

WILD FRONTIERS



Wild Walk in Albania (Recce Tour) Albania

‘Land of Albania! Let me bend mine eyes on thee, thou rugged nurse of savage men’.

So wrote Lord Byron in his famous poem Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage, where he chronicled the journey that he and his friend and diarist J.C. Hobhouse took through the mountainous regions of southern Albania in 1809. Long considered a poor European backwater, Albania is in fact one of the most fascinating countries in the Adriatic. With a rich heritage that can trace its influences back to the Macedonians, the Greeks and the Ottoman Turks, it is also blessed with some of the wildest landscapes left in Europe. This incredible adventure takes us from the streets of its intriguing capital and into the wilds of its mountainous hinterlands. Along the way we will explore the Ottoman charms of Gjirokastrë and the dramatic landscapes of the Kelcra Gorge and the Vjosë Valley, before ending our journey amongst the World Heritage setting of Butrint National Park, one of the most unique archaeological sites anywhere in Europe.

‘Wild Frontiers is a most unusual company. It has developed a great formula - one of informal order. One always knows everything will work out somehow, and there is a lot of fun along the way.’ - *Olly Gerrish*

Highlights:

- Explore Tirana and the UNESCO World Heritage City of Gjirokastrë.
- Visit the ancient sites of Durrës and Bylis and the castle of Ali Pasha of Tepelenë.
- Hiking through the Kelcra Gorge and the Vjosë Valley.
- Visit Butrint, one of the most important archaeological sites in Albania.
- Trek through the diverse UNESCO landscapes of Butrint National Park.

Duration: 9 Days

Average group size: 5 - 10

Start: Sat 09 June 12

Finish: Sun 17 June 12



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Why Wild Frontiers?

As a young, innovative company, Wild Frontiers is delighted to have been voted one of the 'Top 10 Tour Operators' by the readers of both Wanderlust and National Geographic Adventure. We are frequently asked what makes us different from other tour operators, and feel that the factors below answer this important question.

The Traveller's Ethos: WF is a company that has been set up by travellers for travellers, and our ethos is to help adventurous souls get to incredible and inaccessible places in safety and as much comfort as local conditions allow. We are firm believers that travelling is all about the experience and it's the details that make the trip - we specialise in drawing on our own extensive local knowledge and array of contacts to give our clients the very best experience possible.

Personal Service: Our London office is manned by experienced expedition leaders and every trip we run stems from their extensive knowledge - in short, we run the kind of trips that as passionate travellers, we like to do ourselves! When you ring our office, you can be guaranteed to chat to someone that knows the trips and the terrain, and is able to offer sound and practical advice.

Authentic Experiences: Our unique, original itineraries allow our clients to take journeys that venture beneath the surface of the region. Unlike the plethora of 'world specialists' out there who purport to know a hundred destinations, we concentrate on the locations we know and love. We don't run the same tour over and over, thus running the risk of creating a 'tourist circuit' and spoiling untouched regions. Instead, we rarely run any tour more than a couple of times a year and they are on routes we have discovered for ourselves, meaning we are able to give a truly authentic, off-the-beaten-track experience.

Be the First: Our style of travel is all about exploration, and nothing excites us more than opening up new routes to genuine travellers. We keep abreast of new destinations and are often the first to return to places that have vanished from the tourist map. We were the first back into Pakistan after 9/11, the first to return to Kashmir after a decade of tourist isolation, and the first to run a commercial travel trip to Afghanistan for almost 30 years. Since then we have helped bring Colombia, Yemen and Georgia back into the tourist fold, specialising in groundbreaking reconnaissance trips and imaginative expeditions.

Small Group Size: We believe it is imperative to keep the group sizes small. Most trips are limited to a maximum of approximately 12 travellers, thus giving you more access to fragile cultures, better opportunities to interact with local people, and the knowledge you are making less of an impact while there.

Cost of Tours: We believe in an honest, upfront pricing system so you know exactly what the tour will cost before you book. We avoid local payments, 'optional extras' or forcing our clients to split every meal bill. Our tours are provided on a predominantly full board basis, with mineral water, government permits, entrance fees and transport all included.

Added Value: We aim to give our clients the very best (not the least expensive) experience through whatever facilities are available to us. We always try to provide accommodation that is interesting, characterful and convenient, and transport - another important part of any tour - that is as varied and comfortable as possible.

Our clients: Your companions can make or break a trip, and it's lucky therefore that our clients are our greatest asset. Travelling to remote regions is not for everyone, and as such we tend to attract open-minded travellers looking for genuine experiences, and a desire to reach those hard to get to places.

Responsible Travel: Awarded 5 star status by AITO (Association of Independent Tour operators), responsible tourism has always been an integral part of our company ethos and our adventures are designed with the local people, culture and eco-system in mind. For further details please refer to the RT section on this dossier.



Day 1: Tour starts in Tirana: We start with an afternoon walking tour of the city with our local guide. Tirana was founded by Sulejman Pasha during the early years of the 17th century. Established under Ottoman rule, its position along the caravan routes saw Tirana's rise in importance culminate in its choice as the capital of the newly independent Albania in 1920. A mix of grandiose 1930s design and Communist inspired urbanisation, the city is an interesting architectural mix of ideologies. This evening we will dine in a local restaurant in the centre of Tirana Park.

Hotel (D)

Day 2: Tirana - Gjirokastër: This morning we travel south, a journey by road which takes us towards the UNESCO World Heritage city of Gjirokastër. En route we will call in at Durrës, Albania's main port and one of Europe's oldest cities, which was once a major commercial outpost under the Romans. Stopping to visit its archaeological museum, we then move on to Bylis, an old Illyrian city that can trace its ancestry back to the 3rd century BC. Bylis once flourished as the region's political, economic and cultural centre and one of its most important ancient monuments is its cathedral, home to the largest mosaic discovered in Albania to date. Following lunch we then continue to Tepelenë, to visit the castle of Ali Pasha, the 'Lion of Yannina', who ruled

Albania during the late 18th and early 19th centuries. From here we continue on to Gjirokastër and the end of our day's journey.

Hotel (B,L,D)

Day 3: Gjirokastër - Kelcyra Gorge: A beautifully preserved example of an Ottoman town, dramatically situated between the Gjerë Mountains and the Drino River, Gjirokastër is still dominated by its Ottoman citadel, believed to be the second largest in the Balkans. Filled with a lovely collection of charming 17th and 18th century buildings and palatial residences, the old part of the city still reflects something of Gjirokastër's once favoured status amongst the Ottoman elite of the 19th century. We'll visit the castle and the city's Ethnographical Museum, before leaving the city behind for the beautiful landscapes of the Kelcyra Gorge. Part of the Vjosë Valley, considered by many to be one of the natural highlights of the Albanian landscape, the Kelcyra Gorge provides a glorious backdrop for today's walk, as we follow the course of the river, passing through thick forest and the small deserted village of Kala en route to our overnight camp.

Camp (B,L,D)

Days 4 & 5: Trekking through the Vjosë Valley: Over the next two days we will hike through the stunning natural beauty of the Vjosë Valley. Running along part of the Trebeshinë - Dhëmbel - Nemërçkë Mountain chain, the Vjosë River crosses through nearly 200 kilometres of south-western Albania and on our first day we travel part of its length from Kala to Sheper, where we camp overnight. Breaking camp on the second morning we then continue to follow the gentle course of the river as it snakes its way through a landscape peppered with churches and villages. Enjoying the genteel pace and the splendid setting we aim to visit some of the more interesting religious monuments that lie along the route, including the lovely Byzantine church in the little village of Leusë. Our final destination is the small town of Permet, a place renowned for its fine food and strong raki.

Day 4 Camp (B,L,D)

Day 5 Hotel (B,L,D)

Day 6: Permet - Benja - Permet: Today we have a relaxing day as we visit the thermal springs at Benja. Located just a short distance from Permet, the springs are believed to provide cures for a number of ailments, including skin complaints, stomach problems and rheumatism. After visiting the spa we return to Permet for a second night.

Hotel (B,L,D)

Day 7: Permet - Butrint: This morning we drive to the UNESCO World Heritage Site at Butrint National Park, an ancient archaeological site that lies on the shores of the Mediterranean. Located on the Straits of Corfu and surrounded by a picturesque lagoon, the site has, at various stages of its development, been a Greek colony, a Roman city and a bishopric. Today it is a site of major historical significance and remains one of the most important archaeological finds in the country, with artefacts and monuments being unearthed that date back as far as the Bronze Age. Its setting, against the natural backdrop of native woodland and the fresh waters of Lake Butrint and the Vivari Channel, makes it a particularly attractive site to explore. After our visit we will drive to a private beach to spend the rest of the afternoon relaxing, having lunch and swimming in the sea.

Hotel (B,L,D)

Day 8: Walking in the National Park: Butrint National Park covers over 85 square kilometres of historic landscapes and protected environment, with a number of marked walking trails leading to many of the main sites. The natural habitats around the park encompass a rich diversity of environments including lush pastureland, wetlands, Mediterranean maquis and olive groves. The lagoon that surrounds the park is also a haven for endangered Hermann's tortoise and white-tailed sea eagles and during the winter the flooded wetlands become home to a variety of migrant birdlife. Heading back into the park again today we have a chance to explore a little more closely some of its natural beauty and rural charms, spending our time exploring the rich diversity of the landscapes and taking in some of the small farms and settlements that lie amongst this protected wilderness.

Hotel (B,L,D)

Day 9: Butrint - Tirana: Drive back to Tirana airport, where the tour ends.

(B)

Wild Extensions:

Arrive early to adjust to a new time zone or just to get a feel for the country before your tour starts. Explore the country after your tour on a bespoke Wild Extension or just allow a few days to relax afterwards. Maybe choose all of the above and get cheaper flights mid-week?

A sample of what you could do...

The simplest extension from here is Corfu! Not very Wild Frontiers we know but there you are.

Contact the office for extension specifics.

TOUR DETAILS

Tour Code: AWW/C

Tour price: All our tours are priced on a LAND ONLY basis, giving you maximum flexibility when deciding how to get to and from your tour.

Single Supplements: These are NOT compulsory for any Wild Frontiers tour. Where single supplements are available please note that a single room cannot always be guaranteed for every night of the tour as depending on the destination, rooms may be limited. Depending on group size on this tour we will try to offer an optional single supplement for all nights of the tour but it may not be possible in the guesthouse and at the visitors centre.

Flights: If you would like us to send you a quote for the suggested tour flight (see GETTING THERE) or on any alternative flight that may suit you better, please let us know.

In all cases, for the latest prices, please refer to our website or contact the office.

Please remember that all Wild Frontiers tour prices mean NO hidden extras, NO local payments or kitty and NO compulsory single supplements.

WHAT IS INCLUDED?

- Full services of a Wild Frontiers Tour Leader with local guides and drivers.
- Meal plan as detailed in the itinerary (B=Breakfast, L=Lunch, D=Dinner) with mineral water as required.
- All transport as in the itinerary.
- All accommodation
- All entrance fees, as per itinerary

WHAT IS NOT INCLUDED?

- Visas (if applicable)
- Local airport taxes
- Tips
- Beverages & any personal costs
- International Flights
- Airport transfers (unless booking suggested flights through WF office)

GETTING THERE

For this trip our suggested flights (subject to change) are:

09JUN BA 2648 LGW-TIA 09:45/13:40
17JUN BA 2651 TIA-LGW 23:25/01:30+1

LGW - London Gatwick
TIA - Tirana

BA - British Airways

NB If you wish to arrange your own flights you are completely free to do so and in this case we can arrange any transfers or supplementary accommodation that you may require.

Please note that if you are making your own flight arrangements, we recommend that you only purchase flights that are totally flexible and refundable as due to the nature of adventure travel, itineraries can change at any time. For more information, please refer to our booking conditions.

PRACTICALITIES

Accommodation will be in a combination of hotels and wild camps.

Any accommodation mentioned in the itinerary is subject to availability and if not available substitutes will be of a similar quality.

Transport on this tour includes minibuses and our own two feet!.

Trip Grading:

Adventure Rating ❖❖❖❖❖

Comfort Grade ❖❖❖❖❖

Fitness Level ❖❖❖❖❖

Cultural Interest ❖❖❖❖❖

Please note that this grading is an indication only and should you have any concerns please contact the office.

Fitness...

Walkers should be of a reasonable fitness but anyone in a decent state of health, and enjoys a good hike, should be able to manage this trip. The highest we go is about 2,200m. You should also be happy to share facilities and live in a fairly basic style.

It may sound obvious but...

Wild Frontiers tours are not always for everyone and it is important to us that the tour you choose is the most suitable. Please therefore take time to read the dossier carefully. All our tours are graded to give an overall picture of the trip but these are only guidelines and you should check the daily itinerary. Should you have any concerns about your ability to partake in any aspect of the tour then please contact the office.

Insurance: Insurance that provides cover for emergency repatriation in case of a medical emergency is compulsory for all tours. You should be aware that many standard insurance policies may not cover you adequately for all aspects of a Wild Frontiers trip and so we strongly recommend that you purchase a suitably designed insurance policy. One such policy is the "Wild Frontiers" policy underwritten by Travel & General Insurance Company plc, which is available to UK and Republic of Ireland residents through our website or via the insurance company direct on 0845 408 0583. Under this policy there are two different levels of cover available and for this trip the minimum requirement would be the Standard policy.

Cover explained:

Standard policy: a comprehensive travel insurance policy that provides cover for all Wild Frontiers activities, including trekking up to 5,000m. This policy does not provide cover for travel to areas where the FCO is advising against all or all but essential travel.

Elite policy: provides the same comprehensive level of cover as the standard policy. In addition the Elite policy also provides cover for travel to areas where the FCO is advising against all or all but essential travel. The policy will not provide cover for any claims arising from or relating to the reasons why the FCO is advising against travel.

If purchasing the Elite policy you also have the option to **extend the cover** provided by the policy to include cover for claims arising from a terrorist act in an area where the FCO is advising against travel. You can add this cover to your policy when purchasing online or over the telephone.

These policies are only available to those travelling on a Wild Frontiers holiday.

For more information and to purchase your policy online please visit the Insurance section of our website.

The cover is underwritten by the International Insurance Company of Hannover Limited (IICH), who are authorised and regulated by the Financial Services Authority (FSA). Wild Frontiers Limited is an Introducer Appointed Representative of Travel & General Insurance Company plc, details of which can be found at the FSA's website www.fsa.gov.uk.

If you do decide to purchase alternative insurance, then you must ensure that it covers you for every aspect of this trip. Please pay particular attention to ensuring that you are covered for horse-riding.

Visas: Visas are necessary for many of the destinations we travel to and while we aim to provide you with the most up-to-date information, requirements frequently change and as such we advise that you check with the relevant

embassies or contact our recommended visa agency, Travcour (020 7223 5295) www.travcour.com for the latest advice.

For this tour, UK passport holders do not currently require a visa for Albania.

Non-UK passport holders should contact the relevant embassies for individual requirements.

Further details will be sent out to you on booking, however ensuring that correct and valid visas are obtained remains the sole responsibility of the client.

Responsible Travel: Responsible travel and sustainable tourism are fundamental ideas that Wild Frontiers has been committed to since our birth. It is our strong belief that these words should not be simply 'tagged on' to dossiers and websites but should be at the very core of each trip, and our adventures are therefore designed with the local people, culture and eco-system in mind. We believe that a successful trip not only delivers a unique and unsurpassable journey for our clients, but that it also benefits the peoples whose lands we are privileged to visit.

The Wild Frontiers Foundation: In order to facilitate an enduring support structure for the communities we visit, and to show a commitment to these values, Wild Frontiers has set up a charitable foundation through which we can channel funds to both existing NGOs and our own development projects. In addition to organising ethically sensitive tours, having our own charitable foundation allows us to raise money - through the cost of our tours, charity trips and fund raising events - which can then be used to fund various projects in education, sanitation, reforestation and a number of other important issues facing developing communities. Wherever possible we are happy for our clients to visit these projects to see for themselves where and how this money is being spent. For a full list of partner NGOs please visit our website. Should you wish to donate to the foundation please contact the office for details.

The Environment: Trying to do our bit for the environment, in 2005 we were among the first UK-based travel

companies to automatically offset every client's international flight (if booked with us) with a payment to Carbon Clear to help promote sustainable energy.

Climate: Albania has a variety of climatic conditions, being situated in the transition zone between the typical Mediterranean climate in the west and the moderate continental in the east. The average annual temperature is 15°C (59°F). Rainy winters (with frequent cyclones) and dry, hot summers are typical of the coastal plain. Summer rainfall is more frequent and winters colder in the mountainous interior. Annual precipitation ranges from about 100 cm (40 in) on the coast to more than 250 cm (100 in) in the mountains.

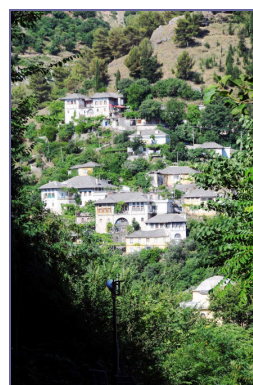
Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO): The FCO travel advice highlights potential hazards people might experience when travelling abroad. Given the nature of destinations offered by Wild Frontiers it is inevitable that from time to time some itineraries contravene this advice. Whilst WF takes the safety and security of its clients extremely seriously, we will not necessarily cancel a trip because of the FCO advice. It is recommended therefore that clients check this advice before booking and contact us if they have any queries or concerns. Please see our website for further information.

Further information:
When you make a confirmed booking with Wild Frontiers we will send you our confirmation pack with complete pre-departure information giving you details on visas, health and vaccinations, packing lists, suggested reading on the region, insurance, photography and other useful tips to make your trip more enjoyable.

ALBANIA - THE FACTS



The country: From Macedonian and Greek, to Roman and Byzantine, Albania bears the scars and influences of countless centuries of foreign rule, culminating in the arrival of the Ottoman Turks in the 15th century. With a coastline that extends along the Adriatic and Ionian Seas and over a third of the country still covered in thick forests, Albania is rich in both natural and cultural attractions. The country is home to wolves and bears, wild boars and chamois, whilst its plant species total some 30% of Europe's entire flora species. Following independence in 1912, it took nearly a century more of invasions, Communist rule and civil unrest for Albania to finally emerge as an individual entity. Today these wild landscapes offer visitors a chance to explore one of the most fascinating and, as yet, untapped corners of Europe, where Byzantine churches and Ottoman city's rub shoulders with UNESCO World Heritage sites and glorious mountain landscapes.



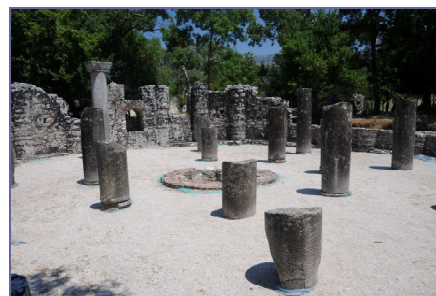
Gjirokastra: Gjirokastra is a UNESCO World Heritage City. It is one of the most venerable towns of Albania and is located in the south of the country, 300 meters above sea level, on a beautiful and dramatic location in a lush valley between the high Gjerë Mountains and the rushing river Drinos. It is dominated by an Ottoman fortress said to be the second largest in the Balkans, the largest being in Belgrade. It's important and commanding situation (guarding one of the main North-South routes of the Balkans) indicates that since prehistoric times it must have been the site of a fort or fortress. Crusaders passed by, looting and raping and pillaging, in the 11th century. A tragic legend recounts that when the Ottomans invaded in the 14th century a Princess Argyro jumped from the highest tower of the castle of Gjirokastër with her very young son, to escape seizure by the Turks. The old part of the town, with charming and characteristic Balkan-Ottoman houses, many with roofs composed of expertly-cut shale stone, surrounds the citadel and overlook the grim Communist-built slum-suburbs and the flood-plain of the Drin. The old Ottoman houses do not have balconies, but they are richly endowed with well-proportioned windows, and elegant verandas. The narrow streets have very well-laid cobble-stones and square-sets. The corner-houses have windows which are vantage-points, as can be seen in the picture below. Beyond the core of the town below the citadel, the houses are obviously residential - a few of them almost palatial.



These date from the period in the middle of the 19th century when Albania was a wealthy part of the Ottoman Empire, to which the country supplied not only fearsome administrators such as the notorious Ali Pasha of Tepelena, but engineers and architects. Under Hoxha the National Museum of Arms was

established in the ground floor of the fortress. It was looted during the first wave of unrest in 1990. The remains of an ancient American spy-plane, shot down in the 1950s, are to be seen in the main yard of the monument. Ali Pasha also constructed an aqueduct 10 km (over 6 miles) long, to bring in 28,000 gallons of drinking water a day from Mount Sopot. It was demolished in 1932 under the régime (1925-39) of President (from 1928, King) Zog and its stones used as building material.

Butrint Archaeological Site: Butrint, ancient Buthrotum, a port from Hellenistic to Ottoman times, is a UNESCO World Heritage Site in south-west Albania. Situated on the Straits of Corfu, and surrounded by a picturesque lagoon, it is one of the most remarkable archaeological sites in the Adriatic Sea region. Walking through the ruins of Butrint, it is hard to imagine the different forms the town has taken, and the differing fortunes of its inhabitants through the generations.



The Venetian Republic purchased Butrint, with the island of Corfu, in 1386 from the Angevins Kings of southern Italy. The main importance of Butrint for the Venetians was the strategic advantage of having an outpost on the mainland and the financial value of the fisheries in Lake Butrint lion pot. Despite its vital strategic value, Butrint functioned essentially as an outpost on the mainland administered from Corfu and under the jurisdiction of the governor of that island. The Venetian presence at Butrint was in effect an enclave on the Ottoman mainland, and hence the fate of the city was often determined by the relations between these two empires. After the fall of the Venetian republic in 1797, and the French occupation of the Ionian Islands, Butrint was occupied by Ali Pasha of Tepelena, marking the end of the Venetian presence

on the mainland. However, the antiquarian studies developed through the Renaissance would form a lasting legacy for Butrint, and the site became a key theatre of interest, first for painters, artists and grand tourists, then for archaeologist.

How to book:

In order to confirm your booking we need to have a completed signed booking form for each client together with a £400 deposit per person. You can either return your booking form to us by post or by booking through our website at www.wildfrontiers.co.uk

You can contact the office by email to info@wildfrontiers.co.uk or we are very happy to take your call on **020 7736 3968**.

Wild Frontiers is a fully licensed and bonded tour operator and our ATOL number is 5975. You can book your holiday with Wild Frontiers in complete confidence that all monies you pay to us for your tour are fully protected.

We are also bonded with the Association of Independent Tour Operators (AITO). AITO members comply with the highest standards of consumer protection.

Every AITO holiday is backed not only by AITO's Quality Charter but also by full financial protection.

We do recommend that you take out adequate travel insurance at the time of booking in the event that you are no longer able to travel as all deposits are non-refundable - full booking conditions can be found on the booking form and online at our website.