fighting the Germans in WWII. Their sacrifice was long suppressed from the historical record, since Britain was considered an imperialist enemy. Nearby stand several grey stones listing the names of all Ger-

man soldiers who died in Albania during WWII, some of them buried at this site. Just up the hill are the tombs of the Frashëri brothers, who helped catalyse the Albanian national awakening in the late 19th century. Abdyl was leader of the Prizren League; Sami was a radical agitator for an independent Albanian republic; and Naim was the first major Albanian-language poet. Across the field to the right is an anti-fascist monument.

The Palace of the Brigades, which once served as the residence of King Zog, stands at the far edge of the park along Rr. Elbasanit and was named for the partisans who captured it in WWII. Now used for official receptions (and with a military headquarters nearby), it is off limits to the public.

Rinia Park G-4, Blv. Dëshmorët e Kombit. A decade ago, Rinia Park was a disgraceful mess of illegal constructions, garbage and shady dealings. During the city's clean-up, the buildings were bulldozed and the result is this pleasant spot of green. The park is now the proud focus of the evening *xhiron*, when thousands of people dress up and stroll around to meet up and chat with friends. The spidery white building that looks like it could be the lair of a James Bond villain is an entertainment complex called Taiwan, apparently for being a sort of island in the park, housing restaurants, a swish terrace café, bowling alleys and a casino. The main attraction however is the fountain in front of Taiwan which in the evening fascinates hundreds of young and old onlookers with its light show.

Zoo (Kopshti Zoologjik Tiranë) Grand Park. Visiting Tirana's zoo is a fairly depressing experience. Most inmates are kept in a small block of cells, where the animals appear to be reasonably well fed and cared for, but the pens are small and featureless. The bedraggled golden eagles - supposedly the proud symbol of Albania - barely have enough space to perch, and on our last visit we saw adults climb over the perimeter fence to throw stones at the lion. A little further into the park along the pond there are lamas and a concrete bear enclosure. Walk under the bridge at the western end of the Grand Park dam, to find the entrance. ▶ Open 08:00 - 18:30. Admission 100/50 lek.

Points of interest

Central Market (Pazari i ri) E-5, Sheshi Avni Rustemi. Small fruit and vegetable stalls can be found across the city, but the daily *pazari i ri* ('new market') truly captures the spirit of the country in a messy explosion of colour, people, fresh produce and trash. Apart from fruit, vegetables, fish and meat, the stalls display a dozen varieties of olives, cheeses, wines and raki throughout small squares and snaking alleyways. Animal rights activists won't like the sight of bunches of live chickens slung over bicycle handlebars, but at least these chicks didn't grow up in Guantanamo poultry farms. Early morning is the best time of day to witness Balkan-style trading and haggling.

Martyrs' Cemetery (Varrezat e Dëshmorëve) Rr. Elbasanit. This cemetery holds the remains of 900 partisans who fought for Tirana in WWII. The 12m-high dynamic white statue of Mother Albania, inaugurated in 1972, watches over the graves in a windswept gown. Enver Hoxha used to be buried at her feet until he fell from grace in 1991. From the heights of the cemetery, Tirana and Mt. Dajti are spread out panoramically before you. A short drive on the bus to Sauk. ▶ Open 08:00 - 17:00.

Communist sights

Just over 15 years ago, all Albania was a living Stalinist theme park. Since then, most of the 'attractions' have disappeared, but a few relics are still left over. During the communist era, the *bllok* (block) area was completely cordoned off by armed guards. This was the residential area of Party leaders. The collection of villas here, impressive enough by Western standards, absolutely dazzled the average Albanian once this area was opened to the public. The three-storey modular home on the corner of Rr. Ibrahim Rugova and Rr. Ismail Qemali was dictator Enver Hoxha's villa, which is now a government residence. After Hoxha's death, the Enver Hoxha Memorial (the pyramid) was built in his honour. A massive gilded statue of Hoxha was erected on Skanderbeg Square - you can still see the raised pedestal. It was dramatically toppled by demonstrators in 1991, ending Hoxha's longstanding cult of personality. After the regime collapsed, not even Hoxha's remains could evade the judgement of history. Originally buried with honours in the Martyrs' Cemetery, Hoxha was dug up in 1992 and unceremoniously fled away in Kombinati Cemetery in west Tirana.

A statue of Lenin once stood on Bulevardi Dëshmorët e Kombit, in front of the Art Gallery. Across the street stood a bust of Joseph Stalin - probably the last place in Europe besides Georgia where he was thus honoured. Uncle Joe's head was carted away before the fall of the regime at the end of 1990, but this symbolical de-Stalinisation came too late to save the leaders.

Behind the Ministry of the Interior on Bulevardi Dëshmorët e Kombit stood the headquarters of the *Sigurimi* (state security police). The feared organisation ran labour camps for political prisoners and maintained a network of informers (known as '80 lek men', for the monthly bonus they supposedly got for snitching on their countrymen). The Postblloku/Checkpoint memorial can be seen on the corner of Rr. Ismail Qemali.

The Arts Gallery has Socialist Realist statues and paintings that are worth a look, but walk around the back to find some of Tirana's last Commie statues huddled behind the building. There's a few workers and soldiers there, but most impressive are the huge statues of Lenin and a very rare one of Stalin.

The best place to get more information about Albania's totalitarian years is the National History Museum which has a large hall dedicated to the period.



Bagged Communists at the Art Gallery - Sco

Statues & Monuments

Fan Noli Statue E-5, Sheshi Fan Noli. This 3-metre-tall, roughly hewn statue commemorates Fan Noli (1882-1965), one of Albania's most revered historical figures. Educated at Harvard, Noli was a writer and Orthodox bishop. He served as prime minister in 1924. In his spare time he translated Shakespeare and Cervantes into Albanian.

Mother Teresa Statue I-5, Sheshi Nënë Tereza. A modest statue of Skopje-born but ethnic Albanian Nënë Tereza or Mother Teresa stands in the southeast corner of the square named after her.

Postblloku (Checkpoint) H-4, Blv. Dëshmorët e Kombit. The impressive new "memorial to Communist isolation", on the corner of Rr. Ismail Qemali, consists of three concrete symbols of suppression. The small bunker, one of thousands built in Albania to repel invaders and control the population, stand by the location of the main entrance to the *blloku*, the segregated residential district where Enver Hoxha and senior communist officials lived. Behind that are several concrete supports from the mine at the notorious Spaç labour camp, where thousands of political prisoners suffered between 1968 and 1990. Finally there's a segment of the Berlin Wall, donated by the city of Berlin. Albania is only slowly coming to terms with the horrors of its Communist dictatorship, and some say this memorial is 20 years late.

Unknown Partisan Statue F-5, Rr. Presidenti George W. Bush. Fist upraised, fighting mad, charging forward with a rifle in his hand - yes, it's none other than the Unknown Partisan. This statue was erected to honor the many Albanian partisans who gave their lives fighting the fascists. Those guys hanging out around the monument in the morning are not WWII buffs but day labourers waiting for work, with their powerdrills and tools on display.

Pyramid (Piramida) G-5, Rr. Ibrahim Rugova. The pyramid, as it's popularly known, opened in 1988 as a museum dedicated to the Albanian dictator-cum-pharaoh Enver Hoxha. Designed by Hoxha's daughter Pranvera, the building was reportedly the most expensive ever erected in Albania. After the regime collapsed, the place became a conference center and location of a club (called *The Mummy*, of course). Now semi-derelict, the government wants to demolish it to make place for new parliament buildings, though there's a healthy heated debate about the destruction of the past and preservation of the park going on. In front of the building, the Peace Bell installation was made in 1999 as a memorial to peace by the children of Shkodra. The bell's metal comes from thousands of bullet cartridges, fired off during the lawless 1990s.

Skanderbeg Square (Sheshi Skënderbej) E-4. Tirana's main square, Sheshi Skënderbej, is a vast traffic circle where you've got to dodge cars careening around the central lawn. The square was large even before World War II, but the Communists made it absolutely massive (and in the process, cleared away an old bazaar). Started in 1958, the pompous Palace of Culture was built with Soviet assistance. But when Albanian-Soviet relations deteriorated, the chief Soviet engineer on the project

gathered up all the blueprints and left the country. Chinese experts had to be called in to finish the job. Today this building contains the Opera and the National Library.

The mosaic on the facade of the National History Museum represents the flow of Albanian history. The Puppet Theater has a surprising past: before World War II, it housed King Zog's puppet parliament. Other sights here include the imposing red-brick National Bank, the Et'hem Bey Mosque and Skanderbeg's statue.

As part of a complete makeover of Tirana's city centre, the square was recently reconstructed, with the construction of some 80m-high buildings optimistically planned for the western edge to accentuate the core of the city.

Tregu i Çamëve F-3, Rruga Shyqyri Berxolli. This long alley is the main clothing and miscellaneous items market in Tirana, lined with stalls that are packed with cheap Chinese knock-offs, socks, underwear, sports goods and plastic toys. Branching off from here, Rruga Camera is the market street for mobile phones, kitchenware and bikes. ▶ Open 08:00 - 18:00. Closed Sun.

Around Tirana

No trip to Tirana is complete without a trip out of Tirana. When you've had enough of dust, mud and traffic, get out and see some of the impressive landscapes in the surrounding area.

Kruja Kruja, 47 km north of Tirana, is touted as a good daytrip from the capital, not only for sightseeing but also for souvenir-hunting. However, if you've already been to Berat and Gjirokastrë, you may be disappointed with the humble nature of this town.

The most important sight in Kruja is the semi-ruined **citadel** area (Kalaja e Krujës), a fortress dating back to the fifth or sixth century and perched dramatically on a rocky outcrop. Only by the end of the 12th century was the citadel completed. It weathered many sieges, the most famous being the Ottoman campaigns repulsed by the Albanian warrior Skanderbeg and his men. Kruja thus became a symbol of national resistance - not until 1478 (after Skanderbeg's death) did the Ottomans succeed in capturing the citadel. One of the few original structures remaining is the clock tower, which was an observation and signalling post.



Mine supports from the Spaç labour camp - JvM

To the left of the citadel's main entrance is the **Gjergj Skanderbeg Museum** (tel.+355 5 11 22 25, open May-Sept 08:00-13:00, 16:00-19:00, closed Mon; Oct-Apr 09:00-13:00, 15:00-19:00, Mon 09:00-16:00, admission 200 lek), built to honour the man otherwise known as Skanderbeg, and a shrine for Albanians though less interesting for foreigners. The museum was built with a fake medieval façade in 1982 and houses copies of Skanderbeg's sword and spiky helmet (the originals are in Vienna), paintings and exhibits (mostly replicas) presenting Skanderbeg's struggle against the Ottomans.

Nearby is the excellent small **Ethnographic Museum** (same times as the Skanderbeg Museum, admission 300 lek) which displays the beautiful interior of a traditional Albanian house around 1800. Exhibits include 19th-century folk dress, as well as traditional copper goods and clay utensils. The friendly caretaker will take you on a whirlwind English-language tour of the rooms.

Though usually skipped by most visitors, the small streets immediately below the Ethnographic Museum are Kruja's best; narrow and winding past high courtyard walls like they did 500 years ago. Wander around and you'll come across the old citadel **hamam** (bathhouse, now converted to a church) and the lovely **Dollma teqe**, a Bektashi temple building with impressive decorations.

Just outside the citadel is the old **bazaar**; one street of quaint shops with windows full of antiques, silver filigree jewellery, folk costumes, woven rugs and traditional felt hats. Bargain hard, they're used to quoting high prices. When you're done shopping and sightseeing, head for the **restaurants** at the top end of the citadel, which offer great views of the surroundings and serve Albanian food. Turkish coffee comes in a traditional copper pot and is best enjoyed curled up on the rows of pillows that surround the Turkish tables of some restaurants. The **Panorama Hotel** (tel. +355 511 230 92, www.hotelpanoramakruje.com, singles €30, doubles €40-50) is a good place to stay; the surprisingly modern rooms have balconies with great views.

Getting to Kruja: A taxi will cost around 3,000 lek (negotiate this beforehand). Buses cost 100-150 lek. As Kruja is just 30 minutes from the airport, it can easily be visited in the morning for some last minute shopping before you catch your flight. If you're **driving**, follow the Shkodra road from Tirana, turn right into Fushe Kruje (spot the George W. Bush statue) and stay on the main road twisting up through the forest and Kruja town, until you see signs for *Kalaja* (fortress).

Pëllumbas Cave (Shpella e Pëllumbasit) Tel. +355 68 360 78 43, www.shpellaepellumbasit.com. For a delightful trip away from the city, visit the cave in Pëllumbas for some fresh air, beautiful rural landscapes, an invigorating walk, a swim in the river and some ancient history. From Pëllumbas village it's a two-kilometre guided walk along a well-prepared path along the Erzen river canyon to the cave entrance, where hardhats are provided - bring a torch. Known as the *Shpella e Zeze* (Black Cave), it's 360 metres deep, up to 45 metres high and features some great stalactites. It was inhabited in prehistoric times, first by bears who left a scattering of bones, and later by humans who dropped all manner of tools in the neolithic, bronze and iron ages. Pëllumbas village is 27km east of Tirana along the road to Elbasan; turn left at the 'Ujvara Resort' sign and drive up into the village, turning left at the 'Pëllumbas' sign. Ask around for local guide Behar Duqi (or call the number above in advance), who takes visitors to and into the cave. Buses to Pëllumbas depart from Rruga Elbasan at 05:15 and 07:15, returning at 18:00. **Outdoor Albania** (see *Travel agents*) does regular daytrips (€30/25) to the area which include transport, guiding and a traditional meal (their association was instrumental in opening up this cave for visitors). ▶ Admission 100 lek.

Dajti Ekspres cable car



Dajti Ekspres Cable Car (Teleferik) Linza, tel. +355 4 237 91 11, marketing@dajtiekspres.com, www.dajtiekspres.com. Whisking you up to 1230m above sea level in under 15 minutes, the Austrian-built Dajti

Express cable car on the outskirts of Tirana is a fun ride. Swooping over pastures, a lake and steep rocks, the 4km route offers great views of the mountain and the city, ending at the edge of Dajti picnic field near the top of the mountain. There you can hike in the lush forests, visit the Ballkoni Dajtit restaurant, the Belvedere Hotel viewing platform, or take one of the shuttle vans to the other hillside restaurants. A taxi from the city centre to the lower station should cost 600 lek. A free shuttle bus service is available from the terminus of the Porcelan bus line; or take the Linza bus to its terminus and walk uphill another 5 minutes. If you're driving, follow Rruga Hoxha Taksim east and follow the signs. ▶ Open 09:00 - 21:00. Closed Mon. Return tickets 700 lek, children under 6 free.

Petrela Castle (Kalaja e Petrelës) Petrelë, Tiranë, tel. +355 69 208 8138. One of Albania's best-preserved castles, Petrela sits picturesquely on a steep slope overlooking a river, 15km southeast of Tirana, along the road to Elbasan. On a clear day you can see all the way to Kruja. Emperor Justinian fortified this place to defend the settlement of Dyrachium (now Durrës). The tower in the centre dates back to 500 AD; surrounding it are walls from the Byzantine period, laid out in a triangle, with round towers at the corners. The castle was used during Skanderbeg's war against the Turks; his sister Mamica lived here and defended the castle, but it was eventually captured and used by Turkish soldiers. ▶ Open 11:00 - 23:00. Admission free.

Mount Dajti (Mali i Dajtit). Throughout your stay in Tirana, the glowing, dark-hued face of Mount Dajti will be tempting you with the promise of fresh air. It's easy to scale the mountain, either by taking the Dajti Ekspres cable car, or by driving up to the national park, rewards include fantastic vistas, lovely forests and several good restaurants. Going by road, take Rruga Dibrës, which eventually snakes around the contours of the mountain. 15km or so up the road is the gate to the park (small fee payable). There is little information available about the park and although it is a wonderful location for walking there are no organised trails or paths. The park extends to the summit from this point, consisting for the most part of deciduous and evergreen forest. Approximately 3km from the park entrance is a small turning to the left. 500m down a rough dirt track is **Fshati Turistik Paradise** (17km from Tirana, tel. +355 223 63 93). Perched overlooking the valley, this is a collection of utilitarian wooden huts with two beds and a shower each. At the centre of the establishment is a good rustic restaurant hosted with hearty good humour by your host Sulejman. About one kilometre further up the road is the **Gurra e Perrisë** fish restaurant, and 200 metres further lies the **Panorama** hotel and restaurant complex. The road continues to ascend past a couple more establishments until it comes to a large grassy plateau beside the top station of the Dajti Express cable car which is the traditional destination for school-parties and weekend locals. Note that the top of the mountain is a military area and is home to radio, TV and NATO masts.



Mangalemi and the castle – JvM

The stunning 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 a two-hour drive via Durrës, slightly longer using one of the two dozen buses per day. You could hurry through on a daytrip, but you'd be a fool not to spend a night to experience this unique Unesco-listed city slowly. After all, the very best thing to do in town is joining the daily *xhiro* evening stroll along Boulevard Republika.

Where to stay

Berat Backpackers Hostel Rr. Nikolla Buhuri 295, Gorica, tel. +355 69 306 44 29, www.beratbackpackers.com. The hostel in a historic house above the Orthodox church in the old Gorica district is the best budget sleep in town. The cosy rooms have good views over the city, and there's a movie room, cellar bar and a wonderful shady garden. Bring earplugs if you require absolute silence at night. The hostel organises walks and hikes too. Cross the footbridge, head up the stairs to the upper street, turn right and walk for a while. ▶ 8 rooms (dorm beds €10-12; singles €12-14, 5 doubles €24-28, camping €7). 📞 🍷

Berati Hotel Rr. Veli Zalosnjaja, Mangalemi, tel. +355 32 23 69 53. A modern hotel built in traditional Berat style, in a quiet alley off the main street. Affordable rooms and a decent restaurant with pizza and other Albanian specialities. ▶ 9 rooms (7 doubles, 2 quads). 📞 🍷

Castle Park Berat-Permet road, km 1.5, tel. +355 67 200 66 23, www.castle-park.com. Out of town, along the road leading up from the Gorica district, the hotel restaurant indeed resembles a castle. Accommodation is in basic chalets. The hotel organises tours and activities such as river rafting, hiking and horse riding. ▶ 8 rooms (singles €20-25, doubles €35-40). 📞 🍷

Cici Pandeli Guesthouse Rrugica Mbrica, Kalaja, tel. +355 32 23 20 54. Cheap and basic rooms with a shared bathroom, on the first floor of a family home in the castle. Signposted behind the Onufri museum. ▶ 2 rooms (singles €8, doubles €16).

Lorenc Guesthouse Rr. Stilian Bandilli, Gorica, tel. +355 69 633 72 54. The Pushi family welcome travellers from across the world to their medieval home, the oldest mansion in Gorica, belonging to the Minister of Justice in the 1930s, and home to the partisan martyr Margarita Tutulani. The basic rooms come with magnificent 350-year-old wooden tavan ceilings. There's a lovely terraced garden with bar out back. ▶ 4 rooms (dorm beds €12, double €24, camping €6). 📞 🍷

Mangalemi Hotel (Tomi's) Rr. Mihal Komneno, Mangalemi, tel. +355 68 232 32 38, www.mangalemihotel.com. The Mio family has done a fantastic job converting Ahmet Kurt Pasha's grand home into one of Albania's most welcoming hotels. The rooms in the old mansion are large and dark, with little roofs over the bathrooms. In the newer wing there are several modern rooms, some with balcony. Great restaurant, too. Along the road leading up to the castle. ▶ 20 rooms (singles €25-30, doubles €35-40). 📞 🍷

Rezidenca Desaret Hotel Rr. Dr. Lluka, Mangalemi, tel. +355 32 23 75 93, www.desaret.com. Simple but comfortable rooms in a modern, traditional-style building. Get a room with a balcony facing the front for great views over Mangalemi and the castle hill. Go up the street opposite the Mangalemi Hotel and turn right. ▶ 5 rooms (singles €25, 2 doubles €35, 3 triples €45). 📞 🍷

Where to eat

Mangalemi Restaurant (Tomi's) Rr. Mihal Komneno, Mangalemi, tel. +355 68 232 32 38, www.mangalemihotel.com. The best place for a memorable Albanian meal. Tomi has been cooking for foreign visitors for two decades, and the large plates of traditional food served on the wonderful terrace never disappoints. ▶ Open 11:30-16:00, 18:30-22:00. \$. 📞 🍷

Onufri Berat Citadel, tel. +355 32 306 61. A cheerful traditional Albanian restaurant in the citadel, overlooking the main gate. All dishes are priced 250 lek and are huge, so share around. ▶ Open 07:30 - 23:00. \$.

Shpetimi 2 Bul. Republika, tel. +355 32 23 31 60. A small fast food restaurant on the main *xhiro* street, selling delicious pizza by the metre, waffles and ice cream. ▶ Open 07:00 - 23:00. 📞 🍷

Shtëpia e Bardhë Rr. Antipatrea, Mangalemi, tel. +355 32 23 45 70. The large white house overlooking the river has a large dining room on the first floor, with good pizza and Albanian food. ▶ Open 09:00 - 23:00. \$.

Bektashi pilgrimage

For one week in late August each year, the Muslim Bektashi sect in Albania embark on a pilgrimage to Mount Tomorri. Bektashis from all over the world come to commemorate Abbas ibn Ali, who died at the battle of Karbala. Expect thousands of pilgrims up on the mountain, visiting the to the Bektashi tekke for prayers and a mass picnic.

Never Enver

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

What to see

Berat Castle

Berat's highlight is the inhabited medieval citadel or castle (Kalaja; admission 100 lek), reached on a very steep and slippery road from the lower town. Don't attempt to walk up on a warm day or you'll be exhausted before you get started, but get a taxi to drop you off; if you're driving, drive up Rrugja Muzak Topia, next to the Luani petrol station on the traffic circle at the entrance of town. After viewing the massive **main gate**, visit the amazing **Onufri Museum** and then walk past several medieval Orthodox chapels (with restored frescoes and icons, but usually closed) to the western walls. 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 Mangalemi and Gorica.

Onufri Museum Rrugica Mbrica, Kalaja, tel. +355 69 269 41 06. The wonderful medieval Church of the Dormition of St Mary with its ornate wooden icon screen is reason enough to enter - and then there's the fabulous collection of Albanian Orthodox icons, many painted by local artist master Onufri. The ticket office sells books and postcards. Call ahead to confirm Anila is present for an English-language tour of the museum at no extra cost. ▶ Open 09:00-13:00, 16:00-19:00, Sun 09:00-14:00; Sept-Apr 09:00-16:00, Sun 09:00-14:00. Admission 200 lek.



The Red Mosque with Mount Tomorri – JvM

Mangalemi & Gorica

Berat's two densely packed lower town districts - Mangalemi at the foot of the citadel hill, Gorica across the river - are characterised 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 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 Rr. Toi Bojaxhiu, Mangalemi.

Halfway down the road from the castle to the lower town, the magnificent 17th-century Llvada mansion houses a quirky regional ethnographic collection. Guides take visitors on a quick English-language tour of the house and the artefacts displayed inside, after which you can sit on the huge shaded verandah and pretend you're a pasha. ▶ Open May-Sept 09:00-13:00, 16:00-19:00, Sun 09:00-14:00, Mon closed; Oct-Apr 09:00-16:00, Sun 09:00-14:00, Mon closed. Admission 200 lek.

Around Berat

Çobo Winery Ura Vajgurore, tel. +355 67 407 05 62, www.cobowineryonline.com. The Çobo family's vineyards, 12.5km from Berat along the main road, 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 Kashmir, or the exclusive Reserve 2007 - or a raki with nuts; prices are 600-3000 lek. Groups can call ahead to arrange a wine-tasting session with tasty regional snacks.

Tours & Activities

The Berat Backpackers Hostel organises two excellent **tours**. The 5-hour Communist Hiking Tour (€10), takes in old bunkers, tunnels and industrial areas; the all-day Waterfall Tour (€10) heads into the countryside an hour from town, with a picnic by an amazing waterfall. 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 organised between February and June, river levels permitting, by ARG (tel. +355 67 200 66 21, www.alrafting.org) and Outdoor Albania (tel. +355 4 222 71 21, www.outdooralbania.com) and cost about €50 including transport from Berat.

Berati Tours Albania Tel. +355 69 523 26 08, www.berati-tours.com. This German-Albanian travel agent is the expert to turn to for travel in Berat and surroundings, as well as the rest of Albania. Their Berat Discovery Weekend package includes lodging, meals, and tours of the city and a nearby gorge.

Codex Beratinus

Of the seven invaluable and ancient 'purple codex' gospel books found in Europe, two are from Berat, dating back to the sixth and ninth centuries. The handwritten "Beratinus 1" is among the four oldest New Testament archetypes, while "Beratinus 2" contains Gospel manuscripts from the standard text period. The originals are kept in a Unesco-sponsored vault at Tirana's National Archive, but copies (made by the Chinese when they restored the books in the 1970s) are available to researchers, and these are important for ancient biblical research.

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

Airport

A taxi to the airport costs about €20. The official yellow cabs of **Airport Express Taxi** (ATE, tel. +355 4 222 21 22, +355 66 208 01 91, www.atex.al) charge 2500 lek, 20% more between 21:00-07:00. A trip to the airport usually takes 30 minutes. Dropping off passengers is free, parking costs 150 lek for the first hour, 720 for a day, 3,000 lek for a week.

The **Rinas Express airport bus** (tel. 069 209 89 08, 069 205 40 02) departs every hour between 07:00 and 19:00 from beside the National Museum on Skenderbeg Square; tickets cost 250 lek and the trip takes 30-45 minutes. Buses from the airport to the centre depart every hour between 06:00 and 18:00.

Tirana International Airport (TIA) Tirana International Airport, Rinas, tel. +355 4 238 16 00/+355 69 206 66 26 (lost and found), fax +355 4 238 15 45, info@tirana-airport.com, www.tirana-airport.com.

Tirana's new and efficient airport is officially named *Nënë Tereza* or Mother Teresa airport, but is also known as Rinas. It's 17km northwest of town along a new access road. Facilities include free wifi and an Adrion press shop (open 03:00-21:00) selling newspapers, books, Albania T-shirts, *In Your Pocket* city guides, and the *Albania Business Guide* and *Book of Lists* investor handbooks. Vodafone and Eagle both have shops selling SIM and recharge cards. There's a tourist information desk in the arrivals area only. The small departures area has fashion, jewellery and duty-free shops (www.albaniadutyfree.com, tel. +355 42 38 19 48, open 07:00-23:00), and a small Adrion press shop. Smoking is banned in the terminal, except for a small room in the departures area.



The Skenderbeu Museum in Kruja - JvM

Taxis

Taxis are a useful form of transport in Tirana, and after 22:00, they're the only game in town. Several companies use meters and can print receipts; our experience so far is that drivers do not have to be reminded to use them. Rates start at 300 lek for the first 2km (sufficient for most city centre trips) and 95 lek/km after that (count on paying 500-700 lek for a ride to the outskirts). Between 22:00 and 07:00 the flagfall is 350 lek. Few drivers speak English, so it's a good idea to write down the address, or to call someone who can explain.

ATEX (Airport Express Taxi) Tel. +355 4 222 21 22/+355 67 200 88 73, www.atex.al. Taxis to/from the airport for 2,500 lek, or 3,000 lek between 21:00-07:00. Online booking possible.
Radio Taxi Tel. +355 4 224 44 44/+355 68 224 44 44, taxikorrekt@hotmail.com.
Speed Taxi Tel. +355 4 222 25 55/+355 69 642 22 11, www.speedtaxi.al.
Tirana Taxi Tel. +355 68 212 55 75/+355 68 605 55 31.

Airlines

Adria Airways (JP) G-5, Rr. Ibrahim Rugova 102, tel. +355 4 227 26 66/+355 69 407 66 14, adria@adriaalbania.com, www.adria.si. Flights to Ljubljana. ▶ Open 09:00 - 18:00. Closed Sun.

Alitalia (AZ) H-5, Blv. Dëshmorët e Kombit, Rogner Europapark Hotel, tel. +355 4 223 00 23, reservation@all-fly-one.com, www.alitalia.it. Flights to Rome. ▶ Open 09:00 - 18:00, Sat 09:00 - 14:00. Closed Sun.

Austrian Airlines (OS) H-5, Blv. Dëshmorët e Kombit, Rogner Hotel Tirana, tel. +355 4 223 50 29, tirana.office@austrian.com, www.austrian.com/al. Flights to Vienna. ▶ Open 09:00 - 15:00. Closed Sat, Sun.

Belle Air (LZ) Bulevardi Zogu I, N°1 Qendra Tregtare Tirana, tel. +355 4 224 01 75, reservation@flybelleair.com, www.belleair.al. Budget flights to Pristina in Kosovo, various Italian cities and summer destinations in Turkey and Egypt. ▶ Open 08:00 - 17:00, Sat 08:00 - 13:00. Closed Sun.

British Airways (BA) www.ba.com. Flights to London Gatwick.

Germanwings (4U) Tel. +44 871 702 99 74, www.germanwings.com. Summertime flights to Cologne, from June-Sept. ▶ Open 06:11 - 23:00.

Jetairfly (TB), tel. +32 70 22 00 00, www.jetairfly.com. Budget flights to Brussels between June-Oct.

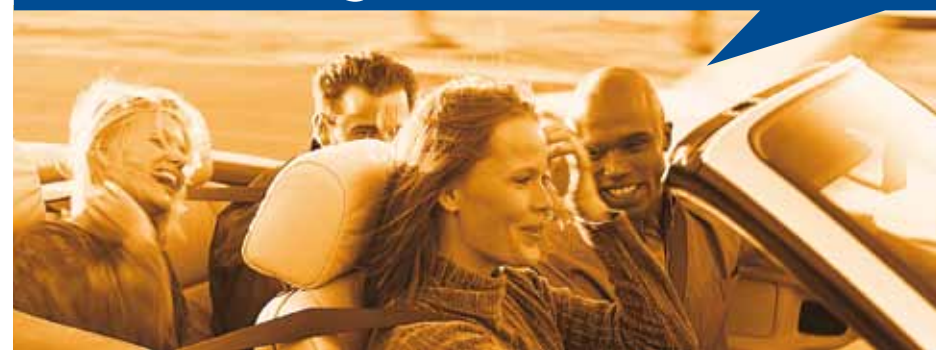
Lufthansa (LH) G-5, Blv. Dëshmorët e Kombit, Rogner Hotel Tirana, tel. +355 4 223 50 28, tirana.office@austrian.com, www.lufthansa.com. Flights to Munich. Also at the airport: tel. +355 4 238 19 26, open 09:00-17:00, Sat, Sun 10:00-15:00. ▶ Open 09:00 - 15:00. Closed Sat, Sun.

Olympic Airways (OA) D-4, Blv. Zog I, Veve Business Centre, tel. +355 4 222 89 60, www.olympic-airways.com. Flights to Athens. ▶ Open 08:30 - 17:00, Sat, Sun 09:00 - 13:00.

Turkish Airlines (TK) E-4, Sheshi Skenderbej, Tirana International Hotel, tel. +355 4 223 49 02, www.turkishairlines.com. Flights to Istanbul. ▶ Open 08:30 - 17:00, Sat 08:30 - 15:00. Closed Sun.

Turkish Airlines (TK) E-4, Sheshi Skenderbej, Tirana International Hotel, tel. +355 4 223 49 02, fax +355 4 222 89 61, www.turkishairlines.com. Flights to Istanbul. ▶ Open 08:30 - 17:00, Sat 08:30 - 15:00. Closed Sun.

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Car rental

Lack of parking space, signs and general discipline makes driving in Tirana adventurous, but despite the apparent chaos traffic doesn't really move very fast. When parking, beware of Tirana's effective tow-trucks. The only central parking garage can be found below the Vesa Center on Rruga Abdyl Frashëri. **Petrol** costs about 165 lek per litre, diesel 160 lek per litre. Renting a car costs from around €45 per day for the cheapest model. The agencies have desks at the airport, but these are often only manned on demand, so inform them in advance. Make sure you have the agency helpline number and a good map before setting off.

Avis H-5, Blv. Dëshmorët e Kombit, Rogner Hotel Tirana, tel. +355 4 223 50 11, avis@avis.al, www.avis.al. Avis operates a fleet of Opel and Chevrolet vehicles. Also at the airport. ▶ Open 08:30 - 19:00, Sun 08:30 - 16:00. Also at Hotel Sheraton (tel. 26 63 89/068 20 55 806, open 08:30 - 18:30, Sun 08:30 - 14:00) and the airport (tel. 068 20 55 807). ☑

Budget H-6, Rr. Elbasanit, Nd. 10, H.5, tel. +355445055 55/+355 67 203 42 67, reservation@budget.al, www.budget.com. ▶ Open 08:00 - 18:00, Sat 09:00 - 15:00. Closed Sun.

Europcar E-5, Rr. Durrësit 61, tel. +355 4 222 78 88/+355 68 209 39 08, anas@abissnet.al, www.europcar.com. ▶ Open 08:00 - 17:00.

Hertz E-4, Sheshi Skenderbej, Tirana International Hotel, tel. +355 4 226 25 11/+355 69 205 87 75, hertz@hertzalbania.com, www.hertz.com. ▶ Open 08:00 - 20:00, Sun 09:00 - 17:00. Also at the airport, open 07:00 - 22:00, Sat, Sun 08:00 - 16:00.

LRS Center Tiranë-Durrës highway, km 1.2, tel. +355 48 20 26 54, Irscenter@yahoo.co.uk. Land

Rovers for rent. ▶ Open 08:00 - 16:30, Sat 08:00 - 12:00. Closed Sun.

Lumani F-5, Blv. Dëshmorët e Kombit, Rogner Hotel Tirana, tel. +355 4 223 50 21/+355 68 409 58 75, office@lumani-enterprise.com, www.lumani-enterprise.com. ▶ Open 08:00 - 20:00. Closed Sun.

Noshi Rent a Car D/E-3, Rr. Durrësit 79, tel. +355 4 240 03 00/+355 69 402 20 00, reservations@noshi.al, www.noshi.al. Budget rental of Chevrolet, Opel, Hyundai and Mitsubishi cars. ▶ Open 08:00 - 20:00, Sat, Sun 09:00 - 17:00.

Sixt E-3, Rr. Kavajës 116, tel. +355 4 222 39 96/+355 68 206 85 00, sixtalbania@europe.com, www.sixt.com. Also at the airport (tel. +355 68 206 85 00). ▶ Open 08:00 - 18:00.

Tirana Car Rentals (TCR) I-4, Rr. Ibrahim Rugova 11/4, tel. +355 4 224 05 11/+355 69 205 10 72, info@tirana-car-rentals.com, www.tirana-car-rentals.com. Local car rental agency with offices in various cities. ▶ Open 08:00 - 19:00, Sat 08:00 - 16:00. Closed Sun.

Public transport

Tirana has a few bus lines, marked on the map printed in our guidebook. A ticket costs 30 lek per ride regardless of distance, to be paid to the conductor on board. Buses run every 6-15 minutes between 05:00 and 22:00. The days of dilapidated old state buses conking out in the middle of the road are over - Tirana has a fleet of modern and privately-run buses, liberally dipped in advertising.

Tirana On Your Mobile:
m.inyourpocket.com

Trains

Albanian Railways, *Hekurudha Shqiptare*, runs its slow, second hand Western trains to various destinations in the country, though there are no services beyond the borders. Great for train fans, but if you need comfort and speed, consider taking a bus instead. The short run to Durrës is perfectly bearable however, and the rails on this stretch may even get improved some time this decade.

Train station B-4, Blv. Zogu I, tel. +355 4 225 10 94, www.hsh.com.al. Tirana's train station is a basic metal and concrete shed at the northern end of the main boulevard. Tickets can only be bought just before departure. There's no left luggage office.

Long-distance buses

Despite the importance of bus travel in Albania, Tirana has no bus station and few scheduled departures, so it's all a bit of a Balkan mess. Bus transport is either in normal buses, increasingly comfortable and with air-conditioning, or in minivans called *furgons* which may be a bit cheaper and faster, but take risks in blind corners. Most bus departures are between early morning and early afternoon. Only the most popular cities also have connections in the late afternoon too, so it's best to set

Train schedule

From Tirana			To Tirana		
Dep.	Arr.	City	Dep.	Arr.	Price
06:00	06:58	DURRËS	06:15	07:15	70 lek
08:40	09:40	DURRËS	09:45	10:45	70 lek
14:30	15:28	DURRËS	13:00	14:00	70 lek
15:45	16:43	DURRËS	16:00	17:00	70 lek
20:00	21:00	DURRËS	18:00	19:00	70 lek
06:00	10:10	ELBASAN	06:40	10:45	190 lek
14:30	18:35	ELBASAN	12:52	17:00	190 lek
13:10	16:55	SHKODRA	05:45	09:28	145 lek
06:00	11:55	VLORA	05:00	10:45	250 lek

Check times and prices locally before travel.

off early.

International buses often depart from behind the National History Museum, where you'll also find most of the ticketing agencies. Buses to Durrës depart very regularly from beside the train station. Buses to Shkodra depart nearby, from Rruga Karl Gega.

Minibuses (*furgons*) depart as soon as they're full, starting from various places in town, sometimes trawling through the streets to find more passengers to cram in.

Furgon (minibus) schedule

Furgon (minibus) schedule

From Tirana	City	First-last bus + frequency, or times	Duration	Price	Departs from:
	BAJRAM CURRI	06:00 - 14:00, hourly	6 hrs	1000 lek	Zogu i Zi
	BERAT	06:30-19:00, twice hourly	2 hrs	500 lek	Nëshërak / 21 Dhjetori
	DURRËS	06:00-18:00, twice hourly	40 min	100 lek	Train station
	ELBASAN	07:00 - 20:00 twice hourly	1.5 hrs	300 lek	Rruga Elbasanit
	FIER	06:00-19:00, twice hourly	1.45 hrs	400 lek	Nëshërak / 21 Dhjetori
	GJIROKASTRA	05:00-18:30	6 hrs	800 lek	Nëshërak / 21 Dhjetori
	PESHKOPI	06:00-14:00	5 hrs	800 lek	Laprak, one traffic light beyond Zogu I Zi
	POGRADEC	08:00 - 19:00 hourly	3 hrs	600 lek	Qemal Stafa Stadium
	KORCA	07:00 - 19:00 hourly	4 hrs	800 lek	Qemal Stafa Stadium
	KRUJA	07:00, 10:00, 12:00, 15:00, 18:00	1 hr	150 lek	Rr. Dervish Hima
	PERMET	06:30, 14:00	4 hrs	500 lek	Nëshërak
	SARANDA	04:00, 05:15, 07:00, 08:30, 09:30, 16:00, 22:00	6 hrs	1200 lek	Nëshërak
	SHKODRA	05:00-20:00, hourly	2 hrs	400 lek	Train station / Zogu i Zi
	KUKES	06:00 - 16:00	2 hrs	8000 lek	Zogu i Zi
	VLORA	05:30-16:30, twice hourly	2.5 hrs	700 lek	Nëshërak / 21 Dhjetori

Approximate times and prices only, inform locally for more details. For Himare and the Riviera coast, change buses at Vlora.

International bus schedule

From Tirana			To Tirana				
Departure	Arrival	City	Dep.	Arr.	Company	From	Price (one way)
04:00	19:00	ATHENS	09:00	21:00	Albanian Interlines	Blv Zog I	€25
08:00	20:00	ATHENS	20:00	08:00	Albanian Interlines	Museum	€35
15:30	06:30	ATHENS	08:00	20:00	Albanian Interlines	Blv Zog I	€25
18:00	22:00	PEJA	06:00	10:00	Sondor	Museum	€20
18:00	23:00	PRISTINA	06:00	10:00	Monopol	Museum	€20
08:00	19:00	THESSALONIKI	19:00	08:00	Drita	Museum	€25
18:00	02:00	SKOPIE	18:00	05:00	Sondor	Museum	€20
21:00	05:00	TETOVO	21:00	05:00	Sondor	Museum	€20

Check all times and prices locally before travelling.

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See the timetable for approximate operating hours, prices and departure points. It's a good idea to ask around for the exact departure locations before travel. Furgons heading southeast for Elbasan, Pogradec and Korça will most likely depart from beside the Qemal Stafa stadium and trawl around on Rruga Elbasan. Those south to Berat, Vlora, Gjirokastra and Saranda depart from Nëshërak and Sheshi 21 Djetori, west of the centre. Those heading to the north (Shkodra, Kukës, etc) leave from Sheshi Zogu i Zi or from Laprak, one traffic light further along the Durrës highway. A very useful online furgon and bus schedule with departures from Tirana can be found at <http://www.matinic.us/albania/furgon.php>.

Albania Interlines D-4, Blv. Zogu I, tel. +355 4222 22 72/+355 67 405 37 02, albania.interlines@hotmail.com, www.albaniainterlines.com. Buses from Shkodra via Tirana to Athens. ▶ Open 09:00 - 21:00.

Drita Travel E-4, Rr. Ded Gjon Luli, tel. +355 4 225 76 63/+355 4 223 54 44, euordrita@yahoo.com, www.dritaonline.com. Buses to Budva, Pristina, Athens, Thessaloniki and more. ▶ Open 08:00 - 20:00.

Eurointerlines D-4, Blv. Zogu I, 39, tel. +355 4 225 18 66/+355 68 407 66 07, euointerlines2@hotmail.com, www.eurointerlines.com. Buses to Greece. ▶ Open 04:00 - 21:30.

Tirana Metropoli E-4, Blv. Zogu I, tel. +355 4 225 36 39/+355 69 348 02 05, tirana-metropol@live.com, www.tiranametropol.com. Daily buses to Pristina and Peja in Kosovo. ▶ Open 08:00 - 20:00.

Travel agents

Tirana's travel agents can arrange everything from plane tickets to hotel bookings, car rental and tours.

Cycling in Tirana

A few years ago in the Mercedes days, only fearless old men and complete fools cycled around Tirana. But with better asphalt and more traffic jams, locals are realising that two wheels get you around this flat city much quicker, and the number of bikes is on the rise. There are even a few token bike paths, though most pedestrians yet have to grasp the idea. Apart from the Ecovolis bike sharing scheme, the Tirana Backpacker Hostel also rents out bikes (mountain bikes, €15 per day). The Tirana Backpacker Hostel and Outdoor Albania also offer guided bike day trips to Mount Dajti.

Ecovolis Bikes Rr. Ibrahim Rugova (Rinia Park), tel. +355 67 204 91 64, www.ecovolism.com. Tirana's excellent Ecovolis bike sharing scheme is cheap and easy to use. The single-speed bikes are perfect for rolling around town. No complicated electronic systems here - just go to the nearest of the three bike stations, leave and ID card or driving license (or a photocopy) with the friendly English-speaking attendants, ask for a lock, and cycle off. The rental cost is an incredible 60 lek per hour, to be paid in cash at the end of the ride. Frequent bikers can buy an Ecovolis Card for 200 lek; then the rental cost is just 100 lek per day. You need to return the bike to the original rental station on the same day; the one in Rinia Park by the fountain is open longest. Also at Sheshi Skenderbeg and Grand Park. ▶ Open 08:00 - 21:00.



Ecovolis rental bikes - Sco

Albania Experience J-5, Rr. Papa Gjon Palli II, N°11/1, tel. +355 4 227 20 55/+355 67 405 58 07, alexperience@albaniaonline.net, www.albania-experience.al. Guided city tours, daytrips to Apollonia, Berat, Durrës, Kruja and other destinations, and plane tickets. AE can also book top-end Tirana hotels with good discounts. ▶ Open 08:30 - 19:00, Sat 08:30 - 16:00. Closed Sun. www.albania-experience.al

Albania Holidays Rr. Sami Frashëri 30, tel. +355 4 223 56 88, contact@albania-holidays.com, www.albania-holidays.com. Runs the www.albania-hotel.com hotel booking website. ▶ Open 08:00 - 18:00, Sat 08:00 - 16:00. Closed Sun.

Albtours H-4, Rr. Ibrahim Rugova, tel. +355 4 225 33 43, albtours@albaniaonline.net, www.albtoursd.al. Near the Sky Tower. ▶ Open 08:00 - 18:00. Closed Sun.

Gulliver OK D-4, Rr. Ismail Qemali 34/1, tel. +355 4 222 76 26/+355 67 203 44 04 (airport), info@gulliver-ok.com, www.gulliver-ok.com. Travel agent with offices in Tirana's city centre and airport; also runs an agency and the local tourism office in Korça. ▶ Open 09:00 - 20:00, Sat 09:00 - 18:00. Closed Sun.

Juicy Tours Tel. +355 67 322 58 71, hello@juicytours.com.au, www.juicytours.com.au. An Australian-run incoming travel agency offering a variety of group 'journeys', including Riviera Secrets, Riveting Roads and festivals.

Magic Tours D-4, Blv. Zogu I, 72, Veve Business Center, tel. +355 4 222 89 87/+355 69 203 28 90, info@magictours-al.com, www.magictours-al.com. ▶ Open 08:00 - 19:00. Closed Sun.

Outdoor Albania H-5/6, Rr. Sami Frashëri 14, Pallati Monopol, tel. +355 4 222 71 21, info@outdooralbania.com, www.outdooralbania.com. Outdoor Albania offers tailor-made private tours and activities in small groups, including trekking, mountain biking, rafting, river hiking, sea kayaking, mountaineering and tour skiing, as well as cultural tours. Daytrips in the mountains near Tirana too. In winter, activities are snowshoeing and hiking. ▶ Open 09:00 - 17:00. Closed Sat, Sun.

Sondor E-4, Rruga, tel. +355 4 222 50 63/+355 68 200 19 88, info@sondortravel.com, www.sondortravel.com. ▶ Open 09:00 - 16:00 ; 18:00-21:00. Closed Sun.

Post

Central Post Office F-4, Rr. Çameria, tel. +355 4 222 23 15, www.postashqiptare.al. ▶ Open 08:00 - 20:00. (08:00 - 13:00 for parcels).

Express mail

The safest, though not the cheapest, way to send valuable or urgent items.

Albanian Courier Tirana-Durrës highway, Salloni Mazda, tel. +355 4 235 79 76, info@albaniancourier.com, www.albaniancourier.com. ▶ Open 09:00 - 19:00, Sat 09:00 - 14:00. Closed Sun.

DHL E-4, Tirana-Durrës highway, km 8, tel. +355 4 240 66 66, dhlalbania@dhl.com, www.dhl.com. ▶ Open 08:00 - 18:00, Sat 08:00 - 12:00. Closed Sun.

EMS F-4, Rr. Reshit Çollaku 4 (post office), tel. +355 4 225 88 28, posta@postashqiptare.al, www.postashqiptare.al. ▶ Open 08:00 - 13:00.

FedEx F-6, Blv. Zogu i Parë, Veve Business Center, tel. +355 4 225 32 03/+355 4 223 50 56, ulysses-fedex@icc-al.org, www.fedex.com/al. ▶ Open 08:00 - 17:00, Sat 09:00 - 12:00. Closed Sun.

TNT E-4, Rr. Mine Peza 2, tel. +355 4 223 49 14, tntalbania@yahoo.com, www.tnt.com. ▶ Open 08:00 - 17:00. Closed Sun.

UPS H-4, Rr. Ismail Qemali 32/1, tel. +355 4 225 97 42, aloperations@unitrans.com.al, www.ups.com. ▶ Open 09:00 - 17:30, Sat 09:00 - 13:00. Closed Sun.

Emergency numbers: **Police 129, Fire 128**



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Rr. Mine Peza, N.2 - Tirana, Albania

Tel: +355 (0)4 22 59 742/ 4 22 56 344 - Mobile +355 66 20 82 698/ 67 20 48 904/ 68 20 48 904

E-mail: info@unitrans.com.al - Web: www.ups.com

Post rates

Postal rates, in lek

	<20g	Packages 0.5-1kg
Albania	40	75
Italy, Greece, Kosovo, Montenegro	50	1000
Europe	80	1300
Americas	120	2200
Other	90	1500

Express mail rates

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FedEx	25	32
TNT	37	44
UPS	37	52

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www.albaniancourier.al

Këto dhe shumë shërbime të tjera në të gjitha agjencitë:



Albanian telephone codes

Berat	32	Kuçova	33	Peshkopi	373
Durrës	52	Kukës	24	Pogradec	832
Elbasan	54	Laç	30	Saranda	85
Fier	34	Lezha	36	Shijak	571
Gjirokastra	84	Librazhdi	353	Shkodra	22
Kavaja	554	Lushnjë	35	Tepelena	814
Korça	82	Peqin	512	Tirana	4
Kruja	511	Përmet	813	Vlora	47

Country codes

Albania	355	Hungary	36	Romania	40
Australia	61	Ireland	353	Russia	7
Austria	43	Israel	972	Serbia	381
Belarus	375	Italy	39	Slovakia	421
Belgium	32	Japan	81	Slovenia	386
Bulgaria	359	Kosovo	381	Spain	34
Croatia	385	Latvia	371	Sweden	46
Czech Rep.	420	Lithuania	370	Switzerland	41
Denmark	45	Moldova	373	Turkey	90
Estonia	372	Montenegro	382	UK	44
Finland	358	Netherlands	31	Ukraine	380
France	33	Norway	47	USA	1
Germany	49	Poland	48		
Greece	30	Portugal	351		

Telephone calls

International calls

Dial the international access number (00), the country code, the area code and the subscriber's number. Call 124 for directory assistance.

National calls

For calls outside Tirana, dial 0, the city code and the subscriber's number. Call 14 for domestic directory assistance. **Local calls:** Tirana numbers have seven digits, all starting with a 2 or a 3.

Calling Albania from abroad

Dial the country code (355), then the city code (Tirana is 4) or the mobile phone number without the initial zero.

Mobile phones

Four providers are active in Albania. **AMC** numbers start with 068, **Eagle Mobile** numbers with 067, **Plus** with 066

and **Vodafone** numbers with 069. You can easily purchase pre-paid SIM cards for around 600 lek at the providers' shops; you'll need ID and a local address (which can be that of your hotel). Recharge cards are widely available across the country. National rates for pre-paid calls are between 30-55 lek per minute.

AMC (Albanian Mobile Communications) G/H-4, Rr. Ibrahim Rugova, Sky Tower, tel. +355 4 227 50 00, contact_us@amc.al, www.amc.al. ▶ Open 08:30 - 21:00.
Eagle Mobile H-4, Tirana-Durrës highway, km 7, tel. +355 4 229 01 00, info@eaglemobile.al, www.eagle-mobile.al. Also at Rr. Myslim Shyri 6 and at the airport,
Plus H-4, tel. +355 4 238 25 00, info@plus.al, www.plus.al. ▶ Open 09:00 - 21:00.
Vodafone H-4, Tirana-Durrës highway, tel. +355 4 228 30 72/+355 69 222 01 11, www.vodafone.al. Also at the airport. ▶ Open 08:30 - 21:00.

Internet cafés

Free wifi is increasingly common in city-centre cafés, restaurants and hotel lobbies such as the Rogner. It's also available free at the airport. In the internet cafés listed below, expect to pay 100-150 lek per hour for internet access (and plenty of noise from little boys playing Counterstrike).

Global I-4, Rr. Perlat Rexhepi 13, tel. +355 4 225 63 06. ▶ Open 09:00 - 02:00.

Net 1 I-4, Rr. Nikolla Tupe 1b. Good internet club with 24 computers. The club also offers a cinema where DVD movies are screened.

Top-Net H-4, Rr. Vaso Pasha, tel. +355 67 219 03 39. Basement internet café with helpful staff and a bar. ▶ Open 08:30 - 04:00.

Internet providers

ABCOM Rr. Ibrahim Rugova, Green Park 2/5, tel. +355 4 450 01 39, info@abcom.al, www.abcom.al. Broadband internet, data transmission, VPN, wifi, hosting, e-mail solutions, digital cable TV and telephony services.

Abissnet Rr. Ismail Qemali, tel. + 355 4 430 00 01, support@abissnet.al, www.abissnet.al.

Ada Net Rr. Dervish Hima 1, tel. +355 4 560 06 24, support@adanet.com.al, www.adanet.com.al. ▶ Open 09:00 - 22:00, Sat 09:00 - 21:00, Sun 10:00 - 13:00.

Albania Online Rr. Donika Kastrioti 4, tel. +355 4 225 11 22, www.albaniaonline.net.

Primo Tirana-Durrës highway, km 1, tel. +355 4 440 01 23, sales@primo.al, www.primo.al.

Tring Tel. +355 4 480 00 00, www.tring.al.

The ladies love Tirana. You may be surprised, but the city is actually a great shopping destination. The city centre is small and you can easily walk everywhere, and without exception the staff is friendly and reasonably competent. Especially shoe shopping is good; they're cheap (around 30% less than in other European cities), most are of Italian quality, and there's great variety. For clothes the story is slightly different, as not all international brands are represented yet. Shopping is still best in the established areas such as in the *bllok* district and along Rruga Myslym Shyri where you'll find many boutiques; you're more likely to find bargains and groovy stuff there than in the malls.

Books

Tirana has a number of shops selling English literature, but the selection isn't great so bring fodder from abroad if you want to read something specific while you're here. Foreign magazines and newspapers can be found at the Adrion shop or at their stands in the Xheko Imperial and Sheraton hotel (at the Albanian Experience travel agency office). The Rogner hotel lobby bar has foreign newspapers available for reading.

Adrion International Books E-4, Sheshi Skënderbej, Palace of Culture, tel. +355 4 222 62 56, books@adrionltd.com, www.adrionltd.com. The best selection of books on Albania, guides, literature and chic lit in English. Lots of magazines as well. Also at the airport, in both the main and departures halls. ▶ Open 08:00 - 19:30.

Corona E-4, Sheshi Skenderbej, Tirana International Hotel, tel. +355 69 217 73 05. The hotel gift shop has a good selection of newspapers, magazines and books on Albania, and souvenirs too. ▶ Open 09:30 - 20:30. Closed Sun.

International Book Shop E-6, Rr. Hoxha Tahsim 1, Stephen Center. Books, newspapers and magazines, including some on religious themes. ▶ Open 08:00 - 20:00. Closed Sat.

Libraria Albania H-3, Rr. Sami Frashëri, tel. +355 4 227 17 49/+355 4 227 15 50, info@albaniabook.com, www.albaniabook.com. A local bookshop with a selection of English-language magazines and Albania-related books. ▶ Open 08:00 - 20:00.

Shtëpia e Librit D-4, Rr. Barrikadave, Galeria Nasional mall, tel. +355 4 450 32 62, admin@shtepiaelibr.it, www.shtepiaelibr.it. Tirana's newest book store, with a small but growing selection of English titles. On the first floor of the Galeria Nasional shopping centre. ▶ Open 09:00 - 21:00.

Electronics

iStream E-4, Sheshi Skënderbej 8 (Tirana International Hotel), tel. +355 4 450 40 31. Official Apple dealer, in the lobby of the Tirana International Hotel, and the people to come to for all Apple related enquiries in English. They also stock a good range of Apple products from iPhones to laptops and accessories.

Fashion

Benetton G-5, Blv. Bajram Curri, Galeria mall. Italian fashion for both sexes. ▶ Open 08:30 - 20:30, Sun 09:00 - 14:00.

Comptoir de Paris Sheshi Italia, Sheraton Mall, tel. +355 68 202 26 84. Expensive brand-name fashion for men, women and children.

Elisse G-3, Rr. Myslym Shyri, tel. +355 4 227 43 56. Elegant shoes. ▶ Open 09:00 - 21:00, Sun 09:00 - 14:00 16:00-21:00.



BOOKS, NEWSPAPERS MAGAZINES GIFTS AND SOUVENIRS

CORONA

Sheshi Skenderbej
Tirana International Hotel
Tel. +355 69 217 73 05

Estel E-3, Rr. Kavajës, tel. +355 68 20 34 473. Italian fashion for men and women. Near the corner with Rr. Kont Urani. ▶ Open 08:00 - 13:00, 16:00 - 20:00. Closed Sun.

Felu H-4, Rr. Pjetër Bogdani 32, tel. +355 68 401 04 00. Colourful, quality Italian 'junior footwear', as well as kids' clothing. ▶ Open 09:00 - 20:00.

Il Camino G-3, Rr. Myslym Shyri 64, tel. +355 4 224 27 85/+355 69 209 47 14, ilcammino@ilcammino.al, www.ilcammino.al. Shoe boutique. Also on Rr. Kavajës 20, Rr. Abdyl Frashëri 6 and in the Sky Tower.

Nino Vitali F/G-3, Rr. Myslym Shyri, tel. +355 4 227 44 70. ▶ Open 09:00-14:30, 18:00-21:30.

Pierre Cardin E-4, Rr. Ded Gjo Lull, pierrecardin.al. The latest PC fashion. ▶ Open 08:30 - 20:00. Closed Sun.

Vintage H/I-4, Rr. Nikola Tupulle 9. Quality second-hand brand clothing for women, including Chanel and Lacoste. ▶ Open 10:00 - 20:00. Closed Sun.

Flowers

Flower shop J-5, Sheshi Italia, Sheraton mall, tel. +355 68 206 05 68. Flowers and ceramics. ▶ Open 08:00 - 18:00. Closed Sun.

Garden Joy H-5/6, Rr. Elbasanit, tel. +355 4 237 41 46. The owner learned flower arranging in Greece and does it well. ▶ Open 09:00 - 21:00.

Kaktus I-4, Rr. Perlat Rexhepi, tel. +355 69 204 96 54. Imported flowers and luxury bouquets. ▶ Open 07:00 - 21:00.

Merkom E-3, Rr. Kavajës, tel. +355 4 225 47 70. Next to Samsung. Also delivers flowers. ▶ Open 08:00 - 20:30.

Natyra H-5/6, Rr. Elbasanit, tel. +355 4 223 06 16. Flowers from Greece arrive three times a week. Good for colourful, custom-made bouquets. ▶ Open 09:00 - 19:00.

Shopping centres

Much to the delight of locals and foreigners alike, Tirana has been enriched with several malls or smaller shopping galleries over the past years. The QTU centre along the Durrës highway was the first in 2005, and several city-centre and peripheral malls have followed.

Casa Italia Tirana-Durrës highway, tel. +355 48 86 05 12, info@casaitalia.al, www.casaitalia.al. A large complex with various mid-range shop outlets.

Citypark Albania Tirana-Durrës highway, km 8, tel. +355 4 237 64 24/+355 4 450 91 11, info@cityparkalbania.com, www.cityparkalbania.com. A large shopping centre with some 180 shops, a Mercator hypermarket, food court, a 550 square metre skating rink, and a Cartoonland. Just beyond the airport turn-off.

Coin H-5, Rr. Papa Gjon Palli II, ABA Business Center, tel. +355 4 450 17 37, www.coin.al. An Italian department store on the lower floors of the ABA building, with fashion (there's a popular OVS shop) and luxury home appliances. **Galeria Mall G-5, Blv. Bajram Curri, tel. +355 4 225 41 00, www.galeria-etc.com.** Housed in the European Trade Centre building behind the pyramid, the Galeria mall has 50 shops, bars and cafés in a pleasantly air-conditioned four-floor complex. There's a supermarket on the ground floor. ▶ Open 09:00 - 21:00.

Galeria Nasional D-4/5, Rruga e Barrikadave. A large covered passage in a new building that in true Albanian style looks like it was built in the 1970s. This bustling haven features a cavalcade of bars, cafés and ice-cream parlours as well as a small supermarket. Several establishments come with large televisions for fans of international football. **Kristal Center Rr. Frang Bardhi, tel. +355 4 480 10 28, info@kristalcenter.com, www.kristalcenter.com.** A modern shopping centre with a Conad supermarket and a cinema complex. Free shuttle bus from Sheshi Skenderbeg square. ▶ Open 09:00 - 21:00.

QTU (Qendra Tregtare Univers) Tirana-Durrës highway, km 6, tel. +355 4 238 01 03, office@acrem.al, www.qtu.al. The QTU shopping centre has a supermarket, electronics store, and a free shuttle bus from the National Museum. The tiny QTU City mall can be found on Rruga Abdyl Frashëri. ▶ Open Apr-Sept 09:00-22:00, Oct-Mar 09:00-21:00. [E]

Sheraton Plaza J-5, Sheshi Italia. The mall attached to the Sheraton hotel has a café, a food court, a good little supermarket and several upmarket shops.

Tirana East Gate (TEG) Tirane-Elbasan road, tel. +355 4 239 50 08, info@teg.al, www.teg.al. Albania's largest mall, 4km from the city centre along the main road to Elbasan. The dozens of shops and restaurants include a huge Carrefour hypermarket. Free shuttle buses depart from Sheshi Skenderbeg, opposite the clock tower, between 09:00 and 22:00.

Souvenirs & Gifts

The best souvenir shopping is north of Tirana in Kruja, where shop windows are full of jewelry, antiques and knickknacks. If you don't have time to make the trek there, check these shops in Tirana. There are also some kiosks selling Albania mugs, plastic guns, dolls and bunker ashtrays at the southern end of Rr. Barrikadave.

Albapost F-4, Rr. Reshit Çollaku, alpost@icc.al.eu.org. Philatelic shop of the Albanian postal service, selling recent commemoratives. ▶ Open 08:00 - 16:00. Closed Sat, Sun.

Aromë Indie G-3, Rr. Myslym Shyri 31, tel. +355 4 226 58 23. Oriental gifts and art, and colonial furniture. On the corner of Rruga Islam Alla.

Specialty shops

Balloon City I-3, Rr. Sulejman Delvina 1, tel. +355 69 332 91 45. Everything you need for a spontaneous party: balloons and confetti. ▶ Open 08:30 - 21:00, Sat 09:00 - 20:30. Closed Sun.

La Casa del Habano J-5, Sheshi Italia, Sheraton mall, tel. +355 68 416 63 37, www.kallmancaribe.com. The only place in the country to buy, and try, quality Habanos, Cohiba and Monte Cristo cigars. Deluxe smokers' accessories and a small whiskey bar too. ▶ Open 10:00 - 22:00.

Natyral & Organik H-4, Rr. Vaso Pasha 3, tel. +355 69 209 90 47, organik@icc-al.org. Organic olive oil, raki, wine, honey, and dried herbs. ▶ Open 09:00 - 21:00, Sat, Sun 09:00 - 14:00, 17:30-21:00.

Vini & Food J-5, Sheshi Italia, Sheraton mall, tel. +355 69 205 87 47. Quality Italian and Albanian wines. ▶ Open 09:30 - 21:30.

Art Forever G/H-4, Rr. Vaso Pasha 99, tel. +355 4 224 63 86. If you're looking for folk costumes, antique chests, wood carvings, or old books, check out this one-man show. Near the corner with Blv. Bajram Curri. ▶ Open 10:30 - 21:00. Closed Sun.

Crabtree & Evelyn I-4, Rr. Ibrahim Rugova, tel. +355 68 202 18 58, www.crabtree-evelyn.co.uk. Luxury soaps and perfumes. ▶ Open 09:00 - 21:00.

Five Senses I-4, Rr. Ibrahim Rugova 30, tel. +355 4 223 53 53. A home interior shop with imported pottery, vases and glassware. In the alley next to the Da Shang Hai restaurant. ▶ Open 10:00 - 20:30. Closed Sun.

Le Futur H-4, Rr. Vaso Pasha, God 4/1, tel. +355 4 223 27 68/+355 66 409 64 12, www.lefutur.al. Dozens of crazy novelty gifts, between 300-4,000 lek. Everything from desktop rocket launch installations to wallets made from South African licence plates. ▶ Open 09:00 - 22:00, Sun 10:00 - 21:00.

Lleshi E-3, Rr. Durrësit, tel. +355 4 226 30 30. Albanian folk costumes, handknit vests, men's felt hats, dolls in folk dress, rugs with national motifs. Near Rr. Asim Vokshi. ▶ Open 08:00 - 14:00, 16:00 - 20:00. Closed Sun.

Pirro Souvenirs I-4, Rr. Abdyl Frashëri, tel. +355 4 222 55 87. A good selection of handicrafts and souvenirs; Albanian flags, key rings, T-shirts, and must-have mugs depicting Enver Hoxha, King Zog and Mother Teresa among others. Also on Rr. e Durrësit. ▶ Open 09:00 - 21:00.

Prodhime Bakri & Filigrani G/H-4, Rr. Ibrahim Rugova, Sky Tower, tel. +355 69 209 10 07. The usual tacky selection of fridge magnets and a few antiques and bric-a-brac from the Soviet period. Also near the Stephen Center Café. ▶ Open 09:00 - 18:00. Closed Sun.

Rrelli-Erebara E-4, Rr. Ded Gjo Luli, tel. +355 4 222 12 82. Traditional folk costumes from all over Albania, as well as wood, bronze and silver souvenirs, pottery, ceramic wares and antiques. ▶ Open 08:00 - 21:00, Sun 08:00 - 14:00.

Supermarkets

Conad G-5, Blv. Bajram Curri, Galeria mall, tel. +355 4 227 01 74/+355 69 409 60 48, cedi.tirana@conadadriatico.it, www.conad.it. A supermarket chain that (incredibly) ships everything from Italy - even the fruit and veg. There's a decent selection meats and cheeses. Also at (I-3) Rr. A.Z. Çajupi. ▶ Open 09:00 - 22:00.

Kedi J-5, Sheshi Italia, Sheraton Plaza mall. A convenient, small supermarket inside the Sheraton mall.

From foreign representations to high-finance, from dentists to American libraries: the *Tirana In Your Pocket* directory is your one stop shop for names and numbers. Offices usually work from 08:00-16:00 and are closed on weekends, with government employees often going home on Friday after lunch.

Advertising & PR

Iceberg Communications I-4, Rr. Perlat Rexhepi, Pall. Edil Al-It, Zyra Nr. 1, tel. +355 4 226 76 81, office@icebergcommunication.com, www.icebergcommunication.com. Publicity, PR and events. ▶ Open 09:00 - 17:00, Sat 09:00 - 13:00. Closed Sun.

Ogilvy H-4, Rr. Abdyl Frashëri, EGT Tower, Pall 11/1, Kati 3, tel. +355 4 224 75 33, ogilvy.albania@ogilvy.com, www.ogilvyalbania.com. ▶ Open 09:00 - 18:00. Closed Sat, Sun.

Banks

Alpha Credit Bank Rr. e Kavajës, G-Kam Center, Pall.14 katësh, tel. +355 4 227 85 00, marketing.albania@alpha.gr, www.alphabank.al. ▶ Open 09:00 - 15:00. Closed Sat, Sun.

BKT (Banka Kombëtare Tregtare) Bul. Zhan D'Ark, tel. +355 4 225 09 55, tsan@bkt.com.al, www.bkt.com.al. ▶ Open 08:30 - 15:30. Closed Sat, Sun.

Credit Agricole Rr. e Kavajës 59, 1001, Tirana Tower, tel. +355 4 225 87 55, www.credit-agricole.al. ▶ Open 08:15 - 15:15. Closed Sat, Sun.

Credins Rr. Ismail Qemali 21, tel. +355 4 223 40 96, info@bankacredins.com, www.bankacredins.com. ▶ Open 08:30 - 16:00, Sat 09:00 - 13:00. Closed Sun.

International Commercial Bank Rr. Murat Toptani, Qendra Eurokol, Kati 7, tel. +355 4 225 43 72/2256254, info@icbank-albania.com, www.icbank-albania.com. ▶ Open 08:00 - 15:30. Closed Sat, Sun.

Intesa Sanpaolo Bank Rr. Ismail Qemali 27, tel. +355 4 227 60 00, info@intesasanpaolobank.al, www.intesasanpaolobank.al. ▶ Open 08:30 - 15:30. Closed Sat, Sun.

National Bank of Greece S.A Rr. Dritan Hoxha, Nd. 8, H.1, Nj.B 11, 1026, tel. +355 4 228 00 00, nbgalbania@exmail.nbg.gr, www.nbgbank.al. ▶ Open 08:00 - 15:00. Closed Sat, Sun.

ProCredit Bank I-3, Rr. Dritan Hoxha, Laprakë, tel. +355 4 238 93 00/+355 4 224 07 77, info@procreditbank.com.al, www.procreditbank.com.al. At the southern end of the street. ▶ Open 08:00 - 17:00. Closed Sat, Sun. On Saturday big branches are open, 8:00 -13:00, others from 08:00 -12:00

Raiffeisen Bank Rr. Kavajës 44, tel. +355 4 238 13 81, info@raiffeisen.al, www.raiffeisen.al. ▶ Open 08:30 - 15:30, Sat 09:00 - 12:30. Closed Sun.

Société Générale Albania Bld. Dëshmorët e Kombit, Twin Towers, Kulla 1, Kati 9, tel. +355 4 228 04 42/+355 4 228 04 43, bp.info@socgen.com, www.societe-generale.al. ▶ Open 08:00 - 15:00, Sat 08:00 - 13:00. Closed Sun.

Tirana Bank Rr. Ibrahim Rugova, tel. +355 4 226 96 17/8/+355 4 227 77 00, info@tiranabank.al, www.tiranabank.al. ▶ Open 08:00 - 15:00. Closed Sat, Sun.

Union Bank Bld. Zogu I, tel. +355 4 225 06 53, info@unionbank.al, www.unionbank.al. ▶ Open 08:00 - 16:30, Sat 08:00 - 13:00. Closed Sun.

Business services

National Registration Centre (Qendra Kombëtare e Regjistrimit) Rr. Ismail Qemali, tel. +355 4 225 00 66, info@qkr.gov.al, www.qkr.gov.al. The NRC is the one-stop-shop for business registrations in Albania. ▶ Open 08:30 - 14:00, Fri 08:30 - 13:30. Closed Sat, Sun.

prodent
KLINIKE DENTARE

Rr. Abdyl Frashëri
Pall. Hekla Kati 3
Tel. +355 4 227 01 25
+355 69 202 85 96
+355 68 402 08 18

Computers

Computer & Copier System (CCS) I-3, Rr. Sulejman Delvina Nr. 8, 1019, tel. +355 4 225 90 04/5, info@ccs-albania.com, www.ccs-albania.al. Sells PCs, copy machines, software and hardware. ▶ Open 08:30 - 17:00, Fri 08:30 - 16:00, Sat 08:30 - 13:00. Closed Sun.

InfoSoft Group (Gjergji Centre) F-5, Rr. Murat Toptani, Gjergji Centre, tel. +355 4 225 11 80, info@infosoftgroup.com.al, www.infosoftgroup.com.al. Hardware, software, service provider. ▶ Open 08:00 - 20:00, Sat 08:00 - 13:00. Closed Sun.

Dentists

In Albanian, 'dental clinic' is 'klinikë dentare'. Easy. Now floss.

Ledismile Dental Clinic Rr. Irfan Tomini, pall. Alfa, Shk. 1, Ap. 1, tel. +355 4 232 07 72/+355 69 406 60 00, ledismile@yahoo.com, www.ledismile.com. ▶ Open 09:00 - 19:00. Closed Sun.

Ortholux Rr. Themistokli Gërmenji (mbrapa RTSH), tel. +355 4 225 15 47/+355 69 578 52 27, info@klinikorthoal.com, ortholux.com. Orthodontic services

Prodent F-1, Rr. Abdyl Frashëri, Pall. Hekla, Kati 3, tel. +355 4 227 01 25/+355 68 402 08 18, arkonda@yahoo.com. ▶ Open 08:30 - 14:00, 16:00 - 20:00, Sat 08:00 - 13:00. Closed Sun.

Tirana Centre G-3, Rr. Bardhok Biba, Pallati i Kadarese, k.2, tel. +355 4 225 74 46/+355 4 223 15 64, info@cosmeticdent-al.com, www.cosmeticdent-al.com. Near Albanian Telecom. ▶ Open 09:00 - 19:00, Sat 09:00 - 12:00. Closed Sun.

Cheers, Albania

Many Americans of a certain age know Albania from the popular TV-series Cheers. In one scene (easy to find on Youtube), "Coach" Ernie Pantusso and Ted Danson sing about Albania, to the tune of "When the Saints Go Marching In":

Albania! Albania!

You border on the Adriatic!

*Your land is mostly is moun-tain-ous
and your chief export is chrome!*

UFO Clinic F-2, Rr. Kavajës, Pallati 3, Shk 7, tel. +355 4 224 00 28. Who wouldn't like their dental work done by Martians? Behind the Central Bank building. ▶ Open 08:00 - 18:00, Sat 08:00 - 12:00. Closed Sun.

Dry cleaners

Fast Clean D-4, Rr. Komuna e Parisit, tel. +355 4 223 74 14. ▶ Open 07:00 - 22:00.

Pastrim Kimik I-3, Rr. Sami Frashëri, tel. +355 4 223 29 76. Fast service, good prices. Below the ProCredit Bank. ▶ Open 07:00 - 21:00, Sun 07:00 - 15:00.

Pastrim Kimik & Levanteri I-5, Rr. Faik Konika, tel. +355 68 200 27 54. Washing and dry cleaning services, near the Venecia café. ▶ Open 08:00 - 20:00, Sun 09:30 - 14:00.

Embassies

Many of Tirana's embassies and consulates can be found along Rruga Skënderbej, and in the area just east of the stadium. It's highly advisable to phone in advance to check the opening times or to make an appointment. The opening times listed here refer to the working hours of the visa/visitor departments.

Austria E/F-2, Rr. Frederik Shiroka 3, tel. +355 4 227 48 55, tirana-ob@bmeia.gv.at, www.bmeia.gv.at. ▶ Open 10:00 - 12:00. Closed Sat, Sun.



24-hour banking – Sco

Bulgaria E-2, Rr. Skënderbej 12, tel. +355 4 223 31 55, bgemb-alb@afb.net.al, www.mfa.bg. ▶ Open 08:30 - 15:00. Closed Tue, Thu, Sat, Sun.

China E-2, Rr. Skënderbej 57, tel. +355 4 223 23 85, chinaemb_al@mfa.gov.cn, al.chineseembassy.org.al. ▶ Open 08:30 - 16:30. Closed Sun.

Croatia F-5, Rr. Abdi Topani, Torre Drin centre, tel. +355 4 222 83 90/+355 4 225 69 48, croemb.tirana@mvpel.hr, www.mvpel.hr. ▶ Open 08:30 - 16:30. Closed Sat, Sun.

Czech Republic E-2, Rr. Skënderbej 10, tel. +355 4 223 40 04/+355 4 223 21 17, tirana@embassy.mzv.cz, www.mzv.cz/tirana. ▶ Open 09:00 - 16:00. Closed Sat, Sun.

Denmark H/I-4, Rr. Nikolla Tupe 1, Kati 4, Ap. 4, tel. +355 4 228 06 00, tiaamb@um.dk, www.ambtirana.um.dk. ▶ Open 09:00 - 12:00. Closed Sat, Sun.

Egypt E-2, Rr. Skënderbej 1, tel. +355 4 223 30 22/+355 4 224 79 86, egyemb@albaniaonline.net, www.mfa.gov.eg. ▶ Open 09:00 - 16:00. Closed Sat, Sun.

France E-2, Rr. Skënderbej 14, tel. +355 4 223 42 50, ambafrance.tr@adanet.com.al, www.ambafrance-al.org. ▶ Open 09:00-13:00, 14:30-17:00. Closed Sat, Sun.

Germany E-2, Rr. Skënderbej 8, tel. +355 4 227 45 05/+355 4 227 45 06, info@tira.diplo.de, www.tirana.diplo.de. ▶ Open 08:00 - 17:00. Closed Sat, Sun.

Greece E/F-2, Rr. Frederik Shiroka 3, tel. +355 4 227 46 44, gremb.tir@mfa.gr, www.mfa.gr/tirana. Consulates in Gjirokastra and Korça. ▶ Open 08:30 - 16:00. Closed Sat, Sun.

Holy See (Vatican) D-4, Rr. Durrësit 13, tel. +355 4 223 35 16, nunapal@icc-al.org. ▶ Open 09:00 - 13:00. Closed Sat, Sun.

Hungary E-2, Rr. Skënderbej 16, tel. +355 4 223 22 38/+355 4 223 49 03, mission.tia@kum.hu, www.mfa.gov.hu/emb/tirana. ▶ Open 08:00 - 16:30. Closed Sat, Sun.

Iran H-5, Rr. Mustafa Matohiti 20, tel. +355 4 222 76 98/+355 4 225 50 38, ambiran@icc.al.eu.org, tirana.mfa.gov.ir. ▶ Open 08:00 - 16:30. Closed Sat, Sun.

Italy H-5, Rr. Gjon Pali II, 2, tel. +355 4 227 59 00, segreteriambasciata.tirana@esteri.it, www.ambtirana.esteri.it. Consulates in Vlora and Shkodra. ▶ Open 08:00 - 18:00. Closed Sat, Sun.

Kosovo G-4, Rr. Donika Kastrioti 6, tel. +355 4 226 16 50, embassy.albania@rks-gov.net, www.ambasada-ks.net/al.

Macedonia F-2, Rr. Kavajës 116, tel. +355 4 223 09 09, tirana@mfa.gov.mk, www.mfa.gov.mk. ▶ Open 08:30 - 16:30. Closed Sat, Sun.

Montenegro G-5, Rr. Jul Varibova 11, tel. +355 4 226 13 09, albania@mfa.gov.me. ▶ Open 09:00 - 17:00. Closed Sat, Sun.

Netherlands H-5, Rr. Asim Zenelli 10, tel. +355 4 224 08 28/+355 4 224 08 26, tir@minbuza.nl, www.mfa.nl/tir. ▶ Open 08:00 - 17:00. Closed Sat, Sun.

Poland D-2, Rr. Durrësit 123, tel. +355 4 223 41 90, polemb@albaniaonline.net. ▶ Open 08.15 - 16.15. Closed Sat, Sun.

Romania H-5, Rr. Themistokli Gërmenji 1, tel. +355 4 225 60 71, roemb@adanet.com.al, www.mae.ro. ▶ Open 08:00 - 16:00. Closed Sat, Sun.

Russia H-5, Rr. Donika Kastrioti 2, tel. +355 4 225 60 40, rusemb@albmali.com, www.albania.mid.ru. ▶ Open Mon, Wed, Fri 08:00-12:00.

Saudi Arabia D-3, Rr. Kavajës 116, tel. +355 4 224 83 06, embasaudarab@albaniaonline.net, www.mofa.gov.sa. ▶ Open 09:00 - 15:00, Fri 09:00 - 13:00. Closed Sat, Sun.

Serbia H-4, Rr. Donika Kastrioti 9/1, tel. +355 4 223 20 91, ambatira@icc-al.org, www.tirana.mfa.gov.rs. ▶ Open 10:00 - 12:00. Closed Sat, Sun.

Slovenia I-4, Rr. Abdyl Frashëri 11/1, EGT Tower, tel. +355 4 227 48 58, vti@gov.si. ▶ Open 08:30 - 16:30. Closed Sat, Sun.

Spain D-2, Rr. Skënderbej 43, tel. +355 4 227 49 61, emb.tirana@maec.es, www.maec.es. ▶ Open 09:30 - 14:00, 16:00-19:00. Closed Sat, Sun.

Sweden H-6, Rr. Pjetër Budi 56, tel. +355 4 238 06 50, ambassaden.tirana@foreign.ministry.se, www.swedenabroad.com/tirana. ▶ Open 10:00 - 12:00. Closed Mon, Wed, Fri, Sat, Sun.

Switzerland H-6, Rr. Elbasanit 81, tel. +355 4 223 48 88, tir.vertretung@eda.admin.ch, www.eda.admin.ch/tirana. ▶ Open 09:00 - 11:00. Closed Sat, Sun.

Turkey I-6, Rr. Elbasanit 65, tel. +355 4 238 03 50, turkemb@atnet.al, www.tirana.be.mfa.gov.tr. ▶ Open 09:00 - 15:00. Closed Sat, Sun.

United Kingdom E-2, Rr. Skënderbej 12, tel. +355 4 223 49 73, enquiries.tirana@fco.gov.uk, www.ukinalbania.fco.gov.uk. ▶ Open 09:00 - 11:30. Closed Sat, Sun.

United States I-6, Rr. Elbasanit 103, tel. +355 4 224 72 85, http://tirana.usembassy.gov. Visits by appointment only. ▶ Open 14:00 - 16:00. Closed Sat, Sun.

Fitness centres

The Sheraton and Rogner Hotel Tirana hotels also have fitness centres.

Rock Tirana Climbing Gym Rr. Ali Visha 8, tel. +355 69 608 49 14, www.rocktirana.com. A bouldering gym, for climbers. Equipment sale and climbing trips too. ▶ Open 16:00 - 22:00, Sun 12:00 - 20:00.

Tirana Fitness Centre I-5, Sheshi Italia, Sheraton Hotel, tel. +355 4 227 47 07. Workout room, sauna, and massage by appointment. ▶ Open 24hrs.

Tirana Yoga Joel Spa, Rr e Elbasanit, perballe Art-house, siper Honey Pub, tel. +355 69 522 95 41, yogatirana@gmail.com, www.tiranayoga.wordpress.com.

Top Technogym K-4, Rr. Ibrahim Rugova, Vila Park, tel. +355 4 225 65 68, top_technogym@yahoo.com. A quality fitness centre below the Vila Park hotel inside the Grand Park. There's a variety of machines, two trainers, a sauna and Jacuzzi. Best of all, the staff can fix up fresh fruit juice for clients and passers-by. ▶ Open 24hrs. Admission 900 lek per day.

Triangle Martial Arts Rr. Elbasan, tel. +355 67 284 05 19, akademia.triangle@gmail.com. Martial arts training. Next to Lion Park, off Rr. Elbasan. ▶ Open 10:00 - 13:00, 15:00-21:30. Closed Sun.

Chambers of Commerce

American Chamber of Commerce H-4, Rr. Ibrahim Rugova 11/3, Sky Tower, tel. +355 4 225 97 79, info@amcham.com.al, www.amcham.com.al. ▶ Open 8.30 - 17:00. Closed Sat, Sun.

British Chamber of Commerce & Industry Blv. Petro Nini Luarasi 58, tel. +355 4 234 10 20/+355 69 202 40 01, info@abcci.com, www.abcci.com. ▶ Open 08:00 - 18:00. Closed Sat, Sun.

Tirana Chamber of Commerce & Industry E-3, Bul. Dëshmorët e Kombit, Twin Towers, tel. +355 4 223 02 84, info@cci.al, www.cci.al. ▶ Open 08:00 - 16:00. Closed Sat, Sun.



Creative wiring solutions - JvM

Joyel Spa Rr. e Elbasanit, tel. +355 4 234 79 79, info@joyelspa.com, www.joyelspa.com. Beautiful spa offering massages, body and facial treatments, physiotherapy, yoga and more. Opposite the Calvin club. ▶ Open 09:00 - 21:00. Closed Mon.

Krehëri i artë i Edlirës G-6, Rr. Petro Nini Luarasi, Nd.61 H4, tel. +355 4 223 39 50, ehasula@yahoo.com. Women's hairdresser. ▶ Open 08:00 - 21:00.

Nobis Wellness Center Rr. Sami Frashëri (Kompleksi TID), tel. +355 4 243 10 33, www.nobis.al. A well-equipped wellness centre with a covered pool, spa, fitness and beauty treatments. The all-day fee includes and hour in the spa (needs to be booked), pool and fitness, with towels and slippers. ▶ Open 06:00 - 23:30, Sat, Sun 06:00 - 20:00. Admission €20, Sat/Sun €25.

Sallon Sharm Rr. Bardhyl 20, Unazë, tel. +355 68 606 87 77, www.sharm-sallon.com. A hairdresser with a difference - profits go to a charity improving the lives of prisoners. Haircuts (men Monday only), make-up, facials, manicures and more. On the ringroad near the eastern end of Rruga Qemal Stafa. Call ahead. ▶ Open 10:00 - 19:00. Closed Mon, Sun.

Velur Spa G-3, Rr. Sami Frashëri, Metropol Center, tel. +355 4 222 25 50, velur.spa@gmail.com. A smart 'Spa & Relax' centre on the lower floor of the Metropol building, opposite *Friends*. There's a *hamam* (Turkish bath) and ladies can undergo massage, hydrotherapy, waxing, facials, manicure/pedicure, and skin treatments with Thai mud, herbs and even chocolate. ▶ Open 09:00 - 22:00, Sun 14:00 - 22:00.

Wang Yan Massage (Dragoi i Zjarrtë) I-3, Rr. Perlat Rexhepi, tel. +355 4 241 58 70, dragoizjarre@hotmail.com. Various kinds of massage (therapeutic, foot, keep-fit) from 2,500 lek per hour, as well as acupuncture and herb treatments. In a second-floor apartment; look for the 'Chinese massage' sign. ▶ Open 09:00 - 21:00.

Hospitals & Clinics

Clinics do not usually take patients outside office hours. For emergencies, go to the American Hospital or to the Civilian Hospital (northeast of the centre on Rr. Dibrës).

ABC Clinic D-5, Rr. Qemal Stafa, Nr 260, tel. +355 4 223 41 05/+355 68 260 04 05, healthcenter@abchealth.org, www.abchealth.org. Christian, English-speaking clinic. ▶ Open 09:00 - 13:00, Tue, Thu 09:00 - 17:00. Closed Sat, Sun.

American Hospital (Spitali Amerikan) Pranë Spitallit Ushtrarak, Laprakë, tel. +355 4 235 75 35, www.spitaliamerikan.com. A modern hospital along the Durrës highway, with international staff.

Bethany Social Services Tirana Clinic Rr. Muhamet Gjollësja, tel. +355 4 223 92 97, bcs@icc-al.org, www.bethany.org/albania.

Hygeia Hospital Tirana-Durrës highway, km1, Fushë Mëzë, tel. +355 4 239 00 00/+355 4 232 30 00 (emergencies), info@hygeia.al, www.hygeia.al. Albania's first large private hospital, opened in 2010.

Klinika Irma Rr. Dora D'Istria, Pall. Triss, tel. +355 4 224 30 00/+355 4 224 28 80, klinikairma@gmail.com. A large private multi-speciality clinic near the Grand Park. Doctors speak English, French and Italian. ▶ Open 09:00 - 18:00, Sat 09:00 - 12:00. Closed Sun.

Kompleksi Spitalor Universitar Zoja e Keshillit te Mire Rr. e Duresit, tel. +355 4 227 32 90.

Luigi Monti Clinic E-3, Rr. Kavajës 120, tel. +355 4 222 39 06, poliambulanca@fzkm.org, www.unizkm.al. Part of the Catholic Diagnostic Center. ▶ Open 08:00 - 14:00, 16:00-19:00. Closed Sun.

Governmental organisations

Albania's governmental organisations. Note that these often do not work on Friday afternoon.

AIDA (Albanian Investment Development Agency) Blv. Gjergj Fishta, Pall. Shallvare Tirane, tel. +355 4 225 10 01, info@aida.gov.al, www.aida.gov.al. **Albanian Development Fund Rr. Sami Frashëri 10, tel. +355 4 223 55 97/+355 4 223 55 98, adf@albanianandf.org, www.albanianandf.org.**

Institute of Statistics (INSTAT) Blv. Zhan D'Ark 3, tel. +355 4 222 24 11/+355 4 223 33 56, inuria@in-stat.gov.al, www.instat.gov.al. Publishes a yearly report called *Albania in Figures (Shqipëria në Shifra)*.

KESH Rr. Vasil Shanto, tel. +355 4 225 97 29, www.kesh.com.al. National electricity corporation.

Hair, Beauty & Wellness

Ardi Hair Fashion H-3, Rr. Vaso Pasha 7, tel. +355 4 227 09 67, ardlan.borova@yahoo.com. Professional ladies and gents salon with ammonia-free hair colouring. Also in the QTU mall (open 09:00-21:00, tel. +355 4 238 01 74). ▶ Open 08:30 - 19:30. Closed Sun.

Da Shanghai Health Centre I-4, Rr. Perlat Rexhepi 16/6, tel. +355 4 222 49 27/+355 69 247 62 71. Chinese doctors perform therapeutic foot (45 mins 1500 lek) and body (60 mins 3,000 lek) massages, acupuncture and herbal baths (15 mins 500 lek). ▶ Open 09:00 - 13:00, 15:30-21:30. Closed Sun.

Genci C-5, Rr. Elbasanit, Pall 2, Shk 9, Ap 70, tel. +355 4 227 23 13/+355 68 206 16 00. Men's hairdresser. ▶ Open 11:00 - 20:00. Closed Sun.



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Phone.: +355 4 23 90 900, Emergency.: +355 4 23 23 000, Fax.: +355 4 23 88 996
E.: info@hygeia.al, www.hygeia.al

Marie Stopes Clinic Rr. Tefta Tashko Koço 10, tel. +355 4 224 10 18, mstopes@icc-al.org, www.mariestopesalbania.com. Family planning clinic providing safe, comprehensive reproductive healthcare and education in a country where contraception and abortion were illegal until 1991. ▶ Open 08:00 - 18:00, Sat 08:00 - 12:00. Closed Sun.

Orthodox Clinic Rr. Dibrës 159, tel. +355 4 236 09 25/+355 4 238 22 10, klinikaorthodhokse@yahoo.com. ▶ Open 08:00 - 20:00, Sat 08:00 - 13:00. Closed Sun.

Qendra Spitalore Universitare Nene Tereza Rr. e Dibrës 372, tel. +355 4 236 36 44, drspit@sanx.net.

Insurance companies

Insig Rr. e Dibrës, Nr. 91, tel. +355 4 225 68 12/+355 4 223 41 70, marrja@insig.com.al, www.insig.com.al. ▶ Open 08:00 - 20:00.

InterAlbanian I-3, Rr. Sulejman Delvina, Zayed Business Center, tel. +355 4 222 95 78/+355 4 225 51 71, kontakt@interalbanian.com, www.interalbanian.com. ▶ Open 08:30 - 17:00, Sat 08:30 - 12:00. Closed Sun.

Sigal Uniqa Group Austria Blv. Zog I, No. 1, tel. +355 4 223 33 08/+355 4 225 34 07, info@sigal.com.al, www.sigal.com.al. ▶ Open 08:00 - 20:00, Sat 09:00 - 14:00. Closed Sun.

Sigma Rr. Komuna Parisit, Pallatet Lura k.2, POB 1714, tel. +355 4 225 82 54, info@sigma-al.com, www.sigma-al.com.

International organisations

Albania's non-governmental and international organisations.

EBRD (European Bank for Reconstruction and Development) Rr. Abdi Toptani, Torre Drini, tel. +355 4 223 28 98, alickola@ebrd.com, www.ebrd.com. ▶ Open 09:00 - 18:00. Closed Sat, Sun.

Ekolëvizja Qendra e Grupimit Ekolëvizja Tiranë, Komuna e Parisit, pranë Universitetit të New Yorkut, tel. +355 4 223 48 51, ekolevizja@yahoo.com, www.ekolevizja.org. A network of ecology groups across Albania. ▶ Open 08:30 - 16:00. Closed Sat, Sun.



Beads – Sco

European Union Delegation Rr. Papa Gjon Pall II, ABA Business Center, tel. +355 4 222 83 20, delegation-albania@ec.europa.eu, www.delalb.ec.europa.eu.

GTZ (German Projects Office) Rr. Skënderbeg 21/1, tel. +355 4 223 04 14, gtz-albanien@gtz.de, www.gtz.de.

IMF (International Monetary Fund) Bul. Dëshmorët e Kombit, Twin Tower 1, Suite 5-4, tel. +355 4 228 04 00, rr-alb@imf.org, www.imf.org/tirana. ▶ Open 09:00 - 17:30. Closed Sat, Sun.

IOM (International Office for Migration) H-4, Rr. Brigada VIII, Vila nr 3, tel. +355 4 227 16 29, iomtirana@iom.int, www.iom.int/albania. ▶ Open 08:30 - 17:00. Closed Sat, Sun.

OSCE (Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe) Sheshi Italia, Sheraton Hotel, tel. +355 4 223 59 96, pm-al@osce.org, www.osce.org/albania.

SNV (Dutch Projects Office) Rr. Ibrahim Rugova, tel. +355 4 225 58 00, balkans@snvworld.org, www.snvworld.org.

Soros Foundation (NOSA) Rr. Qemal Stafa 120/1, tel. +355 4 223 46 21/+355 4 223 42 23, info@osfa.soros.al, www.soros.al. ▶ Open 09:00 - 17:00. Closed Sat, Sun.

Transparency International Bul. Gjergj Fishta, tel. +355 4 226 74 57, info@tia.al, www.tia.al.

UNDP (United Nations Development Program) Rr. Papa Gjon Pall II (ABA Business Center), tel. +355 4 240 07 21, info@un.org.al, www.undp.org.al.

UNFPA (United Nations Fund for Population) Rr. Donika Kastrioti 1/1, tel. +355 4 225 78 38, registry@unfpa.org.al, www.unfpa.org.

UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) Rr. Donika Kastrioti 4, tel. +355 4 225 01 06, berber@unhcr.org, www.unhcr.org.

UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund) Rr. Skënderbej, Godina Volkswagen, Kati 3, tel. +355 4 227 33 35, tirana@unicef.org, www.unicef.org. ▶ Open 8:30 - 17:00. Closed Sat, Sun.

USAID (United States Aid) Rr. Elbasanit 103, tel. +355 4 224 72 85, www.usaid.gov.

WHO (World Health Organisation) Rr. Themistokil Gërmenji, Pall. 10, tel. +355 4 2236 44 84, office@who-albania.org, www.un.org.al.

International schools

Albanian International School Rr. Elbasanit 24, tel. +355 694 74 68 56, info@alb-int.org, www.alb-int.org.

Ecole Viktor Hygo Rr. Tre Vellezërit Kondi, tel. +355 4 237 17 25/+355 69 20 61 677, info@ecole-vhugo.com, www.ecole-vhugo.com. ▶ Open 08:00 - 16:00.

Memorial International School Ish shkolla e Partise, rruga Dritan Hoxha, Nr.1, tel. +355 4 223 73 79, info@mistedu.net, www.mistedu.com.

Tirana International School (TIS) Rr. Vilat Gjermane, Kutia Postare 15 27, tel. +355 4 236 52 39, tirana@qsi.org, www.qsiweb.org/alb.

World Academy of Tirana Rr. Bilal Golemi 17/2, tel. +355 4 244 40 14/+355 4 244 43 36, www.worldacademyoftirana.com. International elementary school for children up to 11. Montessori and International Baccalaureate programmes.

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Ministries

Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Consumer Protection Sheshi Skënderbej 2, tel. +355 4 222 65 51, info@mbumk.gov.al, www.mbumk.gov.al.

Ministry of Defence Blv. Dëshmorët e Kombit 1, tel. +355 4 222 66 01, kontakt@mod.gov.al, www.mod.gov.al.

Ministry of Economy, Commerce and Energy Blv. Dëshmorët e Kombit 2, tel. +355 4 222 76 17, kabinet@mete.gov.al, www.mete.gov.al.

Ministry of Education and Science Rr. Durrësit 23, tel. +355 4 222 63 07, mashadmin@mash.gov.al, www.mash.gov.al.

Ministry of Environment Rr. Durrësit 27, tel. +355 4 227 06 30, mpazaj@moe.gov.al, www.moe.gov.al.

Ministry of Finance Blv. Dëshmorët e Kombit 4, tel. +355 4 222 79 37, generalsecretary@minfin.gov.al, www.minfin.gov.al.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs Blv. Gjergj Fishta 6, tel. +355 4 236 40 90, info@mfa.gov.al, www.mfa.gov.al.

Ministry of Health Blv. Bajram Curri 1, tel. +355 4 236 46 84, kabinet@moh.gov.al, www.moh.gov.al.

Ministry of Integration I-5, Rr. Gjon Pali II, nr. 3, tel. +355 4 222 86 45, elda.kalaja@mie.gov.al, www.mie.gov.al.

Ministry of Interior Affairs Sheshi Skënderbej 3, tel. +355 4 224 71 55, ministria.brendshme@moi.gov.al, www.moi.gov.al.

Ministry of Justice Blv. Zogu I, tel. +355 4 225 93 88, ministri@justice.gov.al, www.justice.gov.al.

Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities Rr. Kavajës 53, tel. +355 4 225 10 08, kontakt@mpcs.gov.al, www.mpcs.gov.al.

Ministry of Public Works, Transport and Telecommunication Sheshi Skënderbej 5, tel. +355 4 238 08 33, jeta.rustemi@mpptt.gov.al, www.mpptt.gov.al.

Ministry of Tourism, Culture, Youth and Sports Rr. e Kavajës, tel. +355 4 222 25 08, informacion@mtkrs.gov.al, www.mtkrs.gov.al.

Municipality of Tirana Blv. Dëshmorët e Kombit, tel. +355 4 222 66 29/+355 4 225 30 53, info@tirana.gov.al, www.tirana.gov.al.

Prime Minister's Office Blv. Dëshmorët e Kombit 1, tel. +355 4 225 65 61, ext. 440, info@km.gov.al, www.keshilliministrave.al.

Municipality of Tirana Blv. Dëshmorët e Kombit, tel. +355 4 222 66 29/+355 4 225 30 53, info@tirana.gov.al, www.tirana.gov.al.

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Prime Minister's Office Blv. Dëshmorët e Kombit 1, tel. +355 4 225 65 61, ext. 440, info@km.gov.al, www.keshilliministrave.al.

Language courses

International Language Centre D-5, Rr. Luigj Gurakuqi Nd.5, H.4, Njësia Bashkiake 2, POB 1017, tel. +355 4 223 61 41/+355 4 223 46 60, llc@primo.al. Albanian lessons for beginners to advanced students. ▶ Open 09:00 - 19:00.

Lincoln Center H-4, Rr. Qemal Stafa 184, tel. +355 4 223 08 80, info@lincoln.org.al, www.lincolnalbania.org. Albanian for foreigners as well as English, German, Spanish and computer courses. Inside Enver Hoxha's old villa, and two other outlets. ▶ Open 8:00 - 20:00.

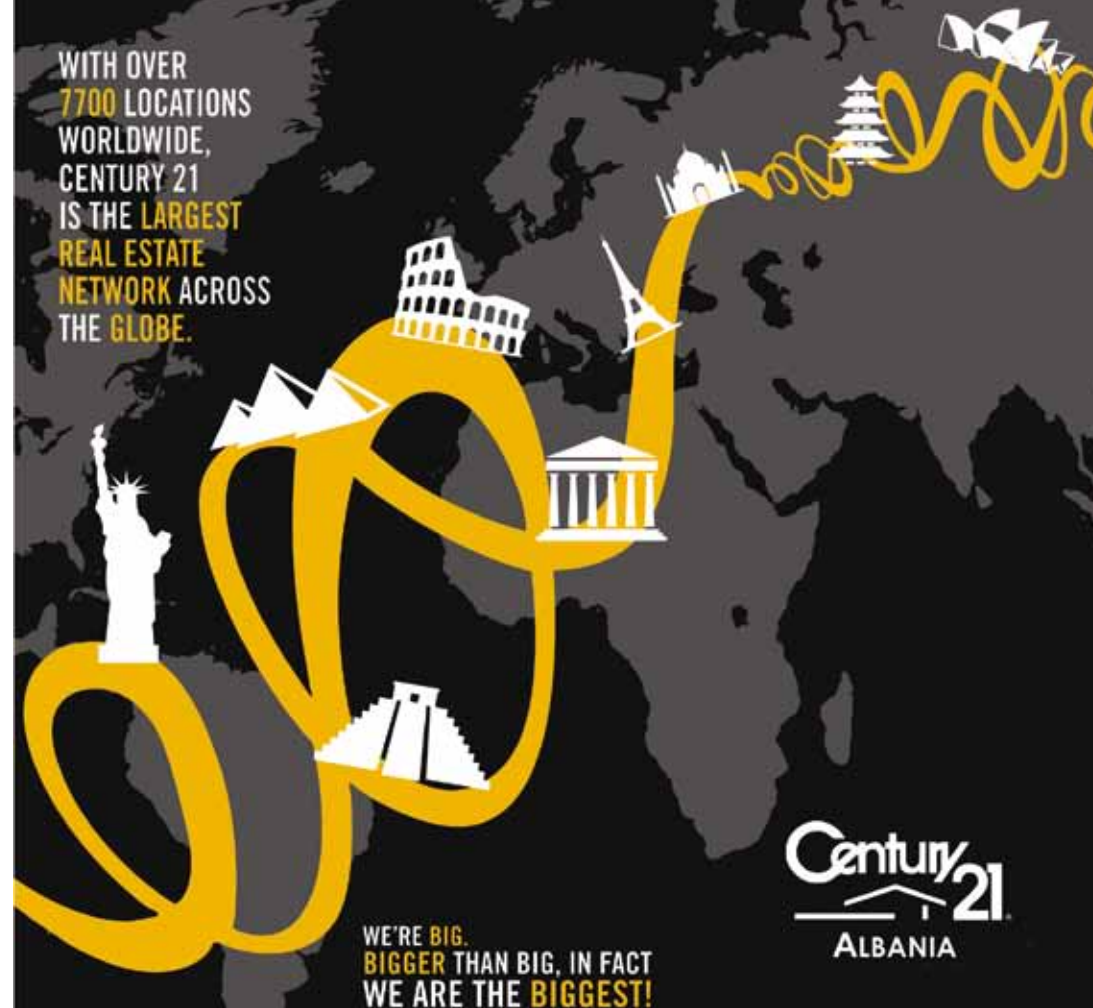


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Opticians

ItaloOptike D-5, Rr. Dibrës 271, tel. +355 4 222 29 85.
 ▶ Open 08:00 - 20:00. Closed Sun.
Optika Bruna G-4, Blv. Bajram Curri, Pallatet Agimi, tel. +355 4 224 63 61, www.otticabruna.com. ▶ Open 09:00 - 13:00/16:00 - 20:00. Closed Sun.
Ottical E-3, Rr. Kavajës 207, tel. +355 4 225 38 83, info@ottical.com. ▶ Open 08:00 - 16:00. Closed Sun.

Pharmacies

Farmacia 7-17 C-4, Blv. Zogu I, tel. +355 4 222 22 41. The non-stop city centre pharmacy. Next to the Tirana Bank. ▶ Open 24hrs.
Farmacit Regj dhe Bime Mjeksores H-4, Rr. Ibrahim Rugova, tel. +355 4 222 67 59. ▶ Open 09:00-14:00, 17:00-20:00. On duty 24hrs.
Farmatech D-5, Rr. Barrikadave, tel. +355 4 223 65 84, info@farmatech.net. Modern pharmacy, English spoken. ▶ Open 08:30 - 22:00. Closed Sun.
Rudi Farma D-4, Blv. Zogu I, tel. +355 4 224 89 51. ▶ Open 08:00 - 20:00. Closed Sun.

Real estate

1.Real Estate Rr. Kavajës, Pall. 3, Shk. 7, Ap. 66, tel. +355 4 223 31 18/+355 66 407 77 77, reale1@abcom.al, www.realestate.com.al.



Tirana seen from the Clock Tower – JvM

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Alb Property Rr. Dervish Hima, tel. +355 4 224 62 53, info@alb-property.com, www.alb-property.com.
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Balkimo Sheshi Italia, Sheraton Hotel, tel. +355 4 226 63 94, info@balkimo.com, www.balkimo.com.
Century 21 Albania Rr. Ibrahim Rugova, Leskova building, tel. +355 4 225 05 99, info@century21albania.com, www.century21albania.com.
Colliers G/H-4, Rr. Ibrahim Rugova, Sky Tower suite 141, tel. +355 4 240 04 70, albania@colliers.com, www.colliers.com.
Green Hours Rr. Abdi Kazani, P. Luarasi 2a, tel. +355 4 223 28 44, info@greenhours.net, www.greenhours.net. Specialises in building plots and agricultural land.
INF93 Rr. Luigj Gurakuqi 8, tel. +355 4 224 95 22, inf93@abaniaonline.net, www.inf-93.com.

Swimming pools

The Nobis Wellness Center also has an indoor pool.

Aquadrom K-3, Liqeni Artificial, Tirane, tel. +355 4 225 62 57. West of the Grand Park are these four outdoor swimming pools. ▶ Open 09:00 - 19:00. Open May-Oct Admission 300-400 lek.
Chateau Linza Rr. Porcelanit, Qesarakë, Linza, tel. +355 69 203 00 03, www.chateaulinzahotel.com. Hotel pool open for visitors.
Park Venue Mullet, Tirana-Elbasan road km 15, tel. +355 68 328 66 66. A hotel pool available for all to use. ▶ Admission 500 lek.

Translations

Fadil Metaj D-3, Rr. Duresit, Pall. 79, Shk. 4, Kati 1, tel. +355 4 223 04 48, fmetaj2005@yahoo.com. Translates English to/from Albanian, Serbian, Croatian, Slovenian, Macedonian, Bulgarian and Russian.

Lawyers & Consultants

Boga & Associates Rr. Ibrahim Rugova, Green Park, tel. +355 4 225 10 50/+355 68 206 20 10, info@bogalaw.com, www.bogalaw.com. ▶ Open 08:30 - 06:30. Closed Sat, Sun.
Deloitte F-5, Rr. Murat Toptani, Eurocol Center, tel. +355 4 227 79 20, alzhja@deloittece.com, www.deloitte.com/al.
Kalo & Associates E-3, Rr. Kavajës, Qendra e Businessit G-KAM, tel. +355 4 223 35 32, info@kalo-attorneys.com, www.kalo-attorneys.com.
KPMG H-4, Blv. Dëshmorët e Kombit, Twin Tower 1, tel. +355 4 227 45 24, al-office@kpmg.com, www.kpmg.al. ▶ Open 08:30 - 17:30. Closed Sat, Sun.
TBI Law Firm D-4, Blv. Zog I, Veve Business Center, tel. +355 4 222 89 62, ketrin.topciu@tbi-al.com, www.tbi-al.com.
Tonucci & Partners H-4, Rr. Abdi Toptani, Torre Drini, tel. +355 4 225 07 11, tirana@tonucci.it, www.tonucci.it.



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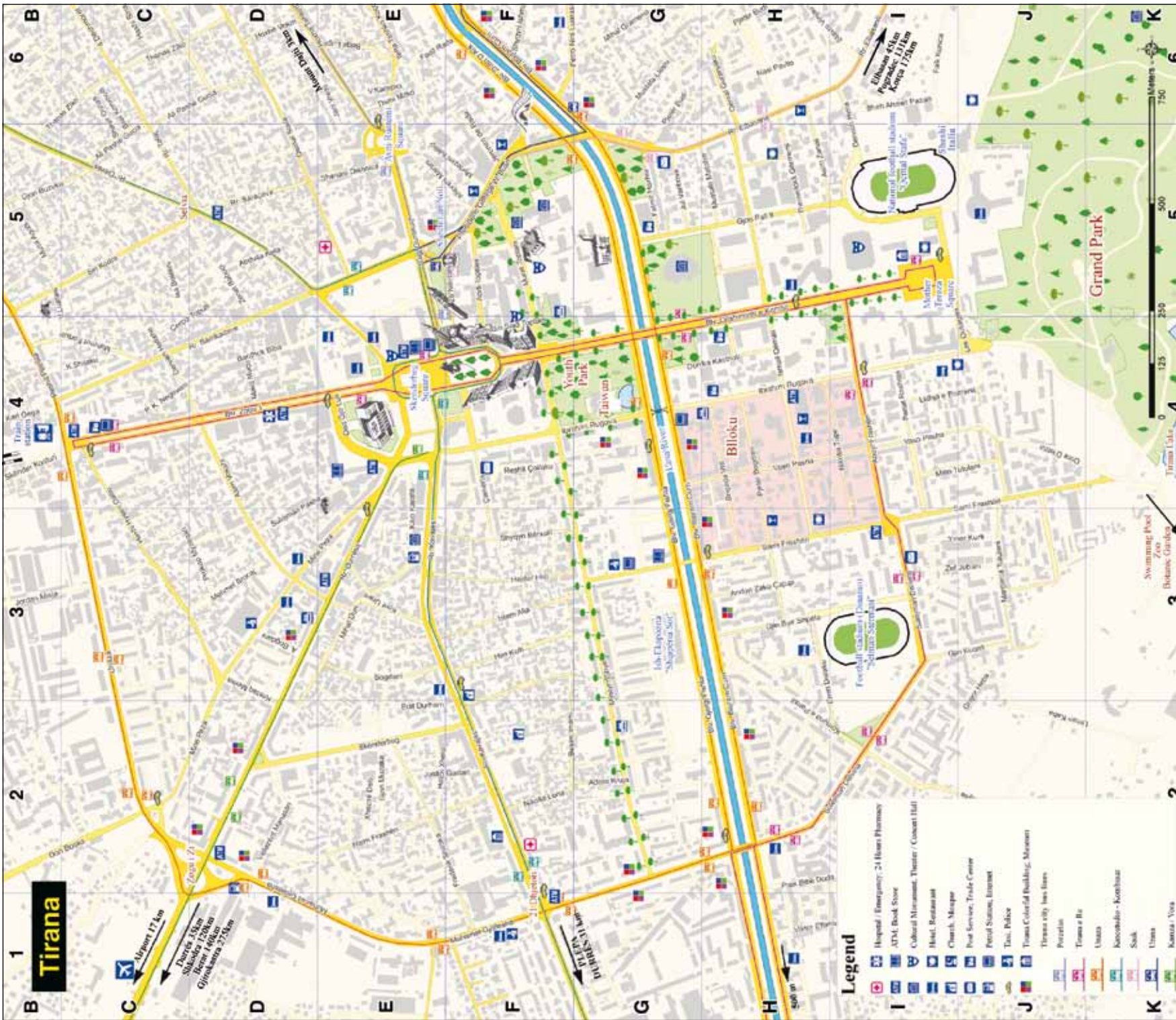


Telephony

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- Address: Rr. "Mihal Duri", Pll. 60, Shk. 1, Ap. 24 përballë ish-Ambasadës Jugosllave
- Address: Pallati "Scutari Construction" tek kryqëzimi i Rr. "Sulejman Delvina" me "Komunën e Parisit"
- Address: Rr. "Gogo Nushi", Pll. 16, Shk. 3, Kati 1, Ap. 1/1
- Address: Rr. "Skënderbeu", (ose ruga e Laknasit), 50 metër nga rrethrotullimi i qendrës, Kamëz
- Address: Rr. "Hamdi Cenogjeri", Pll. 157, Sh 1, K 1, Ap 3 Ngjitur me Tirana Bank, Kombinat
- Address: Godina 3- katëshe, pranë Farmaci "Erion", Istituti Bujqësor



Street register

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

4 Dëshmorët	C-6	Luigi Gurakuqi	E-4/5
28 Nëntori	F-4/5, E-5	Mahmut Fortuzi	B/C-4
Abdi Toptani	F-4/5	Maliq Muço	D-4
Abdulla Keta	D-5	Margarita Tutulani	J-3/4
Abdy Frashëri	I-3/4/5	Medar Shtylla	I/J/K-2
Adem Kruja	G-2	Mehmet Brocari	D-3
Ali Pashe Gucia	C-5/6, D-6	Mihal Duri	E-3
Andon Zako Çajupi	H-3	Mihal Grameno	G-6
Asim Vokshi	D-3/4	Mito Tutulani	I/J-3
Asim Zeneli	H-5/6	Mine Peza	C-2, D-2/3, E-3
Bardhok Bllba	D-4	Muhamet Gjolesha	
Barrikadave	B/C-4, D-4/5	D-1/2, E-1, F-1, G-1/2, H-2	
Beqir Luga	E-6	Murat Toptani	F-4/5
Besim Imami	F-2/3	Musa Agolli	B-5
Bilal Konxholli	C-5/6	Mustafa Lleshi	G-6
Blv. Bajram Curri	1 to G-6	Mustafa Matohtli	G/H-5
Blv. Dëshmorët e Kombit		Myrtezim Këllici	E/F-5
	F-4 to I-5	Myslym Shtylla	G-2/3, F-3/4
Blv. Gjergj Fishta	1 to G-4	Naim Frashëri	E/F-2
Blv. Zhan D'Ark	G-5 to E-6	Nasi Pavllo	H/I-6
Blv. Zogu I	C/D/E-4	Nikolla Lena	F-2
Bogdani	E-3	Nikolla Tupe	I-3/4, H-4
Brigada VIII	H-3/4	Papa Kristo Negovani	C-4
Camëria	F-3/4	Perlat Rexhepi	C-4
Cerçiz Topulli	C-4, D-5	Petro Korçari	I-1
Ded Gjo Lull	E-4	Petro Nini Luarasi	F-6
Dervish Hatixhe	D/C-4	Pjetër Bogdani	H-3/4
Dervish Hima	I-5/6	Pjetër Budi	H-6
Dhimitër S. Shuteriqi	J-1/2	Prek Bibë Doda	H-2
Dibrës	C/D-5, B5/6	Presidenti George V. Bush	F-5
Don Bosko	B/C-2	Prokop Myzeqari	D-3
Donika Kastrioti	G/H-4	Punëtorët e Rilindjes	
Dora D'istria	K/J-4		see Presidenti GWB
Durrësit	D-2/3, E-3/4	Qemal Guranjaku	H-6
Edit Durham	E-2	Qemal Stafra	E-5, D-5/6
Ebasanit	G-5, H-5/6, I-6	Ramzan Farka	B-6
Emin Duraku	I-2, H-3	Reshit Çollaku	F-4
Fadil Rada	I-2, H-3	Reshit Petrela	B/C-4
Faik Konica	I-6	Robert Shvare	I-1
Fatmir Haxhiu	G-5	Sami Frashëri	G-3 to J-4
Frederik Shiroka	F-1/2, E-2	Saraçëve	D-5
Gjin Bue Shpata	H/I-3	Sermedin Said Toptani	F-4
Gjin Kuqalli	I/J-3	Shaqir Ofshafi	C-5/6
Gjon Buzuku	B/C-5	Sheh Ahmet Pazarli	I-6
Gjon Muzaka	E-2	Shenasi Dishnica	D/E-5
Gjon Pali I	G/H/I-5	Sheshi 21 Dhjetori	F-1
Grigor Heba	I-2, J-2/3	Sheshi Avni Rustemi	E-5
Hajdar Hidri	E/F-3	Sheshi Fan Noli	E-5
Haki Mborja	J-1	Sheshi Italia	I-5
Halim Xhelu	E-2	Sheshi Nënë Tereza	I-5
Haxhi Hyshen Dalliu		Sheshi Skënderbeg	E/F-4
	D-3, C-3/4	Sheshi Zogu I Zi	C/D-2
Haxhi Sina	C-6	Shyqyri Bërçolli	E/F-3
Him Kolli	F-3	Hoxhe Vokri	D-6
Hoxhe Vokri	D-6	Hoxha Tahsim	E/D-6
Hoxha Tahsim	E/D-6	Ibrahim Dervishi	I-1
Ibrahim Dervishi	I-1	Ibrahim Rugova	F/G/H/I-4
Ibrahim Rugova	F/G/H/I-4	Isa Boletini	C/D-5
Isa Boletini	C/D-5	Islam Alla	E/F/G-3
Islam Alla	E/F/G-3	Ismail Qemali	H-3/4/5
Ismail Qemali	H-3/4/5	Jani Vreto	E-5/6
Jani Vreto	E-5/6	Jeronim de Rada	F-5
Jeronim de Rada	F-5	Jordan Misja	A/B/C-3
Jordan Misja	A/B/C-3	Jul Vanbova	G-5
Jul Vanbova	G-5	Justin Gadari	E/F-2
Justin Gadari	E/F-2	Jusuf Vroni	I-2
Jusuf Vroni	I-2	K. Shijaku	B/C-4
K. Shijaku	B/C-4	Kajo Karafilli	E-3/4
Kajo Karafilli	E-3/4	Karl Gega	B-4
Karl Gega	B-4	Kavajës	F-1/2/3, E-3/4
Kavajës	F-1/2/3, E-3/4	Komuna e Parisit	H-2/3, I-2
Komuna e Parisit	H-2/3, I-2	Kont Urani	E-3
Kont Urani	E-3	Kristaq Mema	D-2/3
Kristaq Mema	D-2/3	Lek Dukagjini	I-5, J-4
Lek Dukagjini	I-5, J-4	Lidhja Prizrenit	I/J-4
Lidhja Prizrenit	I/J-4	Liman Kaba	J-2/3, K-2
Liman Kaba	J-2/3, K-2		

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Al Brigantino	26	Et'hem Bey Mosque	38	Millennium 2 Cinema	8	Shëngjin Church Mosaic	37
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Alpin	16	Far East	22	MonarC	12	Shtëpia e Bardhë	42
Amor	24	Ferari	14	MonarC Bar	32	Si'n'shpi	33
Apollonia	22	Fiore	26	Mondial	12	Sirius	21
Arber	24	Firenze	14	Mother Teresa Statue	40	Skanderbeg Square	40
Archaeological Museum	36	Flares	31	Mr. Chicken	28	Sky Club	24
Areela	18	Folie	35	Mrizi i Zanave	21	Sky Club Café	30
Artigiano	26	Fortress of Justinian	38	Mumja	35	Sky Hotel	12
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Balkoni Dajtit	24	Friend's Book House	30	Napoli	26	South Park	30
Bamboo	22	Galeria Shijaku	38	National Art Gallery	36	Spare Time	33
Bantia	21	Goethe Institut	8	National Children's Theatre	8	Speed Taxi	44
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Belvedere	20	Grand	10	National Theatre	8	Steelwings	33
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Café Albert	29	Il Pomodoro Food Court	27	Orthodox Cathedral	36	Tirana Backpacker Bar	33
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Caramel Lounge	31	Istituto Italiano di Cultura	8	Palma	15	Tirana International Hotel	12
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Central Café	29	Kalaja	18	Pasticeri Twin Towers	29	Tregu i Çamëve	40
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