



Our must-sees for a first trip to Albania

By Floriane

Albania was one of those countries we looked at from afar when planning our Balkan itineraries. Having explored Montenegro on several occasions, we were keen to see what was just around the corner. Albania is about the size of Brittany, so in a week or even ten days, you're bound to have to make choices. The question quickly became: what to do in Albania for a first trip?

This unspoilt country offers an impressive mix of turquoise beaches, spectacular mountains, UNESCO-listed villages and winding roads perfect for a road trip. The big advantage is that it remains less crowded than some of its neighbors. You can still enjoy unspoilt landscapes, a warm welcome and reasonable prices.

Here are the **must-sees in Albania**, in our opinion, for a successful first discovery.

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Explore the Albanian Riviera: our tips for making

the most of it

It's impossible to talk about a [trip to Albania](#) without mentioning its famous **Riviera, which stretches between Dhërmi and Saranda**. Between the crystal-clear Ionian Sea and sheer cliffs, the scenery is spectacular. On paper, one imagines wild coves and an undiscovered coastline... and it's true that the scenery is magnificent. But let's be honest: the region is developing fast.

Ksamil

Often compared to the **Caribbean** for the color of their water, the beaches around Ksamil in southern Albania are incredible.

They are among the **most beautiful in the country**, with a few **fine sandy beaches** - a rarity on the coast.

The small islands in front of the beach add an **exotic touch that is quite unexpected in Europe**. The water is crystal-clear, the turquoise hues real, and the sunsets superb.

Ksamil is home to several popular beaches. We recommend **The Last Bay** beach, more discreet and a little away from the busiest areas, for its more unspoilt setting, while **Lori** Beach is particularly appreciated for its shallow waters, ideal for families.

Today, Ksamil is one of the country's busiest seaside resorts. New hotels, restaurants lining the seafront, construction in progress... the urbanization is visible. At the height of summer, especially in July and August, the atmosphere can get very lively and the beaches can quickly become crowded.

□ Our tip: opt for May, June or September to enjoy the setting while avoiding the crowds.

Dhërmi

Further north, Dhërmi, with its large pebble beach, offers an equally impressive backdrop, with mountains plunging directly into the sea. The winding roads offer magnificent panoramas, reminiscent of some of the landscapes of the Montenegrin

coast.

Here, too, tourist development is very much in evidence: resorts, vacation villages, buildings under construction... But it's sometimes enough to move away from the most central areas to find quieter corners.

And above all, the hinterland is sublime. The rolling hills, hilltop villages and scenic roads are well worth the detour. In fact, it's when you get up high that you realize just how beautiful the region is.

□ Don't forget to **pack water shoes**, as these are mainly **pebble beaches**. They'll be much more comfortable for your little feet.

Theth National Park: immersion in the Albanian

Alps

A complete change of atmosphere as we head for the north of the country. The *Theth National Park* lies in **the heart of the Albanian Alps**, a region that is still very much alive.

They're known as the **Albanian Alps** because of their spectacular relief: steep peaks, deep valleys, sheer cliffs and mineral landscapes reminiscent of the Alps in France, Switzerland and Italy.

Obviously, we come here to hike, so here are the two main points of interest:

- **Blue Eye**, an impressively blue spring (admission approx. 50 centimes),
- The famous **Theth - Valbona** hike, about 13km round trip, you can find the [complete route on this site](#)

The scenery is reminiscent of [Montenegro's Durmitor National](#) Park: steep peaks, deep valleys and impressive mountain roads. Here, however, tourism is more discreet.

The road to Theth is now paved, but still winding. It's best to plan the journey during the day.

Gjirokastër and its castle

A [UNESCO](#) World Heritage site, Gjirokastër in southern Albania is one of Albania's little nuggets.

The town is built into a hillside and dominated by a **huge castle offering spectacular views over the valley**. The cobbled streets, Ottoman houses (some of which are open to the public), clock tower and stone roofs give the town a special charm.

Berat: the city of a thousand windows

Another UNESCO-listed gem, Berat is nicknamed the city of a thousand windows and is considered Albania's prettiest town. Looking at the white facades stacked one on top of the other, it's easy to see why.

The districts of Mangalem and Gorica face each other on either side of the river. Cross the old bridge, climb to the castle and enjoy the sunset over the surrounding hills.

Lake Komani: the fjord of the Balkans

The ferry crossing between Koman and Fierze winds between steep mountains that plunge into the water.

It lasts around three hours and costs around €15, making it a fairly affordable experience given the exceptional setting.

In the upper reaches of Lake Komani, the spectacle becomes truly dazzling: the mountains narrow, the cliffs plunge into the water and you have the impression of

sailing into the heart of a canyon.

For our part, it really reminded us of our time in the [Norwegian fjords](#), with those steep mountains plunging straight into the water and that almost unreal feeling of isolation. The views also reminded us of the [Bay of Kotor](#), but here in an even wilder, rougher and more isolated version.

Tirana: a surprising capital

Often overlooked in favor of beaches and mountains, Tirana is well worth a visit.

Skanderbeg Square is the heart of the city. You can visit **Bunk'Art**, former bunkers transformed into museums retracing the country's history. The **Blloku**

district, once reserved for the political elite, is now lively, with numerous cafés and restaurants.

Tirana surprises with its energy and colorful facades.

How long will it take to visit Albania?

For a first trip, seven days allow you to combine the Riviera with a listed town such as Berat or Gjirokastër. Ten days offer a more complete overview with Theth or Lake Komani. Fifteen days offer a real road trip between sea and mountains.

Renting a car is the best option for total freedom, especially if you want to explore the Albanian Alps.

Our must-sees on the map

To help you plan your itinerary, we've created a map with all the **places mentioned** in this article. This makes it easier to visualize distances and plan your road trip to Albania.

Albania seduces with its diversity and authenticity. A few hours' drive takes you from heavenly beaches to rugged peaks, from historic villages to a dynamic capital. It's an ideal destination for exploring the Balkans, or complementing a trip to neighboring Montenegro.

Feel free to drop us a **note** below to let us know if you are planning this trip, **ask** any questions or **share** on social media([our Instagram](#)) we will be more than happy to respond!

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