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Profile

Introduction

Once part of the Ottoman and Roman empires, Albania gained its independence as a nation in 1912 after almost four centuries of Turkish control. However, following World War II, the new Republic of Albania fell under Soviet influence and floundered for decades as the poorest and most undeveloped country in Europe.

Since the break-up of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s, Albania has begun developing an open-market economy. The mountainous terrain of the area, which historically had impeded travel and kept Albania isolated, also has helped preserve pristine beaches and other natural treasures of the emerging democracy.



© Pietro Di Bello/ flickr.com
Mountains near Vlora, Albania

Albania is strategically important because of a planned oil pipeline connecting its southern port town of Vlora on the Adriatic Sea to Bourgas, Bulgaria, on the Black Sea. The New-York-based Albanian-Macedonian-Bulgarian Oil Corporation (AMBO) is leading efforts to build the USD 1.1-billion pipeline through Bulgaria, Macedonia, and Albania. The energy project—which includes construction of highway, rail, and optic-to-optic telecommunications links from East to West—will provide for cheaper shipment of Caspian oil to Rotterdam in the Netherlands and the East Coast of the United States.

In 2004, the World Bank, the European Bank of Reconstruction and Development, and the European Investment Bank loaned Albania EUR 110 million to build an industrial and energy park in Vlora, which includes a thermo-power plant and storage for hydrocarbons.

Other signs of Albania's embrace of the Western economic model—characterized by privatization of once state-owned enterprise—are that the country joined NATO and applied for membership in the European Union in 2009.

Violent protests swept Albania in January 2011 in response to entrenched political corruption, according to Alexander A. Arvizu, U.S. ambassador to Albania. How the democracy movement of the Middle East impacts Albania remains to be seen.

Geography

Albania is located on the Balkan Peninsula on the eastern shore of the Adriatic Sea, bordering Montenegro and Kosovo to the north, Macedonia to the east, and Greece to the southeast. Covering an area of 28,748 sq km (11,100 sq mi), Albania is almost as large as the U.S. state of Maryland. It is approximately 340 km (210 mi) in length and 150 km (95 mi) in width.

Geographic Divisions and Topographic Features

Albania is part of the Balkans Region, a mountainous peninsula between the Adriatic Sea on the west and the Black Sea on the east.¹ The western side of Albania is covered with coastal lowlands. They extend eastward, merging into a strip of hills composed of sandstone and flysch (soft rock). Further east, the hills rise into rugged limestone mountains that cover the country's eastern side.^{2, 3}



© Spaz Tacular
Lake Tirana, Albania

Coastal Lowlands

A relatively flat area along the Adriatic Sea, the coastal lowlands are composed of alluvial silt, deposited by the many rivers that empty into the sea. The lowlands are also marked by numerous marshes and swamps, most of which were reclaimed and their water redirected during the communist era. The coastal plain is relatively narrow for most of its length, but widens in the central region. It is approximately 200 km (124 mi) in length, extending as far south as the city of Vlorë.^{4, 5, 6}

1 WorldAtlas.com. "The Balkan Peninsula, or (the Balkans)." No date.

<http://www.worldatlas.com/webimage/countrys/europe/balkans.htm>

2 HowStuffWorks. Discovery Communications. "Geography of Albania." 1998-2010.

<http://geography.howstuffworks.com/europe/geography-of-albania1.htm>

3 Food and Agriculture Organization. Shundi, Andrea. "Country Pasture/Forage Resource Profiles, Albania: Soils and Topography: Major Soil Types." October 2006. <http://www.fao.org/ag/AGP/AGPC/doc/Counprof/Albania/albania.htm>

4 HowStuffWorks. Discovery Communications. "Geography of Albania." 1998-2010.

<http://geography.howstuffworks.com/europe/geography-of-albania1.htm>

5 Encyclopedia.com. Junior Worldmark Encyclopedia of Physical Geography. "Albania: Topographic Regions." 2003.

<http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1G2-3425900012.html>

6 Encyclopedia.com. The Columbia Encyclopedia, Sixth Ed. "Albania: Land and People." 2008.

<http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/Albania.aspx>

Hills

The coastal plain merges inland into a hilly strip that runs from north to south, forming Albania's most densely settled and most industrialized region. The country's largest cities (including Tirana and Elbasan) are located here. Elevations are moderate, generally between 305 and 915 m (1000 and 3000 ft), with a few exceptions.^{7, 8, 9}



© kopaszop / flickr.com
Mountains and lake in Tirana

Mountains

Just east of the hills, mountains dominate the terrain of Albania from north to south and all the way to the eastern border. With elevations of around 2,700 m (8,900 ft), the North Albanian Alps stretch across the country's northern tip, running from northwest to southeast.¹⁰ They are part of the southernmost segment of the Dinaric Alps, a mountain range that runs parallel to the Adriatic coastline. The northern point of the Dinaric Alps is in Slovenia, just south of Austria.¹¹

East of the upland hills and south of the North Albanian Alps, mountains stretch all the way to the border with Greece (south of the Albanian city of Korçë). These densely forested mountains are formed of green serpentine rock and are rounded in shape, except for some sharp outcroppings of sandstone and limestone. In the eastern part of this zone, stand Albania's highest mountains, some over 2,740 m (8,989 ft) in height. The Korab Mountains are located here, stretching north to south from the Drin River to central Albania.¹² Albania's highest peak, Mali i Korabit (Mount Korab) is in this range, with an elevation of 2,752 m (9,030 ft).¹³



© Viktor Kaposi
Albanian Alps near Permet

7 Federal Research Division, U.S. Library of Congress. *Albania: A Country Study*. "Chapter 2: The Society and Its Environment: Topography [p. 60]." 1992. Washington, D.C: U.S. Government Printing Office.

8 HowStuffWorks. Discovery Communications. "Geography of Albania." 1998-2010.
<http://geography.howstuffworks.com/europe/geography-of-albania1.htm>

9 Some sources report this area as simply an extension of the coastal plain. Others call it a separate, interior hill region due to higher elevation and different soil composition. This report follows the latter definition, naming it a hill region.

10 Encyclopædia Britannica. "Albania: Land: Relief." 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-42616>

11 Encyclopædia Britannica. "Dinaric Alps." 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9030487>

12 Federal Research Division, U.S. Library of Congress. *Albania: A Country Study*. "Chapter 2: The Society and Its Environment: Topography [p. 60]." 1992. Washington, D.C: U.S. Government Printing Office.

13 Encyclopædia Britannica. "Albania: Land: Relief." 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-42616>

More ranges stretch from the central region to cover a wide swath of southeastern and southern Albania. Wide valleys divide these mountains, which in the south are mostly bare or else covered with a thin growth of shrubs or pine and oak trees. Elevations here reach as high as 2,500 m (8,200 ft).¹⁴ The Pindus Mountains are part of this area, extending south-to-southeast from Albania into central Greece, where they form the backbone of the country's mainland. Forests of this range are composed of conifer trees at high altitudes, and broadleaf species in lower areas.^{15, 16}

Climate

Along its coast, Albania is characterized as Mediterranean in climate, influenced by the warm ocean breezes off the Adriatic and Ionian Seas. The country experiences hot, dry summers and mild, rainy winters. Farther inland, a continental climate prevails. In the high regions, winters are colder, and summers are relatively mild.¹⁷



© Doron / wikipedia.org
Dinaric Alps

Countrywide, rainfall can be heavy, varying by region. It increases in the interior, with higher levels occurring on the mountains' western slopes. In the North Albanian Alps, the rainfall is greatest, up to 2,500 mm (100 in) yearly. In contrast, along the country's eastern border, around 760 mm (30 in) of rain falls in an average year.^{18,19}

Rivers and Lakes

Several rivers drain the Albanian countryside. Most begin in the eastern mountains or beyond and flow westward, emptying into the Adriatic and Ionian Seas. Because the flow varies depending on rainfall, most rivers are not useful for navigation. They do, however, provide substantial amounts of hydroelectric power to the country's energy grid.^{20,21,22}

14 Encyclopædia Britannica. "Albania: Land: Relief." 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-42616>

15 Encyclopædia Britannica. "Pindus Mountains." 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9060071>

16 World Wildlife Fund (WWF), Wild World. "Pindus Mountains Mixed Forests (PA1217)." 2001. http://www.worldwildlife.org/wildworld/profiles/terrestrial/pa/pa1217_full.html

17 HowStuffWorks. Discovery Communications. "Geography of Albania: Climate." 1998–2010. <http://geography.howstuffworks.com/europe/geography-of-albania1.htm>

18 Encyclopædia Britannica. "Albania – Land – Climate." 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-42618>

19 HowStuffWorks. Discovery Communications. "Geography of Albania: Climate." 1998–2010. <http://geography.howstuffworks.com/europe/geography-of-albania1.htm>

20 Encyclopædia Britannica. "Albania – Land – Drainage." 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-42617>

21 HowStuffWorks. Discovery Communications. "Geography of Albania: Water." 1998–2010. <http://geography.howstuffworks.com/europe/geography-of-albania1.htm>

The Drin River, originating in Kosovo (where it is called the Beli Drim, or White Drin) is Albania's most important and longest river, with a length of 282 km (175 mi) as measured from the headwaters of the White Drin.²³ (In Albania and ethnic Albanian parts of Kosovo, the White Drin is known as the Drini I Bardhë.) The Drin River is also fed by a tributary known as the Drini i Zi (or Black Drin), which collects water from Albania's border region with southern Macedonia, where Lakes Ohrid and Prespa are located.²⁴ With its three hydropower plants, located along stretches of the river in northern Albania, the Drin River provides 90% of the nation's electricity.²⁵

At least four important rivers are found in central Albania. Beginning west of Lake Ohrid and flowing generally toward the west, the Shkumbin River empties into the Adriatic Sea northwest of Divjakë. This river serves as the dividing line for the two major dialects of Albanian: Gheg is spoken north of the river, and Tosk to the south.²⁶ South of the Shkumbin, two rivers link to form one waterway to the sea, the Seman River. The northernmost of the Seman River's two source tributaries is the Devoll River. From its origin close to the border with northern Greece, the Devoll River flows generally northwest, then bends south. Near Kuçovë, it meets the Osum River, and the two rivers merge into one.²⁷ The Osum River, the Seman's other source tributary, flows from southeastern Albania toward the northwest to meet the Devoll. From this confluence, the Seman River emerges and flows westward, emptying into the Adriatic Sea.



© Christian Guthrie
Bridge to Shkodër Lake

The Vjosë River is the most important river in southern Albania. It begins in the mountains of northwestern Greece and flows in a northwestern direction across southern Albania. Slightly north of Vlorë, it empties into the Adriatic Sea.²⁸

Three large lakes are located in Albania. In the northwest, Lake Shkodër shares territory in both Albania and Montenegro. With an area of 390 sq km (150 sq mi), it is the Balkan Peninsula's largest lake. In the past, it was not a lake but an extension of the Adriatic Sea.

22 High Beam Research. "What Rivers Are There in Albania?" 2010. <http://answers.encyclopedia.com/question/rivers-there-albania-130466.html>

23 Encyclopædia Britannica. "Albania – Land – Drainage." 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-42617>

24 Inweb. "Internationally Shared Surface Water Bodies in the Balkan Region: Drin/Drim River Sub-basin." No date. http://www.inweb.gr/workshops/sub_basins/8_Drin.html

25 Control System Engineering. "Drin River Hydropower Plants: Introduction." August 2006. http://www.cse-engineer.com/My_Homepage_Files/Download/DrinCascade_HPP_monitoring.pdf

26 Museum of Learning. "Shkumbin River." 2010. http://www.museumstuff.com/learn/topics/Shkumbin_River

27 Museum of Learning. "Devoll River." 2010. http://www.museumstuff.com/learn/topics/Devoll_River

28 Museum of Learning. "Vijose River." 2010. http://www.museumstuff.com/learn/topics/Vijose_River

Part of the lake has been set aside as a large bird reserve that supports many species, including pelicans, herons, and seagulls.^{29, 30}

In southeastern Albania, Lake Ohrid lies along the mountainous border with Macedonia. It is one of the oldest lakes in Europe, and the deepest in the entire Balkans, at 286 m (938 ft). It is a relatively large lake, covering an area of 347 sq km (134 sq mi).^{31,32} Underground channels connect it to Lake Prespa, which lies at a higher elevation 10 km (6 mi) to the east. Lake Prespa shares territory with Greece as well as Albania and Macedonia. With an area of 274 sq km (106 sq mi), it is slightly smaller than Lake Ohrid.^{33,34} A few islands lie in Lake Prespa, one of them in Albanian territory, housing a monastery built in the 14th century.

Major Cities

Tirana (Tiranë)

Located in central Albania, Tirana is Albania's capital and largest and most vibrant city. It is also the political and cultural center of the nation, represented by institutions such as the Museum of National Culture, the National Library, and the National History Museum. Other cultural treasures in the capital city include the Theatre of Opera and Ballet, the Museum of Natural Sciences, the University of Tirana, and the Palace of Congresses.³⁵ Several monuments are found throughout the city, reflecting celebrated people or historical events. A statue of Skanderbeg, the Albanian national hero, stands in Skanderbeg Square in the city center. In downtown Tirana, the architecture is Italian, developed during the Mussolini era.³⁶ Adding to its cultural renown, since 1925 Tirana has been the world's main center of an order of dervishes known as Bektashis. Their name derives from a nationally famous 13th-century Sufi saint, Haji Bektash.³⁷



© Charles Roffey
Skanderbeg Square in Tirana

29 Encyclopædia Britannica. "Scutari, Lake." 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9066419>

30 Museum of Learning. "Lake Shkoder." 2010. http://www.museumstuff.com/learn/topics/Lake_Shkoder

31 Encyclopædia Britannica. "Ohrid, Lake." 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9056869>

32 Museum of Learning. "Lake Ohrid." 2010. http://www.museumstuff.com/learn/topics/Lake_Ohrid

33 Encyclopædia Britannica. "Prespa, Lake." 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9061295>

34 Museum of Learning. "Lake Prespa." 2010. http://www.museumstuff.com/learn/topics/Lake_Prespa

35 Encyclopædia Britannica. "Albania: Cultural Institutions." 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-276852>

36 Adria Travel. "Step Across the Border: Albania – Tirana." 2009. http://www.adriatravel.me/_english/Tirana.html

37 World Mayor. Swift, Nick. "The History of Tirana: A Fusion of Islamic and Christian Influences." 13 October 2008. http://www.worldmayor.com/worldmayor_2004/tirana_history.html

From the time of its founding in 1920, the city developed rapidly, changing even more during the 1990s after the communist regime fell. In the first five years of the 21st century, Tirana experienced a “civic rebirth.” The city government demolished many of the squatter structures created to accommodate the people who flooded into the city in the 1990s, building public spaces and housing in their place. Authorities planted thousands of trees and transformed the grim-looking buildings from the communist era by painting them in bright colors and remodeling them to add shops and cafes. These efforts have helped to expand tourism in the city.^{38,39}

Although Tirana is a relatively young city (founded in 1920), the area where it stands has been inhabited for centuries. Roman Emperor Justinian built a castle there in 520; it was restored in the 18th century. Land registration records for the site date back to 1431-32, when the Ottomans were in power. In 1614, a local feudal leader by the name of Sulejman Pasha established Tirana as an Ottoman city. Composed mainly of a business center and a mosque, it garnered trade from its location along caravan routes.⁴⁰

Durrës

Located 39 km (24 mi) almost due west of Tirana, Durrës is a port on the Adriatic Sea and Albania’s second largest city. It is a popular resort and hosts a number of cultural events that attract a sizable tourist population. Ferryboats docked in the harbor carry passengers across the Adriatic Sea to the Italian ports of Trieste, Bari, and Ancona.⁴¹



© Zachary Korb
Durrës Port

Durrës’ history is long and turbulent. Founded in 627 B.C.E, it is one of Albania’s oldest towns.⁴² Colonists from Corinth and Corcyra were the first to live there, followed by Illyrian kings. Both Macedonians and Romans occupied Durrës in the 3th and 4th centuries B.C.E., respectively. It was not until the period between the 7th and 12th centuries C.E. that Durrës became the most important seaport of the eastern Adriatic

38 The New York Times. Levathes, Louise. “Albania’s Capital Gets a New Coat.” 14 August 2005.

http://travel.nytimes.com/2005/08/14/travel/14surf.html?_r=2

39 Municipality of Tirana. Kramer, Jane. “Painting the Town: How Edi Rama Reinvented Albanian Politics.” 2010.

<http://www.tirana.gov.al/?cid=2,58,413>

40 Albanian Canadian League Information Service. “Tirana.” 3 September 2006. <http://albca.com/albania/tirana.html>

41 Albania.Shaqiperia.com. “Durrës.” 2007. <http://albania.shaqiperia.com/kat/m/shfaqart/aid/2217/Durres.html>

42 B.C.E.=Before the Common Era (corresponds to B.C.= Before Christ)

Sea.⁴³ The city was later ruled by Venice for 108 years, and then conquered by the Ottomans.⁴⁴

Elbasan

Located southeast of Tirana, Elbasan lies almost directly in the center of the country. It sits atop a fertile highland plain on the Shkumbin River's northern bank. Rail and road transportation link the city to Durrës and other cities. Elbasan is a trading center, thanks to not only its transportation outlets, but also its manufacturing enterprises and rich harvest of tobacco, olives, corn, and timber.⁴⁵ Unfortunately, widespread pollution of the soil occurred during the communist era, when industry was developed without concern for environmental impact. The World Bank and other organizations began working with Albania's environmental ministry in the early 2000s to clean up what could be "the worst case of poisoned soil in eastern Europe."⁴⁶

In ancient times, Elbasan was known as Skampa, a fortress town. It was a station on the Roman-constructed Via Egnatia highway, which connected vast distances from east to west on the Balkan Peninsula. Skampa was badly damaged during the Gothic migration, and rebuilt as a fortress during the Justinian era. In the early years of Ottoman rule of Albania, the town (now called Elbasan) was militarily important. Ottomans rebuilt the fortress (or castle) in 1466, and the city began its rise as a center of culture and commerce.^{47, 48}

Shkodër

Shkodër is in northwestern Albania, lying on the edge of a plain near the southern end of Lake Shkodër. It is the most important city in northern Albania and known for its cultural traditions. Writers and artists from this city are famed for their literature, painting, and music. Prior to World War II, Shkodër was the country's center of Roman Catholicism, with convents, a pontifical college, and Catholic libraries and publishing



© Christian Guthier
Castle and bridge in Shkodër

43 C.E.=Common Era (corresponds to A.D.=Anno Domini)

44 Albania Shaqiperia.com. "Durrës." 2007. <http://albania.shaqiperia.com/kat/m/shfaqart/aid/2217/Durres.html>

45 Encyclopædia Britannica. "Elbasan." 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9032234>

46 Guardian.co.uk. Brown, Paul. "Elbasan: From Market Garden to Dead Zone." 27 March 2004.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2004/mar/27/internationalnews.pollution>

47 AlbaniaLink. "Elbasan." 2005.

<http://www.albanialink.com/load.php?uVH=AlbaniaLinkWebSiteAboutAlbaniaInformationsAccessMapsCitiesToursShopMakingBlogsAndContactsAlbaniaLinkWebSite&l=2&r=3&sm=4&c=elbasan&smN=3&m=4>

48 Albania Shaqiperia.com. "Elbasan." 2007. <http://albania.shaqiperia.com/kat/m/shfaqart/aid/2265/Elbasan.html>

houses. Shkodër is also known for its historic trading bazaar, which lay at the convergence of routes from the Aegean Sea and Danube River.^{49, 50}

The most ancient town in Albania, Shkodër was built around a castle dating to as early as the 1st millennium B.C.E. According to historical records, the Illyrian king Gentius lived here when Romans captured the city in 168 B.C.E. Subsequent conquerors, including Byzantines, Serbs, Turks, and Venetians, held the city. After 1760, Shkodër briefly became independent before the Ottomans again asserted control.^{51, 52}

Vlorë

This port city, the country's second largest, is located in the southwest, on the shore of the Strait of Otranto (which separates the Adriatic and Ionian seas).⁵³ It is famous as Albania's first capital, and the site where Albania declared its independence in 1912. Today, Vlorë is a manufacturing city, export center, and destination point of an oil pipeline between Europe and the Caucasus. The city is also a tourist center, popular for its accessible beaches. The beaches lend themselves to illegal activity, as well. In the early 20th century, the city emerged as a center of smuggling and human trafficking, with the victims and goods loaded onto speedboats that traversed the Adriatic Sea at night. Many of the people transported were illegal immigrants. The Albanian government took steps to curb this activity in 2006, banning speedboat traffic until 2009.^{54,55}

Vlorë is another of Albania's ancient cities, founded as Aulon in the 6th century B.C.E. It became Illyria's main seaport at one time, famous for its olives, vineyards, and salt production. Similar to other Albanian cities, Vlorë was controlled through the years by Byzantines, Serbs, Normans, Venetians, and, of course, the Ottoman Empire.⁵⁶

Korçë

The main city located in Albania's southeastern region, Korçë sits on a plateau of fertile land encircled by mountains. The region is a major agricultural center for growing wheat as well as apples, grapes, and sugar



© rada2007 / flickr.com
The first Albanian school in Korçë

49 Encyclopædia Britannica. "Shkodër." 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9067454>

50 Albania Shaqiperia.com. "Shkodra." 2007. <http://albania.shaqiperia.com/kat/m/shfaqart/aid/2278/Shkodra.html>

51 Encyclopædia Britannica. "Shkodër." 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9067454>

52 Albania Shaqiperia.com. "Shkodra." 2007. <http://albania.shaqiperia.com/kat/m/shfaqart/aid/2278/Shkodra.html>

53 Encyclopædia Britannica. "Adriatic Sea." 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9003799>

54 ESI. "Vlora." 2010. http://www.esiweb.org/index.php?lang=en&id=298&city_ID=58

55 Balkan Insight. Likmeta, Besar. "Smuggling Hub to Real Estate Boom Town." 24 August 2009. <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/main/news/21779/>

56 ESI. "Vlora." 2010. http://www.esiweb.org/index.php?lang=en&id=298&city_ID=58

beets. In addition to its agricultural importance, Korçë is a food processing and industrial center, producing carpets and knitted clothing. The city has strong cultural traditions, having been a center of Byzantine Christianity, a unique center for music, and a site of Ottoman architecture. In addition, the country's first school that used Albanian as the medium of instruction opened in Korçë in 1887. Several museums are located here, including the Museum of Medieval Art and the Museum of Prehistory.^{57, 58}

Korçë originated in the 13th century as a feudal estate. The region was inhabited prior to that, however, with settlements dating 6,000 years. Ancient Illyrian tombs have been uncovered near the present city.^{59, 60}

History

Early History and Middle Ages

In ancient times, tribes of Illyrian and Thracian peoples settled the region now known Albania. They were later colonized by the Greeks, and for several centuries, the Romans.⁶¹ Part of the interior became an independent kingdom, which began to decline after the 3rd century C.E. The entire region came under Byzantium's control after the Roman Empire divided in 395. During this period of Byzantine rule, Serbs invaded northern Albania, and Bulgaria annexed southern Albania. Byzantine armies retook the southern portion of the country, while a succession of foreign powers dominated other areas. As the name "Albania" emerged, a national consciousness—based on a common language, land, and culture—coalesced between the 8th and 11th centuries. In spite of this growing sense of a shared identity, nearly the entire region came under Serb control during the 14th century. As Byzantine rule ended, Albanians began to migrate out of the country in massive numbers, many traveling to Greece and the islands of the Aegean Sea.^{62, 63, 64}

57 Albania Shaqiperia.com. "Korça." 2007. <http://albania.shaqiperia.com/kat/m/shfaqart/aid/2266.html>

58 Encyclopædia Britannica. "Korçë." 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9046055>

59 Albania Shaqiperia.com. "Korça." 2007. <http://albania.shaqiperia.com/kat/m/shfaqart/aid/2266.html>

60 Encyclopædia Britannica. "Korçë." 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9046055>

61 Albania, from Isolation toward Reform. Bléjer, Mario I, Mauro Mecagni, Ratna Sahay, Richard Hides, Barry Johnston, Piroška Nagy, and Roy Pepper. "Chapter 1: Introduction [p. 3]." 1992.

62 Encyclopedia.com. The Columbia Encyclopedia, Sixth Edition. "Albania: History – Historic Albania." 2008. <http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/Albania.aspx>

63 Encyclopædia Britannica. "Albania: History – The Byzantine Empire – From Illyria to Albania." 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-42644>

64 Encyclopædia Britannica. "Albania: History – The Byzantine Empire – The Decline of Byzantium." 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-42646>

Ottoman Rule

In the 15th century, Turkish forces began their conquest of Albanian territory, strategically winning support from the local population. The Ottoman Turks rewarded local rulers who fought well for them with titles (such as *pasha* and *bey*), positions of authority and autonomy, gifts of landed estates (*timars*)⁶⁵, and other favors. In this way, they gained local allies. Gjergj Kastrioti, the son of a native Albanian chieftain, joined forces with the Turks, who gave him the title *bey* in exchange for his service. In later years, however, Kastrioti changed sides and led the Albanians in a long struggle against the Turks. Known as Skanderbeg, he was memorialized as a national hero after he died in 1468.^{66, 67}



© Charles Roffey
Old Ottoman bridge at Mesi

The Ottoman Turks dominated Albania, establishing an inefficient and corrupt government. The country stagnated economically and socially over the four centuries of Ottoman rule (1385–1912).⁶⁸ Albania, cut off from the West due to Ottoman control, was denied the spread of humanistic knowledge and philosophy that marked the Renaissance.⁶⁹ Witnessing instead the destruction of their country's culture, art, and commerce, the Albanian people began to revolt. Those from the highlands had never been subjugated by the Ottoman Turks and strongly resisted foreign rule. Increasingly, they refused government mandates to pay taxes, give up arms, or volunteer for military service. Furthermore, many Albanians throughout the country opposed the Turkish rulers on religious grounds, defending Christianity over the Islamic faith represented by the Turks. At the same time, many Albanians converted to Islam to avoid paying the tax for refusing to do so.^{70, 71}

65 Encyclopædia Britannica. "Timar." 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9072500>

66 Encyclopedia.com. The Columbia Encyclopedia, Sixth Edition. "Albania: History – Ottoman Rule." 2008. <http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/Albania.aspx>

67 Encyclopædia Britannica. "Albania: History – The Byzantine Empire – The Decline of Byzantium." 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-42646>

68 U.S. Department of State. "Background Note: Albania: People and History." 14 June 2010. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/3235.htm>

69 The Renaissance, or "Rebirth," which took place in Europe at the end of the Middle Ages, was characterized by a revival of classical learning. During this period, commerce grew, new continents were explored, and inventions or substantial progress took place in printing, paper, and the mariner's compass. Source: Encyclopædia Britannica. "Renaissance." 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9063161>

70 Encyclopædia Britannica. "Albania: History – The Ottoman Empire – The Nature of Turkish Rule." 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-42648>

71 Encyclopedia.com. The Columbia Encyclopedia, Sixth Edition. "Albania: History – Ottoman Rule." 2008. <http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/Albania.aspx>

The Ottoman Empire began to decline in the 18th century despite its successes in dividing and absorbing local Albanians. As the empire's central authority weakened, *pashas* (powerful estate owners who had collaborated with the Ottoman government) increased their political power. Their control over the territory remained virtually unchecked until the Turkish sultan overthrew them and abolished the *timar* system of awarding landed estates in 1831. Subsequently, private landowners and tribal chieftains filled the vacuum created by the collapsing empire and gained regional power, hiring impoverished peasants as tenant farmers to work on their lands.⁷²

Albanian Nationalism, Independence, and Two World Wars

In 1878, the League of Prizren established a modern Albanian alphabet. This step was pivotal in promoting nationalism after the language had been suppressed for centuries. In this and other developments,⁷³ it was apparent by the early 1900s that the Ottoman Empire had lost its ability to contain Albanian nationalism. Declaring their independence after the first Balkan War (1912), Albanians fought to determine who would possess the territories of the Ottoman Empire. The second Balkan War (1913) resulted in Serbian occupation of Albania. Following World War I, Albania regained its independence with the help of President Woodrow Wilson. At the Congress of Lushnje, the American leader vetoed a European plan that would have dismembered Albania. In 1919, the League of Nations was organized with a Covenant establishing the power embodied in its member states.⁷⁴ Albania joined the League in late 1920.^{75, 76, 77}

Following World War I, the development of state forces in the region impacted Albania in several ways. When the war ended in 1918, a new monarchy formed in the Balkans with Serbia as its dominant power. The emergence of this state (renamed Yugoslavia in 1929⁷⁸) would continue to have repercussions for Albania. In the post-war years,

72 Encyclopædia Britannica. "Albania: History – The Ottoman Empire – The Nature of Turkish Rule." 2010.

<http://search.eb.com/eb/article-42648>

73 University of Michigan Library. Pahumi, Nevila. "The Consolidation of Albanian Nationalism: The League of Prizren 1878-1881 [p.10]." 2007. http://deepblue.lib.umich.edu/bitstream/2027.42/55462/1/pahumi_history_honors_thesis_2007.pdf

74 The League's objective was to prevent future aggression and to preserve the peace treaties established at the end of World War I. This aim was undermined when the U.S. Congress neglected to ratify the Treaty of Versailles, which included the League's Covenant. The League's mandates turned out to be unenforceable when, in the 1930s, Germany, Japan, and Italy undertook actions against other member nations. Source: Encyclopædia Britannica. "Nations, League of." 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9055027>

75 Encyclopædia Britannica. "Albania: History – Independent Albania – Creating the New State." 2010.

<http://search.eb.com/eb/article-42651>

76 U.S. Department of State. "Background Note: Albania: People and History." 14 June 2010.

<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/3235.htm>

77 Encyclopedia.com. The Columbia Encyclopedia, Sixth Edition. "Albania: History – National Independence." 2008.

<http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/Albania.aspx>

78 Encyclopædia Britannica. "Yugoslavia." 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9389170>

conservative landowners in Albania struggled for control against liberals influenced by the West. Ahmed Zogu, a conservative who had lost his bid for power, fled to the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (later Yugoslavia) and lined up forces to attack Albania. He succeeded in 1925, ruling Albania as King Zog and driving a wedge of mistrust between the two countries. Italy then exerted its power, invading Albania in 1939, driving King Zog into exile, and bringing Albania under its sphere of influence. The Italians established a puppet government in Albania that declared war on the Allies in 1940. However, leftist forces (partisans) in Albania opposed the Italian proxy and, under the leadership of Enver Hoxha, fought the occupying Axis powers.

At the same time, a civil war—between the partisans (communists) and rival, non-communist resistance groups—was fought in Albania from 1943–44. Aided with weaponry supplied by the United Kingdom, the partisans (who supported the Allies and opposed the Axis powers) were victorious.⁷⁹ Under Hoxha, the partisans formed a provisional government in 1944 after liberating Tirana. In 1945, a post-war side development emerged as a possible destabilizing force with implications for Albania and the region: Yugoslavia was reconstituted as a socialist nation. Its six republics were Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Slovenia, Macedonia, and Montenegro. The new nation also included the two Serbian independent provinces of Vojvodina and Kosovo, the latter populated mostly by Albanians.^{80,81, 82}

Modern Political History: Toward Democratic Government

Albania's initial close relations with Yugoslavia after World War II deteriorated quickly. Fearing that Yugoslavia would take it over,⁸³ Albania pulled away and became one of the U.S.S.R.'s satellite nations, heavily dependent on Soviet aid. In time, Hoxha became disillusioned with Khrushchev's de-Stalinization policies and rapprochement with Yugoslavia (1961). Albanian fear and opposition to these strategic actions by the Soviets eventually led to a break-up of the alliance. Now lacking allies, Albania aligned itself

79 Federal Research Division, U.S. Library of Congress. *Albania: A Country Study*. "Chapter 1: Historical Setting [p. 33]." 1992. Washington, D.C: U.S. Government Printing Office.

80 U.S. Department of State. "Background Note: Serbia – People and History." June 2009. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5388.htm>

81 Encyclopedia.com. *The Columbia Encyclopedia*, Sixth Ed. "Serbia: History – Turkish Rule." 2009.

<http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/Serbia.aspx>

82 BBC News. "Timeline: Break-up of Yugoslavia." 22 May 2006. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/4997380.stm>

83 Albania, from Isolation toward Reform. Bléjer, Mario I, Mauro Mecagni, Ratna Sahay, Richard Hides, Barry Johnston, Piroška Nagy, and Roy Pepper. "Chapter 1: Introduction [p. 5]." 1992. Washington, D.C: International Monetary Fund.

with China, from whom it received economic aid.^{84, 85} In 1977, Hoxha broke with China over the latter's rapprochement with the United States.⁸⁶

In 1982, the Albanian Communist First Secretary Ramiz Alia, became president of the nation, and two decades of historic change followed. After the death of Enver Hoxha in 1985, Alia began to reach out to Greece, Italy, and other European nations, to forge ties and promote trade. Alia also restored diplomatic relations with both the U.S. (1991) and the U.S.S.R. (1990). In another significant shift, the Albanian government approved future elections and an opposition party. Although the Communists won the election in 1991, Alia's cabinet was forced to resign over its failure to address the nation's substandard living conditions, high unemployment, and inflation. In 1992, Sali Berisha became the country's first democratically elected president, ending 47 years of Communist governance. In an attempt to reverse the nation's economic problems, Berisha moved Albania toward a free-market economy, but little improvement took place. In reforming some of Albania's political troubles, he oversaw the state's prosecution of Alia and other former government leaders for corruption.^{87, 88}

Turmoil continued as the country struggled toward democratic reform. In 1997, Albanians across the country revolted in response to the collapse of unscrupulous pyramid schemes that caused widespread bankruptcy. The government nearly foundered, and infrastructural damage caused by the rioters was severe.⁸⁹ Further chaos in the region resulted in 1999 when NATO attempted to stop Serbian aggression against the Kosovan Muslim population by bombing Yugoslavia.⁹⁰ Half a million ethnic Albanians living in

84 Albania, from Isolation toward Reform Bléjer, Mario I, Mauro Mecagni, Ratna Sahay, Richard Hides, Barry Johnston, Piroška Nagy, and Roy Pepper. "Chapter III: Economic Performance in the 1980s [p. 46]." 1992. Washington, D.C: International Monetary Fund.

85 Concerning Soviet rapprochement with Yugoslavia: Yugoslavia's leader, Tito, had broken with the U.S.S.R. after he refused to conform to Soviet leadership, and Yugoslavia was expelled from the Soviet Bloc, but it was later offered readmission.

86 Encyclopedia.com. The Columbia Encyclopedia, Sixth Edition. "Albania: History – Attempts at Democracy." 2008. <http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/Albania.aspx>

87 Encyclopedia.com. The Columbia Encyclopedia, Sixth Ed. "Albania: History – Attempts at Democracy." 2008. <http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/Albania.aspx>

88 BBC News. "Albania Country Profile." 6 May 2010. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/country_profiles/1004234.stm

89 Encyclopedia.com. The Columbia Encyclopedia, Sixth Ed. "Albania: History – Attempts at Democracy." 2008. <http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/Albania.aspx>

90 After the communist Yugoslav President Tito died in 1980, Yugoslavia began to fragment under nationalist pressures that led to wars of independence. In the late 1980s, Serbian leader Slobodan Milošević, rose to power, becoming head of Serbia's Communist Party in 1986 (Serbia was part of Yugoslavia at the time). He exploited Serbian nationalist sentiment, pushing for a "Greater Serbia" that would include Serbia and neighboring areas that were populated by Serbs, including Kosovo. Separatist movements emerged, with Slovenia and Croatia the first to declare their independence. They were followed by Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, and the Albanian-populated province of Kosovo, which began an armed resistance against Serbian rule in 1997. In 2003, the name Yugoslavia was changed to Serbia and Montenegro, and in 2006, Montenegro declared its independence. Kosovo announced its independence in

Kosovo fled to Albania.⁹¹ The wave of refugees created an enormous strain for the Albanian government, already trying to cope with Europe's weakest economy.⁹²

Albania achieved some measure of stability in 2002, after its political parties began working, more or less cooperatively, within the parliamentary system. Despite some improvement, however, Albania's election process failed to meet recent international standards. In the parliamentary elections of June 2009, the Socialist opposition party accused the incumbent government of fraud. Critics threatened anti-government activity if their demand for a recount was denied.^{93, 94} In the same year, Albania joined NATO and applied for membership in the European Union.^{95,96}

2008, and it has been recognized by over 60 nations including the U.S. Source: Encyclopedia.com. The Columbia Encyclopedia, Sixth Ed. "Serbia: Serbia within Yugoslavia." 2009. <http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/Serbia.aspx>

91 BBC News. "Albania Country Profile." 6 May 2010. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/country_profiles/1004234.stm

92 BBC News. "Analysis: The Impact on Albania." 30 March 1999. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/special_report/1998/kosovo2/308241.stm

93 AlbanianEconomy.com. "Albania Parties Struggle to Resolve Crisis." 24 March 2010. <http://www.albanianeconomy.com/news/2010/03/24/albania-parties-struggle-to-resolve-crisis/>

94 EurActiv.com. "EU Mediators Try to Save Albania from Political Chaos." 25 May 2010. <http://www.euractiv.com/en/enlargement/eu-mediators-try-save-albania-political-chaos-news-494387>

95 U.S. Department of State. "Background Note: Albania: People and History." 14 June 2010. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/3235.htm>

96 BBC News. "Albania Country Profile." 6 May 2010. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/country_profiles/1004234.stm

Economy

Overview

Albania ranks as one of Europe's most impoverished countries. Recent attempts to move toward a free market have not stimulated productivity much. For most of its history, Albania has been an agricultural society, producing enough for individual families' subsistence. There was little regional commerce due to a lack of roads and transportation, and farmers lacked incentives to produce crops they could sell and trade. In the 20th century, Albania had no industrial base until the Communists came to power in 1944 and imposed an economic model based on central planning and the elimination of private ownership. The government eliminated or strictly controlled foreign trade and investment as it nationalized property and fixed wages and prices.⁹⁷ Initially growing very slowly, the economy stagnated in the 1980s because of spent machinery, weak foreign trade, raw-material shortages, and adverse agricultural conditions. In the 1990s, it declined precipitously.⁹⁸ In 1992, the new Berisha government attempted to establish a market economy and lifted the harsh restrictions against private and foreign trade.⁹⁹



© Sam Joachim / flickr.com
Agricultural land in Rrogozhina

The nation's move toward privatization and its attempts to attract foreign investment have yielded some economic growth in the 21st century. The percentage of people living below the poverty line decreased from 25.4% in 2002 to 12.4% in 2008. However, the economic landscape remains bleak. Much of the difficulty in reforming Albania's economy can be traced to the country's large informal economy, estimated by the IMF to be 30–40% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP).¹⁰⁰ Unemployment remains generally high and foreign investment low.¹⁰¹

Industry, Trade, Agriculture, and Services

Industrial growth and reform in Albania have been slow, even though privatization and free market reforms have helped to improve output and efficiency.¹⁰² Still, only a small

97 Albania, from *Isolation toward Reform*. Bléjer, Mario I, Mauro Mecagni, Ratna Sahay, Richard Hides, Barry Johnston, Pirooska Nagy, and Roy Pepper. "Chapter 2: The Pre-Reform Economic System [p. 6]." 1992.

98 Albania, from *Isolation toward Reform*. Bléjer, Mario I, Mauro Mecagni, Ratna Sahay, Richard Hides, Barry Johnston, Pirooska Nagy, and Roy Pepper. "Chapter 2: The Pre-Reform Economic System [p. 11–12]." 1992.

99 U.S. Department of State. "Background Note: Albania: Economy." 14 June 2010. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/3235.htm>

100 U.S. Department of State. "Background Note: Albania: Economy." 14 June 2010. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/3235.htm>

101 BBC News. "Albania Country Profile." 6 May 2010. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/country_profiles/1004234.stm

102 BBC News. Hollingham, Richard. "Albania's Struggle with Privatisation." 19 May 2005.

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/from_our_own_correspondent/4560229.stm

percentage of the population is employed in manufacturing and mining industries, which generate approximately one tenth of the country's income.¹⁰³

Albania's trade deficit has been widening, reflecting the low competitive capability among enterprises in the country. Between 2007 and 2008, the rate of exports fell significantly.¹⁰⁴ Attempts to expand and diversify Albania's export base by generating foreign investment have not been successful, in general because of the weak business environment. Most of the country's exports (almost 56%) go to Italy. Albania imports around three times more than it exports, with most commodities coming from Italy. The country also imports goods from Greece, Turkey, Germany, China, and Russia.¹⁰⁵

While almost 60% of the people in Albania are employed in agriculture, this sector of the economy reflects a disproportionately small percentage of the GDP.¹⁰⁶ One positive outcome of the mid-1990s pyramid scheme failure was the innovative collaboration among a variety of entrepreneurs. These individuals and mid-sized firms formed an association to produce and market organic goods, including honey, olive oil, and teas. While signaling a positive turnaround in some parts of the economy, their progress has been impeded by a lack of infrastructure and transportation.¹⁰⁷ Mechanization has remained slow and raw materials in short supply, keeping the agricultural sector stalled in conditions that inhibit productivity.

Remittances (money sent back home) from Albanians working in foreign countries have played an important role in the national budget, helping to mitigate the nation's large trade deficit. According to recent figures, foreign remittances constitute approximately 15% of the GDP.¹⁰⁸ Most Albanians working abroad are employed in Italy and Greece.



© Skanderbeg Capital Group / flickr.com
Gjegjan Mining District

Although the service industry (hotels, restaurants, and trade) has remained weak, it has been growing in recent years, along with construction. Increased stability in the region

103 Encyclopædia Britannica. "Albania: Economy – Manufacturing." 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-42628>

104 US AID. Albania. "US AID: Competitiveness and Openness Solution to Albania's Widening Trade Deficit, Reduction in Remittances." 28 April 2009.

http://albania.usaid.gov/?fq=brenda&m=shfaqart&aid=310&kid=26&tit=USAID:_Competitiveness_and_Openness_Solution_to_Albania%C3%A2%E2%82%AC%E2%84%A2s_Widening_Trade_Deficit_Reduction_in_Remittances

105 CIA World Factbook. "Albania: Economy." 27 May 2010. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/al.html>

106 U.S. Department of State. "Background Note: Albania: Economy." 14 June 2010. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/3235.htm>

107 BBC News. "Albanian Entrepreneurs Eye World Markets." 18 April 2005. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/business/4350463.stm>

108 CIA World Factbook. "Albania: Economy." 27 May 2010. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/al.html>

contributed to a period of expansion in the tourism industry for Albania and the rest of the Balkans. When compared to figures for 2008, however, tourism has seen a relatively sharp decline in the recent global economic downturn.^{109, 110}

Energy and Natural Resources

Albania's energy production sector has been marked by shortages, largely due to the nation's dependence on hydropower. Near the end of the communist era, many hydroelectric power plants were built on the Drin River. More recently, a new thermal power plant was constructed at Vlorë, which has helped expand capacity. Aside from this power source, plans are in place to upgrade and repair transmission lines that connect Albania with Kosovo and Montenegro. This project, too, is expected to reduce shortages of energy.¹¹¹

Fossil fuel resources exist in Albania, but production is low, and Albania ranks 93rd compared to the rest of the world.¹¹² Most of its oil fields and natural gas are found in the southwestern region. Sizeable mineral deposits are located in the central and northeastern mountains. These include copper, iron-nickel, and chromium. In the 1980s, chromium production was significant, but production fell at the end of the communist era. Worn-out machinery and inadequate methods of recovery have since hampered mining production.¹¹³



© Revizionist / wikipedia.org
Macedonian girls in costumes

Ethnic Groups

Albanians comprise around 98% of the population in Albania.¹¹⁴ Of the remaining inhabitants, between 1% and 3% are Greek, and less than 2% are a combination of Macedonian, Vlach (Aromania), and Serb/Montengrin. A relatively small number of people



© Christian Guthier
Hydro power station at the Drin River

109 Balkan Travellers. "Tourism in Albania, Greece, Croatia and Turkey Hit by Global Turmoil." 9 September 2009. <http://www.balkantravellers.com/read/article/1455>

110 U.S. Department of State. "Background Note: Albania: Economy." 14 June 2010. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/3235.htm>

111 CIA World Factbook. "Albania: Economy." 27 May 2010. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/al.html>

112 CIA World Factbook. "Albania: Economy." 27 May 2010. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/al.html>

113 Encyclopædia Britannica. "Albania: Economy – Resources and Power." 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-42627>

114 U.S. Department of State. "Background Note: Albania." 30 June 2009. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/3235.htm>

in Albania identify themselves as Roma (Gypsy) and Bulgarian.^{115,116,117}

Albanian

As an ethnic group, Albanians are believed to be descended from the Illyrians, an ancient people of the western Balkans.¹¹⁸ It is believed that various tribes representing Illyrian culture appeared in what is now Albania in approximately 2000 B.C.E. In later centuries B.C.E., the more advanced Greek civilization reached the same region, influencing and stimulating greater development of Illyrian culture.^{119,120}



© Cuito Cuanavale
Albanian children in Durrës

According to some scholars, the Albanian language derives from the Illyrians. This relationship is disputed by those who claim that Thracian—an early Greek language—is a more likely source. Albanian, which uses a Roman script adopted in 1908, is the official language of the country. Before that time, publications were printed using Greek, Latin, and a mix of other alphabets.^{121, 122, 123}

The Shkumbin River serves as a rough divide between the two major dialects of Albanian: Gheg spoken north of the river, and Tosk to the south. The latter has been the country's official dialect since 1972 and is the medium of instruction in Albanian schools. Differences in the two dialects evolved during the cultural divide that began to place in the 5th and 6th centuries. At the time, Illyrian culture prevailed north of the Shkumbin and Greek to the south.^{124, 125, 126} Speakers of Gheg dominated politically in Albania until 1944, when the Communists took over. Known to be tribally organized and politically independent, Ghegs often opposed outside influence and authority (including that

115 CIA World Factbook. "Albania: People – Ethnic Groups." 27 May 2010. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/al.html>

116 U.S. Department of State. "Background Note: Albania." 30 June 2009. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/3235.htm>

117 Ethnologue. "Languages of Albania." 2010. http://www.ethnologue.com/show_country.asp?name=AL

118 The Illyrians were of non-Turkic, non-Slavic origin. Source: U.S. Department of State. "Background Note: Albania: People and History." 14 June 2010. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/3235.htm>

119 Encyclopædia Britannica. "Albania: History – Antiquity – The Illyrians." 2009. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-42640>

120 Encyclopædia Britannica. "Albania: History – Antiquity – The Greeks." 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-42641>

121 Encyclopædia Britannica. "Albania: People – Languages." 2009. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-42623>

122 Encyclopædia Britannica. "Albania: History – Antiquity – The Illyrians." 2009. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-42640>

123 Ethnologue. "Albanian, Tosk: A Language of Albania." 2009. http://www.ethnologue.com/show_language.asp?code=als

124 Museum of Learning. "Shkumbin River." 2010. http://www.museumstuff.com/learn/topics/Shkumbin_River

125 High Beam Research. "What Are the People of Albania Like?" 2010. <http://answers.encyclopedia.com/question/people-albania-like-130467.html>

126 Ethnologue. "Albanian, Tosk: A Language of Albania." 2009. http://www.ethnologue.com/show_language.asp?code=als

wielded by the central government). During Albania's communist era, the Gheg clan system faded, but its influence was still evident in the patriarchal family structure that remained. In southern Albania, where the territory was more accessible to outsiders, the Tosk culture and language had always been more influenced by foreigners. In this region of the country, Albania's communist movement received much of its support.¹²⁷

In addition to their home country, Albanians live in Muslim communities throughout the region. To the north in Kosovo (formerly part of Serbia), about 90% of the population is made up of Albanians. By comparison, the number of Albanians in Serbia is about 5% of the total population. In Montenegro, about 30% of the population is Albanian. To the east in Macedonia, official estimates put the number of ethnic Albanians at 23% of the population. To the south in Greece also reside about one million Albanians.



© Charles Roffey
Albanians in Cameria, Greece

Greek

Greeks are among several ethnic groups who historically have lived in Albania. Most Greeks in Albania have made their home in the southeast, where they are concentrated along the border with Greece.¹²⁸ Their population in Albania is relatively small. A few returned to Greece in 1990, when the border between the two countries was reopened.^{129,130} During Albania's communist years, Greeks faced linguistic and cultural discrimination in Albania. Use of their language and Greek names were restricted, and Albania's border with Greece was closed. The Albanian communists forced Greeks to relocate and assimilate. Since 1990, discrimination against the Greek population has lessened.¹³¹



Courtesy of Wikipedia
Group of Aromanians

Vlach (Aromanian)

Descended from the Thracians and Illyrians of past centuries, the Vlach people inhabit an area of southwestern Albania that extends into the interior of the country. They are also known as Aromanians because their language is similar to Romanian. Now integrated into Albanian society, Vlachs were formerly nomads who herded sheep as an occupation.

127 Encyclopædia Britannica. "Albania: People: Ethnic Groups." 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-276843>

128 Encyclopædia Britannica. "Albania: People: Ethnic Groups." 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-276843>

129 Ethnic Groups Worldwide: A Ready Reference Handbook. Levinson, David. "Albania [p. 8]." 1998.

130 Ethnologue, Languages of the World. "Greek." 2010. http://www.ethnologue.com/show_language.asp?code=ell

131 Ethnic Groups Worldwide: A Ready Reference Handbook. Levinson, David. "Albania [p. 8]." 1998.

Under Albanian communism, they were forced to quit their nomadic ways and live in settlements.^{132, 133}

Macedonian

Macedonians represent a small percentage of the Albanian population and live in groups along Albania's eastern border with Macedonia.^{134,135} Estimates of the total size of this group vary significantly, with the Albanian government claiming that little more than 4,000 ethnic Macedonians live in the country, compared with a figure of more than 200,000 claimed by at least one Macedonian rights group.^{136,137} In Albania, their language is also called Macedonian Slavic, or simply Slavic.¹³⁸ The nation of Macedonia did not exist until 1991, when Yugoslavia broke up. While in Albania there is little ethnic conflict between Albanians and Macedonians, significant discord exists between the two populations in Macedonia.¹³⁹

Self Study Questions

Albania's main rivers begin in the west and flow toward the east. True or False?

The Albanian capital of Tirana was founded centuries ago. True or False?

Albania stagnated politically and economically under Ottoman domination. True or False?

The U.S. helped Albania assert its independence. True or False?

The Hoxha regime's close bilateral ties with Yugoslavia lasted for decades. True or False?

¹³² Ethnic Groups Worldwide: A Ready Reference Handbook. Levinson, David. "Albania [p. 8]." 1998.

¹³³ Ethnologue. "Languages of Albania: Aromanian." 2010. http://www.ethnologue.com/show_country.asp?name=AL

¹³⁴ Ethnologue. "Languages of Albania: Macedonian." 2010. http://www.ethnologue.com/show_country.asp?name=AL

¹³⁵ Encyclopædia Britannica. "Albania: People: Ethnic Groups." 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-276843>

¹³⁶ Institute of Statistics, Republic of Albania. "Minorities in Albania [pp.10-11]." 23-27 May 2005.

http://www.osce.org/documents/eea/2005/05/14595_en.pdf

¹³⁷ HistoryofMacedonia.org. "The Macedonian Minority in Albania." 2003.

<http://www.historyofmacedonia.org/MacedonianMinorities/MacedonianMinorityinAlbania.html>

¹³⁸ Ethnologue. "Languages of Albania: Macedonian." 2010. http://www.ethnologue.com/show_country.asp?name=AL

¹³⁹ BalkanInsight.com. Marusic, Sinisa-Jakov. "Macedonia: Ohrid Accord is 'Only Alternative.'" 29 April 2010. <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/macedonia-ohrid-accord-is-only-alternative>

Religion

Overview

Approximately 70% of the Albanian people identify themselves as Muslim, either Sunni or Bektashi. Another 20% are Albanian Orthodox (a branch of the Eastern Orthodox Christian church), and 10% are Roman Catholic.^{140,141} Statistics are not current, however, and may be unreliable due to the former communist

government's interference with religious practices in the country over four decades.¹⁴² Furthermore, under the

Ottoman Empire, many Christian Albanians were pressured to convert to Islam.

Identifying as Muslim in public, many maintained their Christian beliefs in private. This pragmatic custom existed alongside wide acceptance of Albanian pagan beliefs. All these adaptations to Albania's social and political realities mixed together to become part of the spiritual landscape, enduring into the 20th century when all religions were banned.^{143,144}

Today, Albanians are considered largely secular in their beliefs and lifestyles, even when they identify with organized religions.¹⁴⁵



© Viktor Kaposi
Et'hem Bey Mosque, Tirana

Hoxha's Campaign against Religion

Stalinist leader, Enver Hoxha, saw religion as potentially divisive and campaigned against religious institutions in Albanian society. In 1945, the Agrarian Reform Law nationalized religious property and monastic estates. Authorities arrested and executed many clergy, expelling foreign Catholic priests and nuns from the country in 1946. Though representatives of organized religion were unwelcome in Albania, the nation's first communist constitution ironically guaranteed religious freedom. Three years later,

140 CIA World Factbook. "Albania: People: Religions." 27 May 2010. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/al.html>

141 U.S. Department of State. "Background Note: Albania: 14 June 2010. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/3235.htm>

142 CIA World Factbook. "Albania: People: Religions." 27 May 2010. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/al.html>

143 Federal Research Division, U.S. Library of Congress. Albania: A Country Study. "Chapter 2: Society and Its Environment: Religion: Before 1944 [p. 84]." 1992. Washington, D.C: U.S. Government Printing Office.

144 Ancient pagan beliefs have been particularly concentrated in the mountainous northern part of the country. Source: Vargmal. "Religion in Albania (or the Lack Thereof)." 2000–2010. <http://vargmal.org/dan1628>

145 Encyclopædia Britannica. "Albania: People: Religion." 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-42625>

government hostility against the clergy became official with the Decree on Religious Communities (1949), which placed the latter completely under state control.¹⁴⁶



In the 1950s, the Hoxha regime divided and controlled Muslims in the country, while intensifying its persecution of the Orthodox and Catholic faiths. It further divided the Sunni and Bektashi Islamic sects, purging the imams and eliminating opposition leaders. In addition, the government exacerbated tensions between the country's main religions by manipulating the Orthodox population into submission to government policies. The regime continued to malign the Roman Catholic Church, considered a political threat because of its ties to the Vatican. By extension, the Stalinist leadership branded Catholics as fascists, associating their religion with the capital of Italy and Mussolini's occupation of Albania during World War II. By 1967, at the peak of religious repression, all mosques and churches were under government control, and clergy of all faiths were in prison or dead. The 1976 constitution prohibited religious activity, and the 1977 penal code imposed prison sentences on those who promoted or practiced religion.¹⁴⁷

Restoration of Religion

Enver Hoxha's successor, Ramiz Alia, reacted to international criticism by adopting more tolerant policies with respect to religion. In 1988, clergy who had left the country were allowed to return to Albania. The government prohibition on religious practice ended in late 1990. At this time, the few mosques and churches that remained had been turned into cultural centers or other facilities. Many people in the country wanted to restore or rebuild them, and plans were drawn up to accomplish this goal.¹⁴⁸

Major Religions

Sunni Islam

The two primary Islamic sects in Albania today are Sunni and Bektashi. By the 18th century, Islam had become widely accepted in Albania, particularly by members of the

146 Federal Research Division, U.S. Library of Congress. Albania: A Country Study. "Chapter 2: Society and Its Environment: Religion [p. 82-87]." 1992. Washington, D.C: U.S. Government Printing Office.

147 Federal Research Division, U.S. Library of Congress. Albania: A Country Study. "Chapter 2: Society and Its Environment: Religion: Hoxha's Anti-religious Campaign [p. 85-87]." 1992. Washington, D.C: U.S. Government Printing Office.

148 Federal Research Division, U.S. Library of Congress. Albania: A Country Study. "Chapter 2: Society and Its Environment: Religion: The Revival of Religion [p. 87]." 1992. Washington, D.C: U.S. Government Printing Office.

elite classes. Before 1912, Sunni Muslims (located primarily in the cities) constituted about 50% of Albania's population.¹⁴⁹

Sunni is one of the world's two major branches of Islam (the other being Shi'a), and represents the majority of Islamic followers. Both Sunni and Shi'a Muslims believe that the Holy Quran (Koran) contains the words of Allah (God) revealed to the Prophet Muhammad.¹⁵⁰ To live life in accordance with Allah's intent, Muslims follow the Five Pillars of Islam.^{151,152} While both major branches of Islam are deeply connected to these basic beliefs, their differences are also profound. Their chief difference concerns the rightful succession after the death of the Prophet. The Sunnis believe that the first four caliphs who succeeded the Prophet Muhammad were his rightful heirs and that all successors should be chosen by consensus, based on merit and political abilities. In contrast, Shi'a Muslims believe that the Prophet's successors were hereditary, including Ali, his son-in-law, and Ali's descendants. These differences have led to civil war and deep divisions between the two branches over the centuries.^{153, 154}

Bektashi Islam

Bektashi, a Sufi order, has developed as a syncretic religion. Founded in the 13th century by the Iranian Islamic saint Hajji Bektash Wali, it gained followers in Turkey during the 16th century and spread to Albania and other regions of the Ottoman Balkans.¹⁵⁵ The order was originally part of the Sunni branch of Islam, but in the 16th century became more affiliated with Shi'a Islam. Known for their religious tolerance, the Bektashi in the Balkans also synthesized their religious beliefs with some tenets of Sufi mysticism and Christianity. They rose to prominence during the Ottoman Empire, dominating the elite military order known as Janissaries in the 15th century, later fading away after the Janissaries disbanded (1826). In



© Cliti / flickr.com
Bektashi Islam

149 Vargmal. "Religion in Albania (or the Lack Thereof): 1.2.3. Islam." 2000–2010. <http://vargmal.org/dan1628>

150 The Quran is distinct from the hadith, which are the sayings of Muhammad.

151 The Five Pillars of Islam include declaring and affirming one's faith, observing daily prayer, giving alms to charities, fasting and purifying oneself during Ramadan, and going on a pilgrimage at some point in one's life to the holy city of Mecca (if one is able to do so). Source: Islam 101. "Five Pillars of Islam." No date. <http://www.islam101.com/dawah/pillars.html>

152 Islam for Today. Amin, Hussein Abdulwaheed. "The Origins of the Sunni/Shia Split in Islam." No date. <http://www.islamfortoday.com/shia.htm>

153 Encyclopædia Britannica. "Albania: People: Religion." 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-42625>

154 Encyclopædia Britannica. "Sunnite." 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9070378>

155 Justice, Phyllis G. Holy People of the World: A Cross-Cultural Encyclopedia. "Bektash Wali, Haji [p. 113]." 2004. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, Inc.

1925, the Turkish ruler Kemal Ataturk prohibited Sufi religious orders from operating in the country and ordered all *tekkes* (Sufi places of worship) closed.^{156, 157, 158}

During this period of religious repression (early 1900s), the leaders of the Bektashi movement relocated to Albania, settling in remote areas of the country. They later appeared in urban areas. Since 1925, the city of Tirana has been the major center of the Bektashi dervishes, an order of religious ascetics.¹⁵⁹ After religion was banned in Albania, Bektashi followers spread throughout the Balkans and many went to the United States.

Albanian Orthodox Church

Associated with Eastern Orthodox Christianity, members of the Albanian Orthodox Church live primarily in southern Albania, the region where Tosk is the dominant dialect.^{160, 161} Roman rulers introduced Christianity to the territory that is now Albania in the first century C.E., after Roman forces conquered Illyrian settlements.

Orthodox Christianity quickly developed from the Roman influence, shaped by the culture of the surrounding region.^{162, 163}

Associated with the Eastern Roman Empire and its capital in Byzantium, the Orthodox Church separated from the Roman Catholic Church in Albania after the Schism of 1054.¹⁶⁴ (This event was predated by the split of the Roman Empire in 395). The Eastern Orthodox branch was so named because it lay within the jurisdiction of Constantinople and its Ecumenical Patriarch (the eastern equivalent of the Roman Catholic Pope).^{165, 166} During the years that the Albanian Orthodox Church was banned in



© Erik Stewart
Orthodox church in Berat

156 Encyclopædia Britannica. "Bektashi." 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9015166>

157 Center for Islamic Pluralism. Schwartz, Stephen. "Bektashi Sufis in the Albanian National Renaissance: The Universal Significance of the League of Prizren." 28 November 2009. <http://www.islamicpluralism.org/1425/bektashi-sufis-in-the-albanian-national>

158 InYourPocket. "The Bektashi Sect." 1995–2010. <http://www.inyourpocket.com/albania/tirana/The-Bektashi-sect-70140f?more=1>

159 World Mayor. Swift, Nick. "The History of Tirana: A Fusion of Islamic and Christian Influences." 13 October 2008.

http://www.worldmayor.com/worldmayor_2004/tirana_history.html

160 Encyclopædia Britannica. "Albania: People: Religion." 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-42625>

161 CNEWA, A Papal Agency for Humanitarian and Pastoral Support. "The Orthodox Church of Albania." 28 June 2007.

<http://www.cnewa.org/ecc-bodypg-us.aspx?eccpageID=25&indexview=toc>

162 Federal Research Division, U.S. Library of Congress. Albania: A Country Study. "Chapter 1: History: The Ancient Illyrians [pp. 4-7]." 1992. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.

163 Vargmal. "Religion in Albania (or the Lack Thereof): 1.2.2 Orthodoxy." 2000–2010. <http://vargmal.org/dan1628>

164 Encyclopædia Britannica. "Schism of 1054." 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9071657>

165 Federal Research Division, U.S. Library of Congress. Albania: A Country Study. "Chapter 2: Society and Its Environment: Religion: Before 1944 [p. 82]." 1992. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.

Albania (1960–89), it relocated to the American city of Boston, where it survived in exile. Here in the United States, the church’s Orthodox Mass was first spoken in Albanian, rather than in the Greek language used in Albania.^{167, 168}

Roman Catholicism

Albania’s Roman Catholic population is concentrated in the mountainous northern region, particularly in and around the city of Shkodër.¹⁶⁹ After the Schism of 1054, Albanian Christians in the north (the Gheg-speaking region north of the Shkumbin River) fell under the jurisdiction of the Pope in Rome.¹⁷⁰ The division in Albania between Catholics and members of the Eastern Orthodox Church (now the Albanian Orthodox Church in Albania) continued until the 14th century. At that time, the Ottomans invaded and brought Islam to the region; many Christians converted to the Islamic faith.¹⁷¹ Until the mid 17th century, Catholics resisted the pressure to change faiths, but the Ottoman government’s broad persecution of the holdouts wore down people’s resistance.¹⁷²



© Erik Stewart
Inside a Catholic church

The Role of Religion in the Government

Religion plays little role in the Albanian government today. The nation’s Constitution names no official state religion and upholds the freedom of religion. The government itself is secular. At the same time, it privileges the country’s main religions (Sunni, Bektashi, Catholic, and Orthodox Christian) by observing their holy days as national holidays. The higher social status and recognition that these primary religions enjoy is



© Jim Forest
Albanians at Orthodox ceremony

166 BBC. “Eastern Orthodox Church.” 11 June 2008.

http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/christianity/subdivisions/easternorthodox_1.shtml

167 Vargmal. “Religion in Albania (or the Lack Thereof): 1.2.2. Orthodoxy.” 2000–2010. <http://vargmal.org/dan1628>

168 CNEWA, A Papal Agency for Humanitarian and Pastoral Support. “The Orthodox Church of Albania.” 28 June 2007.

<http://www.cnewa.org/ecc-bodypg-us.aspx?eccpageID=25&indexview=toC>

169 Encyclopædia Britannica. “Albania: People: Religion.” 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-42625>

170 CNEWA, A Papal Agency for Humanitarian and Pastoral Support. “The Orthodox Church of Albania.” 28 June 2007.

<http://www.cnewa.org/ecc-bodypg-us.aspx?eccpageID=25&indexview=toC>

171 Federal Research Division, U.S. Library of Congress. Albania: A Country Study. “Chapter 2: Society and Its Environment: Religion: Before 1944 [p. 82].” 1992. Washington, D.C: U.S. Government Printing Office.

172 Vargmal. “Religion in Albania (or the Lack Thereof): 1.2.1. Catholicism.” 2000–2010. <http://vargmal.org/dan1628>

based on their long and stable presence in the country.¹⁷³

Religious groups do not have to register with the government unless they are seeking special status as nonprofit organizations. The latter confers benefits that can include tax-exempt status and the right to own property. If a religious organization is of foreign origin and needs government assistance, it must provide certain data requested by the government.¹⁷⁴

The constitution establishes that public schools in Albania are secular, and religion cannot be part of the curriculum.¹⁷⁵ The small number of official, religiously affiliated schools must maintain licensing with the Ministry of Education and design their curriculum to meet national standards of education.¹⁷⁶

Religion and Daily Life

In practice, the government has respected the Albanian people's right to practice the religion of their choice since the end of the Hoxha regime. Increasing numbers of Albanians attend church or mosque weekly, and many new places of worship have been built since the demise of the atheist state. In addition, a large number of foreign Muslim and Christian proselytizers have moved to Albania to spread their faiths. They have achieved varying degrees of success since many Albanians distrust practices that threaten the national tradition of religious moderation.¹⁷⁷



© Jim Forest
Albanian religious painting

Besides the increasing number of people who practice a religion, many Albanians follow no formal religion at all. They may have become accustomed to atheism and feel no need to change their worldview. Equally important, before state-sponsored atheism dominated Albania, the country embraced multiple faiths. People were used to being discreet about their religious practices, which sometimes included a blending of different faiths. Even today, they may not follow a single religion or prescriptive set of religious beliefs. Albanians have historically

173 Embassy of the United States, Tirana, Albania. "U.S. Department of State International Religious Freedom Report: Albania." 2009. http://tirana.usembassy.gov/09pr_1026.html

174 Embassy of the United States, Tirana, Albania. "U.S. Department of State International Religious Freedom Report: Albania." 2009. http://tirana.usembassy.gov/09pr_1026.html

175 Vargmal. "Religion in Albania (or the Lack Thereof): 2. Current Status of Religious Freedom." 2000–2010. <http://vargmal.org/dan1628>

176 Embassy of the United States, Tirana, Albania. "U.S. Department of State International Religious Freedom Report: Albania." 2009. http://tirana.usembassy.gov/09pr_1026.html

177 Chicago Tribune. "Albania Finds Religion After Decades of Atheism." 18 April 2007. http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2007-04-18/news/0704170802_1_albanians-foreigners-religion

practiced religious tolerance alongside nationalism, identifying themselves as Albanian first, before religious affiliation.^{178, 179, 180}

Religious Events and Holidays

The government recognizes several religious holidays in Albania as national holidays. These include: Christmas Day, Orthodox Christmas, Good Friday, Easter Monday, Orthodox Easter, Lesser Bairam (Eid al-Fitr, or End of Ramadan), and Greater Bairam (Eid al-Adha, or Feast of the Sacrifice). In addition, the beatification of Mother Teresa (Mother Teresa Day) takes place in October. On these days, only certain stores and institutions remain open for business.¹⁸¹

Brief descriptions follow regarding Albania's important religious holidays, along with the approximate dates on which they fall in 2010. Islamic holidays follow the lunar calendar so their dates change yearly.

Christmas Day (25 December)

Christmas day, the Christian holiday that celebrates the birth of Christ, is a time for close family members to celebrate together. In Albania, participants typically decorate a Christmas tree, exchange gifts with friends and family, and share a feast that often includes stuffed turkey, and rich deserts such as baklava. On the evening of 24 December, families often follow the tradition of attending Midnight Mass.¹⁸²



© Cili / flickr.com
Christmas Tree in Tirana

Orthodox Christmas (6 January)

Celebrated in Eastern and Central Europe, Orthodox Christmas falls at the end of the first week of January on the Gregorian calendar. Usually preceded by a fast that commences in November, it is a time for self-restraint and reflection on inner healing. Orthodox Christmas focuses on family togetherness and spiritual insight rather than the commercial frenzy and materialism of gift giving

178 Chicago Tribune. "Albania Finds Religion After Decades of Atheism." 18 April 2007. http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2007-04-18/news/0704170802_1_albanians-foreigners-religion

179 Vargmal. "Religion in Albania (or the Lack Thereof)." 2000–2010. <http://vargmal.org/dan1628>

180 Embassy of the United States, Tirana, Albania. "U.S. Department of State International Religious Freedom Report: Albania: Section I. Religious Demography." 2009. http://tirana.usembassy.gov/09pr_1026.html

181 World Travel Guide. "Albania Public Holidays." 2010. http://www.worldtravelguide.net/country/4/public_holidays/Europe/Albania.html

182 The Holiday Spot. "Christmas in Albania." No date. <http://www.theholidayspot.com/christmas/worldxmas/albania.htm>

associated with Christian practices in the West. On Christmas Day, families in Albania celebrate by attending church and enjoying a feast in their homes.^{183, 184}

Good Friday and Easter Monday (2 April and 5 April)

In keeping with Christian tradition, the Friday before Easter, known as Good Friday, is a day that Catholics, and some other Christian denominations, fast, or limit their eating. It is also customary on this day for Catholics to abstain from eating meat. Worshippers may attend either or both services—Holy Saturday and Easter Vigil or Easter Sunday—which commemorate the resurrection of Christ. Easter Sunday is a national holiday, observed on the following Monday.

Orthodox Easter (5 April)

Orthodox Easter is the “supreme festival of the year” among Christians in the East (as opposed to Christmas, which ranks more highly in the West).¹⁸⁵ Similar to Orthodox Christmas, Orthodox Easter is a deeply spiritual day, preceded by fasting. In many countries throughout the Balkans region, including Albania (which incorporates many Greek Orthodox traditions), Orthodox families attend church on Sunday. After the service, the parish priest is asked to bless prepared colored eggs, which symbolize rebirth. Family members then share formal dinners together, breaking their fast with a number of specially prepared meat dishes and other foods such as Mayeritsa, a Greek Easter soup, and baklava.¹⁸⁶



© Jim Forest
Easter eggs

Lesser Bairam (Eid al-Fitr) (11 September)

Also a national holiday, Eid al-Fitr is a religious festival that celebrates the end of fasting during the holy month of Ramadan. In the celebration, Albanian Muslims visit each other's homes, exchange gifts, give charity to the poor, and visit the gravesites of

183 BBC. “Eastern Orthodox Church: Calendar and Christmas.” 11 June 2008.

http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/christianity/subdivisions/easternorthodox_1.shtml#h6

184 Central Europe Review (CER), Vol. 3, No. 2. Požun, Brian J. “Orthodox Christmas: Conflicts and Celebrations.” 15 January 2001.

<http://www.ce-review.org/01/2/pozun2.html>

185 BBC. “Eastern Orthodox Church: Calendar and Christmas.” 11 June 2008.

http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/christianity/subdivisions/easternorthodox_1.shtml#h6

186 Holidays of the World Cookbook for Students. Webb, Lois Sinaiko. “Greece, Albania [pp. 75-76].”

deceased relatives. Children dress in brightly colored clothing and families gather for a special meal.^{187, 188}

The lunar month of Ramadan honors the time when Allah revealed the Quran to Muhammad. During Ramadan (concluded by Eid al-Fitr), Muslim adults are obligated to purify themselves spiritually by fasting and abstaining from food and drink from dawn to sunset. In this practice, they dedicate themselves to prayer and spiritual improvement. Only the infirm, soldiers on duty, and the young are exempted from the fast. During Ramadan, families hear the call for prayer at each sunset and gather for the evening meal. Before dawn the following day they eat a small meal before resuming their daily fast.^{189, 190}

Mother Teresa Day (19 October)

The national holiday known as Mother Teresa Day honors its namesake, Agnesë Gonxhe Bojaxhiu. Mother Teresa was born in Albania and rose to prominence as a Catholic nun who ministered to the poor in India. She changed her name to Teresa after the patron saint of missionaries, Thérèse de Lisieux, and in 1950, she founded the Missionaries of Charity in Calcutta, India. For more than 45 years, she worked with them to serve the destitute, the orphaned, the sick, and the dying. In 1979, she won the Nobel Peace Prize. Mother Teresa died in 1997, and the Catholic Church beatified her, bestowing upon her the title of “Blessed” (a step in the process of canonization),¹⁹¹ on 19 October 2003. Catholics in Albania customarily attend Mass on this holiday.¹⁹²



Greater Bairam (Eid al-Adha) (17 November)

Eid al-Adha, also known as Feast of the Sacrifice, is a national holiday in Albania and another of the country’s major Islamic festivals. It is celebrated approximately two months after Eid al-Fitr, or the end of Ramadan. It also occurs at the end of the annual Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca (the Hajj), for those who were able to travel there. Eid al-

187 The CurrentAffairs.com. “Eid al Fitr Celebrations Around The World.” 20 September 2009. <http://thecurrentaffairs.com/eid-al-fitr-celebrations-around-the-world.html>

188 Religion Facts. “Eid Al-Fitr.” 2004–05. <http://www.religionfacts.com/islam/holidays/fitr.htm>

189 Religion Facts. “Ramadan.” 2004–09. <http://www.religionfacts.com/islam/holidays/ramadan.htm>

190 Muslim Student Association, Colorado State University. “Islamic Holidays and Observances.” 2002. <http://www.colostate.edu/orgs/MSA/events/Ramadan.html>

191 Encyclopædia Britannica. “Canonization.” 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9020031>

192 AGlobalWorld.com. “Albania Rejoices Mother Teresa Day.” No date. <http://aglobalworld.com/holidays-around-the-world/albania-mother-teresa-day/>

Adha commemorates Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son in obedience to Allah. In recognition of this event, families sacrifice a sheep, goat, camel, or cow. They divide the meat among themselves and share it with the poor, including servants, beggars, and residents of orphanages.¹⁹³

Buildings of Worship

According to statistics that Albanian religious communities have provided, there are over 1,000 churches and 600 mosques throughout the country. These include approximately 690 Catholic churches, 570 mosques, 425 Orthodox churches, and 70 Bektashi *tekkes* (structures where Sufi worshippers congregate).¹⁹⁴ Foreign sources have funded many of these mosques and churches, several of which remain closed due to lack of staff or low interest among the Albanian people.



In addition to property currently held, each of the four main religious communities in Albania has unresolved property claims with the state dating back to the communist era. In some cases, the government returned the buildings but kept the surrounding land because individuals or entities were using it for their own purposes. Although the communist government kept records of confiscated property, bureaucratic obstacles continue to block its return.¹⁹⁵

Churches and Mosques

Several historical churches and mosques are located in Tirana. Some of the nation's most highly rated artisans built the Mosque of Ethem Beu there. Its construction began in 1789 and ended in 1821. A clock tower was later added with money provided by the wealthiest families in Tirana. In 1780, the Orthodox Church of Saint Prokop was constructed in Tirana, followed by the Catholic Church of Saint Maria in 1864. The latter was funded by the Austro-Hungarian Emperor Francis Joseph.¹⁹⁶



193 Religion Facts. "Eid Al-Adha: Festival of the Sacrifice." 2004–2009. <http://www.religionfacts.com/islam/holidays/adha.htm>

194 Vargmal. "Religion in Albania (or the Lack Thereof): 2.3 Places of Worship." 2000–2010. <http://vargmal.org/dan1628>

195 U.S. Department of State. "Albania: International Religious Freedom Report 2007: Restrictions on Religious Freedom." 2007. <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2007/90160.htm>

196 World Mayor. Swift, Nick. "The History of Tirana, a Fusion of Islamic and Christian Influences." 13 October 2008. http://www.worldmayor.com/worldmayor_2004/tirana_history.html

Bektashi Tekkes

Bektashi *tekkes*, or centers of worship, take different forms, depending on whether they are located in the city or countryside. At the Bektashi headquarters in Tirana, the *tekke* is an elegant structure that lies near the center of the city and is open to visitors. In the countryside, *tekkes* are often stone buildings encircling a courtyard with a gated entry, and surrounded by land owned by the order. One such Bektashi *tekke*, located in the southern Albanian city of Gjirokastra, was reportedly built in the 18th century. It includes tombs of important historical Bektashi leaders, a lodge where the dervishes stay (including an area for women in the order), and an administrative office. Several items adorn the premises, such as historical photos, framed documents written in calligraphy, statues, and images. The *tekke* was converted into a factory during the communist era and later restored.^{197, 198}

Albanian Orthodox Churches

Orthodox churches in Albania (and throughout the world) are typically structures built with one or more domes, which symbolize heaven and earth. In Albania, they are often made of stone. Just past the door, one would find a circular or rectangular entry vestibule, where an urn has been placed to hold candles. Worshippers who enter the church can light a candle, used to venerate various icons or religious images. The people then gather in an area known as the “nave” to participate in the service. Frescoes depicting Biblical teachings and paintings of religious figures adorn church walls and interior screens.^{199, 200} Albanian Orthodox churches reflect their unique architecture.^{201, 202, 203, 204}

197 Bektashi.net. Nirmala, Tirath Singh. “A Nirmala Among Bektashis.” 21 February 2007. <http://www.bektashi.net/tekkes-gjirokaster.html>

198 InYourPocket. “The Bektashi Sect: Tekkes in and Around Tirana.” 1995–2010. <http://www.inyourpocket.com/albania/tirana/The-Bektashi-sect-70140f?more=1>

199 Hart, Aidan. “Some Principles of Orthodox Church Architecture.” 12 June 2006. http://www.hexaameron.org/newsletter/pdf/ss_07_hart.pdf

200 St George Greek Orthodox Church. “Consecration of St. George Greek Orthodox Church.” 21 June 2010. <http://www.stgeorgedowney.org/churchdesign.html>

201 Wikimedia Commons. “File: Kisha e Lindjes së Krishtit në Shkodër.jpg.” 2009.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Kisha_e_Lindjes_s%C3%AB_Krishtit_n%C3%AB_Shkod%C3%ABr.jpg

202 Wikimedia Commons. “File: Church in Pogradec.jpg.” 2006. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Church_in_Pogradec.jpg

203 Wikimedia Commons. “File: Church in Korçë.jpg.” 2009. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Church_in_Korçë.jpg

204 Wikimedia Commons. “File: Labova e Kryqit3.jpg.” 2006. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Labova_e_Kryqit3.jpg

Behavior in Places of Worship

Mosques and the images and objects they contain are sacred to many Albanians and should be approached quietly and with respect. They represent not only Albania's religious legacy, but also much of the Albanian people's cultural identification.



© olli / Flickr.com
Bektashi worship area interior

It is advisable to ask permission before entering a mosque.

Exchange 1: May I enter the mosque?

Visitor:	May I enter the mosque?	a moond te hue ne jaamee?
Local:	Yes.	po

Visitors are expected to dress conservatively when entering religious sites. Whether in mosques or churches in Albania, visitors should wear clothing that is clean and neat. Shorts and mini-skirts are not appropriate, regardless of the circumstances. An approved dress code includes shirts and long pants for men and skirts or pants along with blouses or sweaters for women, all loose fitting. Skirts should not be shorter than knee length.

Exchange 2: What should I wear in the mosque?

Visitor:	What should I wear in the mosque?	chfaar doohet te veshey ne jaamee?
Local:	Nice clothes.	doohet te veeshesh meer

It is important to note that it is customary for a woman to cover her head with a scarf before entering a mosque. Both men and women should remove their shoes before they step inside.

In an Orthodox church, visitors will find it necessary to remove their hats before entering, and once inside the church, refrain from touching paintings or statues. Although men and women can both enter churches and worship together, women are not allowed to walk

into the altar space behind the wall that holds religious icons and paintings. All visitors should keep their voices low and refrain from making remarks that could disturb others.

Times of prayer vary, depending on the customs of individual mosques and churches. If a service is taking place when visitors enter, they should quietly observe and not walk around.

Exchange 3: How many times a day do you pray?

Visitor:	How many times a day do you pray?	saa her ne deet faalenee?
Local:	We do prayers five times.	ney faalemee pes her

In general, visitors to any mosque or building of worship need to be aware of the protocol being observed by local people. Visitors should not bring food or drink into a mosque, church, or monastery, and should refrain from taking photographs inside or outside the building unless they have permission.

Self Study Questions

Enver Hoxha, Albania’s Stalinist leader, viewed religion as potentially divisive. True or False?

The national ban on religious practices in Albania lasted until Ramiz Alia came to power. True or False?

Today, Albanians are considered largely secular in their beliefs and lifestyle. True or False?

The majority of Albanians is Catholic. True or False?

Mother Teresa Day is a national holiday in Albania. True or False?

Traditions

Honor and Values

One of the Balkan Peninsula's oldest countries, Albania has long been populated by two ethnic groups: the tribal Ghegs in the north and the semi-feudal Tosks in the south. Through the centuries, these two groups have reflected divergent social values. At the same time, they share a cultural pride, independence of spirit, and strong family ties that characterize the entire population. Because the Ghegs and the Tosks never unified around religion, language, or empire, they did not develop a sense of national identity that would have bound them together more cohesively.^{205, 206, 207}

Many of the differing mores and cultural values between northerners and southerners resulted from social and political developments. Descended from the Illyrians, the northern Ghegs valued intense loyalty to the tribe and its male clan leader as well as tribal independence and honor of the family. The Ghegs followed a strong patriarchal system that governed domestic life: childrearing, marriage, the status of women and male-female relations. In contrast, the Tosks, more affected by contact with foreign cultures, followed more liberal or egalitarian religious or civil customs. To the extent that they were assimilated into the culture of the Ottoman Empire, the Tosks were separated from one another in ways that influenced the growth of their heritage culture. For example, the use of Latin and Greek for business and religious purposes impeded the development of an Albanian national literature. Ottoman rule was a major force that diminished the development of a national consciousness. By contrast, the Ghegs of the north remained largely independent of the Ottomans, free to follow their own localized traditions. These regional differences inhibited a sense of national identity in Albania in different ways and stifled the political will for national unity until the 20th century.^{208, 209}

205 Federal Research Division, U.S. Library of Congress. *Albania: A Country Study*. "Chapter 2: The Society and Its Environment: Traditional Social Patterns and Values [p. 74-77]." 1992. Washington, D.C: U.S. Government Printing Office.

206 *The Albanians: An Ethnic History from Prehistoric Times to the Present*. Jacques, Edwin E. "Introduction: Who Are the Albanians [pp. xii-xiii]" 1995.

207 CultureGrams. "Republic of Albania: General Attitudes." 2010.

http://online.culturegrams.com/world/world_country_sections.php?contid=5&wmn=Europe&cid=2&cn=Albania&sname=General_Atitudes&snid=6

208 Federal Research Division, U.S. Library of Congress. *Albania: A Country Study*. "Chapter 2: The Society and Its Environment: Traditional Social Patterns and Values [p. 74-77]." 1992. Washington, D.C: U.S. Government Printing Office.

209 Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. "The Development of Albanian Nationalism." 23 March 2005.

http://www.wilsoncenter.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=events.event_summary&event_id=109275

Blood Feuds

The custom of expressing tribal honor through blood feuds, which developed in rural northern Albania, is still visible there. Feuds (vendettas) that might date back decades can have implications in the present: members of feuding families are sometimes killed in retribution for past crimes of their relatives. In one instance, a man received a 15-year prison sentence for the crime of murder. Yet, after his release from prison, his family was forced to go into hiding, largely due to customary law spelled out in the ancient code, or “Kanun.” This code stipulates that the family of the victim who was killed can invoke its “right to take revenge on any male adult” in the extended family of the man who committed the crime.²¹⁰ This right is based on the cultural ideal that “Blood is avenged with blood.”^{211,212}

During the communist rule of Enver Hoxha, blood feuds were outlawed; they resurfaced, however, after his regime ended. The National Reconciliation Committee (NRC), a non-governmental mediation group for warring families, has since tried to reduce the incidence of blood feuds in Albanian society. The NRC estimates that across the nation, thousands of families are involved in such feuds, resulting in the confinement of about 800 children to the relative safety of their homes. (According to the Kanun, those persons exacting revenge may not enter the property of a person implicated.)^{213,214}

210 BBC News. Lanchin, Mike. “Albania’s Young Blood Feud ‘Hostages.’” 18 November 2008.

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/7727658.stm>

211 BBC News. Mortimer, Majlinda, and Anca Toader. “Blood Feuds Blight Albanian Lives.” 23 September 2005.

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/4273020.stm>

212 CultureGrams. “Republic of Albania: General Attitudes.” 2010.

http://online.culturegrams.com/world/world_country_sections.php?contid=5&wmn=Europe&cid=2&cn=Albania&sname=General_Atitudes&snid=6

213 BBC News. Lanchin, Mike. “Albania’s Young Blood Feud ‘Hostages.’” 18 November 2008.

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/7727658.stm>

214 BBC News. Mortimer, Majlinda, and Anca Toader. “Blood Feuds Blight Albanian Lives.” 23 September 2005.

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/4273020.stm>

Communication, Greetings, and Codes of Conduct

For many years, foreigners did not travel to Albania. A major outcome of such isolation was the deep entrenchment of Albanian traditions and customs. Nowadays, local people are often curious about the outside world and tend to welcome visitors to their country. They might initiate random conversation with foreign visitors, for example, when riding a bus or in other public settings. Alongside their own language or dialect, Albanians often converse in other languages, including English (especially among young people), Italian, French, and Greek (mainly in the south).²¹⁵



© Zsuzsanna Fomaneck
Sharing coffee

Foreign male visitors can greet Albanian men with a verbal exchange and an offer to shake hands, while looking directly into the other person's eyes. Direct eye contact is important to Albanians, regardless of age and gender. It is considered a sign of respect and sincerity.^{216, 217}

Exchange 4: Good afternoon.

Visitor:	Good afternoon.	meeredeeta
Local:	Good afternoon.	meeredeeta

When greeting Albanian women, foreigners should offer a light handshake. Albanian friends and family members may hug or kiss each other lightly on the cheek when they meet. Such expressions, however, are not appropriate for visitors to the culture.²¹⁸ The spoken greeting that accompanies a handshake varies. If meeting local people, it is appropriate to smile and say “Good afternoon,” “Good morning,” or “How are you?”

215 The Bradt Travel Guide. Gloyer, Gillian. .Albania. “Chapter 2: Practical Information [pp. 44, 47].” 2008.

216 Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada. Centre for Intercultural Learning. “Albania: Country Facts: Cultural Information – Communication Styles.” 2009. <http://www.intercultures.ca/cil-cai/ci-ic-eng.asp?iso=al>

217 Culture Crossing. “Albania: Eye Contact.” 2010.

http://www.culturecrossing.net/basics_business_student_details.php?Id=7&CID=2

218 Culture Crossing. “Albania: Greetings.” 2010. http://www.culturecrossing.net/basics_business_student_details.php?Id=7&CID=2

Exchange 5: How are you?

Visitor:	How are you?	see yeh?
Local:	Good.	meer

When meeting someone for the first time, it is best to use formal address (“Mr.,” “Mrs.,” or professional titles such as “Dr.”). Avoid first names unless invited to use them. After a relationship has developed, it is common practice to use first names.²¹⁹

Exchange 6: Hello, Mr. Saiti.

Visitor:	Hello, Mr. Saiti.	toondjaatyeyta, zotree saa-eetey
Local:	Hello!	toondjaatyeyta!
Visitor:	How are you?	see yenee?
Local:	Very good.	shooma meer

When Albanian family members address each other, they use kinship terms, such as *teze* (aunt, or mother’s sister) or *xhaxha* (uncle, or father’s brother). Sometimes unrelated people will refer to each other as *nene* (meaning “mother,” used for an older woman) or *xhaxha* (used for an older man).²²⁰

Topics of conversation can include general inquiries about family, work, Albanian cultural values, or the visitor’s own background. Providing details about personal

219 Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada. Centre for Intercultural Learning. “Albania: Country Facts: Cultural Information – Dress, Punctuality & Formality.” 2009. <http://www.intercultures.ca/cil-cai/ci-ic-eng.asp?iso=al>

220 CultureGrams. “Republic of Albania: Greetings.” 2010.

http://online.culturegrams.com/world/world_country_sections.php?contid=5&wmn=Europe&cid=2&cn=Albania&sname=Greetings&snid=8

relationships is unnecessary and such information might not be well received. Attempts by foreign guests to discuss regional conflicts are also typically unwelcome.

Exchange 7: How is your family?

Visitor:	How is your family?	see ee kenee ngaa shtepeeya?
Local:	Very good.	shoom meer

Communication can be enhanced by noting that Albanians take great pride in their nation, values, and traditions. A visitor who knows something about Albanian history, and is openly willing to learn more, will earn respect for expressing this attitude. As a rule, Albanians appreciate visitors’ attempts to speak their language. Reaching out in this way demonstrates a desire to understand and communicate with local people and is likely to inspire cooperation among all parties.²²¹

A wise practice when greeting or conversing with Albanians is to remain open-minded and friendly, keeping the conversation light and steering away from controversy. It helps to be well informed about current events and to offer opinions only when asked. Albanians may speak very directly regarding some issues (to a degree that might be considered intrusive, according to U.S.-American social conventions), yet avoid other topics altogether, particularly bad news. Finally, it is rare to see Albanians expressing anger or making loud emotional statements in public. Visitors, as well, are advised to keep their demeanor calm and measured.^{222, 223}

Non-verbal communication is similar in some ways to that found in mainstream U.S. culture. Personal space (the distance people leave between themselves when conversing) is about the same. Albanians often touch each other on the arm or hand while speaking, but they tend to be more restrained with strangers. One difference between U.S. and Albanian cultures is the direction of head gestures when signaling “yes” or “no.” Albanians shake the head from right to left for “yes” and nod up and down to mean “no.”

221 Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada. Centre for Intercultural Learning. “Albania: Country Facts: Cultural Information - Conversations.” 2009. <http://www.intercultures.ca/cil-cai/ci-ic-eng.asp?iso=al>

222 Culture Crossing. “Albania: Communication Style.” 2010. http://www.culturecrossing.net/basics_business_student_details.php?Id=8&CID=2

223 Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada. Centre for Intercultural Learning. “Cultural Information – Display of Emotion.” October 2009. <http://www.intercultures.ca/cil-cai/ci-ic-eng.asp?iso=al>

This is particularly true in certain parts of the country.^{224, 225, 226} In Tirana and areas where Albanians have interacted more frequently with foreign visitors, they may use head signals they have learned from visitors (nodding for “yes,” shaking the head for “no”). For this reason, it may be necessary to ask what the signal means.²²⁷

Hospitality and Gift-Giving

If invited to dinner, lunch, or a party at an Albanian person’s home, guests should be aware of a few protocols. Regarding time, Albanians value punctuality, yet they frequently do not arrive on time for events. Given this mixed message, it is advisable for a foreign guest to err on the side of caution and arrive on time or maybe just a few minutes late.²²⁸ In addition, any guest invited to dinner should dress appropriately in clean, conservative clothing. Usually the host will ask them to remove their shoes at the door and will provide a pair of slippers to wear inside the house.²²⁹



© Robert Nagle
Albanian Family

Gratitude for being welcomed into someone’s home is always appropriate.

Exchange 8: Thank you for your hospitality.

Guest:	Thank you for your hospitality.	faleymeenderit per meekpreetyen toowaay
Host:	Don’t mention it. Thanks for coming.	aazdjeh. faleymeenderit che erdhet

224 Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada. Centre for Intercultural Learning. “Albania: Country Facts: Cultural Information – Communication Styles.” 2009. <http://www.intercultures.ca/cil-cai/ci-ic-eng.asp?iso=al>

225 Culture Crossing. “Albania: Personal Space & Touching.” 2010. http://www.culturecrossing.net/basics_business_student_details.php?Id=9&CID=2

226 Culture Crossing. “Albania: Gestures.” 2010. http://www.culturecrossing.net/basics_business_student_details.php?Id=13&CID=2

227 Bradt Travel Guide. Gloyer, Gillian. Albania. “Chapter. 2: Practical Information: Cultural Tips [p. 46].” 2008.

228 Culture Crossing. “Albania: Visiting.” 2010.

http://online.culturegrams.com/world/world_country_sections.php?contid=5&wmn=Europe&cid=2&cn=Albania&sname=Visiting&snid=26 http://www.culturecrossing.net/basics_business_student_details.php?Id=11&CID=2

229 World Travel Guide. “Albania Information: Social Conventions.” 2010.

http://www.worldtravelguide.net/country/4/general_information/Europe/Albania.html

Albanians are known for being genial, warm hosts who make their guests feel comfortable. They may feel slighted if someone refuses an offer of coffee, tea, or anything specially prepared, including alcoholic beverages. It is customary for guests to accept what is offered to them. Typical beverages include fruit juice or some kind of cognac, local wine, or sweet liquor. Such drinks are usually accompanied by a snack such as biscuits or cake.^{230, 231, 232, 233, 234}

When invited into an Albanian person’s home, it is customary to bring a gift if it is for a special occasion, such as a birthday. (If it is an ordinary visit, a gift is not necessary.) An appropriate item would be an artistic memento from one’s home country or a present for any children in the household. Customarily, the recipient will not open the gift until guests have left.^{235, 236}

Exchange 9: These chocolates are for the children.

Guest:	These chocolates are for the children.	keto chokolaata yaan per femeeyet
Host:	Why? It is not so necessary! Thank you.	po pseh? nook esht nevoja te shpenzohenee faleymeenderit

If curious about something you are drinking or eating, simply ask your host what it is. Albanians take pride in the food they prepare and will probably be pleased when a guest shows interest in its preparation.

230 Jeninalbania.blogspot. “An Albanian Adventure: Albanian Hospitality.” 23 June 2007.

http://jeninalbania.blogspot.com/2007/06/albanian-hospitality_3497.html

231 John Coyle Official Blog. “Tour of Albania #5: Switchback Three – Hospitality.” 21 June 2009.

<http://johnkcoyle.wordpress.com/2009/06/21/tour-of-albania-5-hospitality/>

232 Culture Gram. “Republic of Albania: Visiting.” 2010.

http://online.culturegrams.com/world/world_country_sections.php?contid=5&wmn=Europe&cid=2&cn=Albania&sname=Visiting&nid=26

233 Information Sciences Institute. Hobbs, Jerry R. “Maybe the First American Tourist in Albania: Hospitality.” 23 January 2004.

<http://www.isi.edu/~hobbs/albania1/node1.html>

234 TJC Global. “Doing Business in Albania: Eating Etiquette.” 2007. http://www.tjc-global.co.uk/?lang=en&pid=etiquette_albania

235 TJC Global. “Doing Business in Albania: Gifts.” 2007. http://www.tjc-global.co.uk/?lang=en&pid=etiquette_albania

236 Culture Gram. “Republic of Albania: Visiting.” 2010.

http://online.culturegrams.com/world/world_country_sections.php?contid=5&wmn=Europe&cid=2&cn=Albania&sname=Visiting&nid=26

Exchange 10: What is the name of this dish?

Guest:	What is the name of this dish?	see choohet kyo djel?
Host:	This byrek is pastry filled with meat and eggs, or spinach and cheese.	kue esht bue-rek behet mey meesh ey chep oseh mey speenaach ey diyaath

Asking about the name of a dish or its ingredients might stimulate conversation, possibly leading to a useful exchange of information for everyone present.

Exchange 11: What ingredients are used to make *byrek*?

Guest:	What ingredients are used to make byrek?	chfaar perdornee per te ber buerekoon?
Host:	Flower, salt, onions, pepper, meat, eggs, cheese, spinach, or yogurt and it's baked.	meel, kreep, chep,peeper vaay, meesh, vez , diyaath, speenaach, oseh kos dheh footet ne fooR per too pyeykooR

Eating Customs

When eating at an Albanian table, there are a few general expectations. It is considered polite for guests to wait for their host to start eating before they begin. The use of eating utensils follows continental (European) norms; the knife is held in one's right hand and the fork in the left. Guests serve themselves from food placed in serving dishes. Typically, several appetizers will be on the table. They can include feta or other cheeses, boiled eggs, sausage, olives, tomatoes, and onions. *Raki*, a strong alcoholic drink, usually precedes or accompanies an Albanian meal. Depending on the attitude of the host, it could be



© Ed Allie
Byrek, an Albanian pastry

considered an offense to refuse to drink it.^{237, 238} Ultimately, visitors should follow their own dietary health needs.

Three meals a day are usually eaten, with breakfast around 6:30 or 7:00 a.m. The main meal of the day is lunch, served sometime between 3 and 4 p.m. It typically consists of salad, soup with rice and meat broth, vegetables, and a main course of something like baked, stuffed peppers or a dish with vegetables and meat. Dinner is eaten between 7:30 and 9:30 p.m. It can include soup, bread, yogurt, and a dessert.²³⁹

Exchange 12: This food is good.

Guest:	This food is good.	kue ooshcheem esht ee meer
Host:	Thank you. Please take more.	faleymeenderit. oordheronee

Dress Codes

The dress code in modern Albania is similar to that of the U.S. and Western Europe. Typically, Albanian men who work in business settings wear suits and ties. Women are more likely to wear skirts and dresses than slacks. In the cities, people tend to wear trendy and contemporary clothing, depending on the occasion. Casual clothing may include jeans, sneakers, and colorful shirts or t-shirts.²⁴⁰



© Charles Roffey
Casually dressed Albanians

The choice of clothing depends on the occasion and its degree of formality.

237 CultureGrams. "Republic of Albania: Eating." 2010.

http://online.culturegrams.com/world/world_country_sections.php?contid=5&wmn=Europe&cid=2&cn=Albania&sname=Eating&snid=10

238 TJC Global. "Doing Business in Albania: Eating Etiquette." 2007. http://www.tjc-global.co.uk/?lang=en&pid=etiquette_albania

239 CultureGrams. "Republic of Albania: Eating." 2010.

http://online.culturegrams.com/world/world_country_sections.php?contid=5&wmn=Europe&cid=2&cn=Albania&sname=Eating&snid=10

240 CultureGrams. "Republic of Albania: Personal Appearance." 2010.

http://online.culturegrams.com/world/world_country_sections.php?contid=5&wmn=Europe&cid=2&cn=Albania&sname=Personal_Appearance&snid=7

Exchange 13: How should I dress?

Visitor:	How should I dress?	see te veeshem?
Local:	Wear nice, clean clothes.	veeshoo meer meh Robaa te paastRa

In rural areas, particularly in the north, Albanians wear traditional clothing, which differs according to region. Men wear cotton shirts, wool vests, and pants made of wool or cotton. They often wear a white cap known as a *qeleshe*. Women wear headscarves and colorful skirts also made of wool. In southern Albania, such traditional clothing is most often reserved for ceremonial events.²⁴¹

Exchange 14: Is this acceptable to wear?

Visitor:	Is this acceptable to wear?	aa esht kyo veshyeh ne Reygool?
Local:	Yes.	po

Non-Religious Holidays and Celebrations

There are several non-religious public holidays and various other celebrations in Albania. On national holidays, most businesses and government offices are closed. On other public holidays, government offices and banks close their doors, but many businesses remain open.^{242, 243}



© Marcin Kaczor
Girls dancing in Albanian dress

241 CultureGrams. “Republic of Albania: Personal Appearance.” 2010.

http://online.culturegrams.com/world/world_country_sections.php?contid=5&wmn=Europe&cid=2&cn=Albania&sname=Personal_Appearance&snid=7

242 World Travel Guide. “Albania Public Holidays.” 2010.

http://www.worldtravelguide.net/country/4/public_holidays/Europe/Albania.html

243 Bradt Travel Guide. Gloyer, Gillian. Albania. “Ch. 2: Practical Information: Public Holidays [p. 43].” 2008.

New Year's Day (1 January)

A national and worldwide holiday, New Year's Day takes place on 1 January. In Albania, the New Year is ushered in with widespread celebration.

Exchange 15: Will you be celebrating New Year?

Visitor:	Will you be celebrating New Year?	aa do te festonee veeteen eh Ree?
Local:	Yes!	po

Summer Day (15 March)

In ancient Illyrian culture, nature was honored in a number of ways. Two ancient cults—the Cult of the Sun and Cult of the Snake—still exist today in some of Albania's rural areas. Through the centuries, people have paid homage to the seasons in festivals celebrated at the summer and winter solstices and the spring and autumn equinoxes.²⁴⁴ In the 20th century, when religion was banned under communist rule, some of the pagan, non-institutionalized religious practices observed in rural areas were left intact. Today, Albania's government recognizes some of those same pagan festivals as national holidays. They include the solar festival known as Summer Day (in Albanian, *Dita e Verës*).²⁴⁵

Nevruz

Also called the Holiday of Sultan Novrus (Nevrus), this Bektashi festival is of Persian origin. It celebrates the new year (on 22 March in 2010) and takes place in Bektashi *tekkes*, where non-Bektashi people are welcome to participate and observe for most of the ceremony.²⁴⁶

244 Vargmal. "Religion in Albania (or the Lack Thereof): 1.1 Antiquity." 2000–2010. <http://vargmal.org/dan1628>

245 Vargmal. "Religion in Albania (or the Lack Thereof): 1.5 Totalitarian Regime." 2000–2010. <http://vargmal.org/dan1628>

246 InYourPocket. "The Bektashi Sect: Bektashi Events." 1995–2010. <http://www.inyourpocket.com/albania/tirana/The-Bektashi-sect-70140f?more=1>

May Day

International Workers' Day, held on 1 May, is a national holiday in Albania. It honors the social and economic achievements of workers and is observed in most countries of the world.²⁴⁷

Independence Day

Independence Day (28 November) is a national holiday established in 1912 by Albania's first head of state. It celebrates Albania's independence from Ottoman domination and is marked by a variety of concerts and events. In Tirana, the mayor along with Albania's president and prime minister participate at a patriotic ceremony. In one part of this event, they visit the cemetery of national martyrs.²⁴⁸

Liberation Day

This holiday commemorates the victory of Allied Forces over the Axis Powers in Albania at the end of World War II. On 28 November 1944, the National Liberation Front drove the Nazis and Italian forces out of Albania. The holiday, featuring several patriotic ceremonies in Tirana on 29 November, celebrates Albania's freedom and commemorates its war victims.²⁴⁹

247 A Global World. "Albania Holidays: Labour Day; May Day; Workers' Day; Day of Kazak." No date.

<http://aglobalworld.com/holidays-around-the-world/category/world-holidays-holidays-around-the-world/europe-holidays-world-holidays/albania-holidays-europe-holidays-world-holidays/>

248 A Global World. "Albania Marks Independence Day." No date. <http://aglobalworld.com/holidays-around-the-world/albania-marks-independence-day/>

249 A Global World. "Liberation Day Commemorated in Albania." No date. <http://aglobalworld.com/holidays-around-the-world/liberation-day-albania/>

Do's and Don'ts ^{250, 251, 252}

Do remove your shoes before you enter a mosque.

Do remove your hat before entering an Albanian Orthodox church.

Do not criticize or show disrespect to Albanian officials, citizens, or their country.

Do not engage in political discussions about sensitive topics.

Do not engage in overt expressions of affection with the opposite sex.

Do not stare at or make casual comments about the wives or girlfriends of Albanian men.

Do not point to anybody using a finger. Use the entire *right* hand instead.

Do not use a “thumbs up” gesture. It means, “You’ll get nothing from me,” and is considered impolite.

Do not point upward with the middle finger. It is obscene in the U.S. and equally so in Albania.

Do not use obscene or indecent language within earshot of Albanian citizens. Many could be familiar with American slang.

250 CultureGrams. “Republic of Albania: Gestures.” 2010.

http://online.culturegrams.com/world/world_country_sections.php?contid=5&wmn=Europe&cid=2&cn=Albania&sname=Gestures&nid=9

251 TJC Global. “Doing Business in Albania: Cultural Awareness.” 2007. http://www.tjc-global.co.uk/?lang=en&pid=etiquette_albania

252 Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada. Centre for Intercultural Learning. “Cultural Information – Conversations.” October 2009. <http://www.intercultures.ca/cil-cai/ci-ic-eng.asp?iso=al#cn-1>

Self Study Questions

Albania was historically divided into two linguistic subcultures. True or false?

The tribal blood feuds of the north are based on a body of customary law codes known as Kanun. True or false?

The national holiday known as Summer Day was banned by the communist government. True or false?

Albanian Independence Day celebrates the nation's independence from the Serbs. True or false?

The traditional cap worn by men in Albania is usually white. True or false?

Urban Life

Urbanization

History of Urbanization

As recently as the early 1990s, between 65% and 75% of Albanians lived in rural areas, either in the countryside or in small villages.^{253, 254} This settlement pattern was reinforced by the communist government policies blocking migration to cities, since agricultural development was its top priority. When crop production fell short, the government intensified its efforts to build the rural sector by allowing some free-market activity and greater privatization of land. The economy continued to collapse, however, catalyzing the migration of thousands of people to capitalist countries (mainly Italy and Greece) to find jobs in the 1990s.^{255, 256} The standard of living in Albanian cities dropped sharply in 1991, yet people continued domestic migration to urban centers (mainly in western Albania) in search of jobs and economic opportunities.^{257, 258}



© David Dufresne
Train from Durres to Tirana

In contrast to the pattern of low internal urban growth during the communist era, Tirana increased from 60,000 residents in 1945, to 226,000 in 1987.²⁵⁹ Tirana's post-World War II boom was the result of nationwide industrial expansion and being Albania's capital and center of government. Thus, opportunities for both industrial and government jobs drew Albanians to Tirana. Until the 1970s, the standard of living improved, largely due to economic aid from the Soviet Union and China.²⁶⁰ By the 1990s, however, it became

253 Federal Research Division, U.S. Library of Congress. Albania: A Country Study. "Chapter 2: The Society and Its Environment: The Albanian People: Settlement Patterns [p. 74]." 1992. Washington, D.C: U.S. Government Printing Office.

254 Alain-Bertaud.com. Bertaud, Alain. "Urban Development in Albania: The Success Story of the Informal Sector [p. 2]." 28 June 2006. http://alain-bertaud.com/AB_Files/AB_Albania%20Urban%20informal%20Sector%20paper.pdf

255 Federal Research Division, U.S. Library of Congress. Albania: A Country Study. "Chapter 3: The Economy: Agriculture [p. 133]." 1992. Washington, D.C: U.S. Government Printing Office.

256 Federal Research Division, U.S. Library of Congress. Albania: A Country Study. "Chapter 3: The Economy: Work Force and Standard of Living [p. 126]." 1992. Washington, D.C: U.S. Government Printing Office.

257 Federal Research Division, U.S. Library of Congress. Albania: A Country Study. "Chapter 3: The Economy: Work Force and Standard of Living: Standard of Living [pp. 128-129]." 1992. Washington, D.C: U.S. Government Printing Office.

258 Alain-Bertaud.com. Bertaud, Alain. "Urban Development in Albania: The Success Story of the Informal Sector [p. 2]." 28 June 2006. http://alain-bertaud.com/AB_Files/AB_Albania%20Urban%20informal%20Sector%20paper.pdf

259 Federal Research Division, U.S. Library of Congress. Albania: A Country Study. "Chapter 2: The Society and Its Environment: The Albanian People: Settlement Patterns [p. 74]." 1992. Washington, D.C: U.S. Government Printing Office.

260 The Central and Eastern Europe Handbook. Heenan, Patrick and Monique Lamontagne, Eds. "Chapter 10: Albania [pp. 118-119]." Rama, Shinasi A. 1999.

increasingly difficult for people, whether they lived in Tirana or other Albanian cities to maintain a standard of living comparable to that of the 1980s.²⁶¹

After the decline of communism in the former Soviet Union, urbanization in Albania occurred in three phases. First, the informal sector grew, which meant day labor or unregulated jobs with no benefits. Since the state had collapsed, making codes and laws obsolete, the migrant population settled on vacant lands surrounding cities. Here, they built structures on an informal basis (outside legal channels), squatting on land belonging to the state or confiscated from previous owners whose claims had not been settled. By the time the post-communist government began to redistribute the formerly state-owned land, migrants already occupied much of it. (Their landowning status eventually became legal in most cases.) In the second phase a formal economic sector developed in response to the need for a regulated state system. Official land development provided many formal sector jobs in the centers of cities. In addition, organization of the informal sector improved and the stock of housing expanded. In the third phase, starting in 2006, the formal, regulated sector became better organized as the government expanded the infrastructure by establishing a tax base and codifying the development of real estate.²⁶²

Urban Work Issues

Concurrent with inflation in the 1990s and the increasing difficulty of earning enough money to support a family in urban areas, unemployment rose and labor strife increased. Official government sources reported unemployment at 30% in 1991, but unofficial estimates placed it closer to 50%.²⁶³ Lacking funds for investment, factories closed their doors, unable to obtain energy, raw materials, or equipment. As the communist order continued to break down, the government lost its influence over trade unions, and workers began joining independent unions. Although employee demands and strikes became more common, workers made few gains due to the deterioration of the economy and social structure. Although they gained independence, workers lost job security, wage



© Henri Bergius
Old Albanian factories

261 Federal Research Division, U.S. Library of Congress. Albania: A Country Study. "Chapter 3: The Economy: Work Force and Standard of Living [p. 126]." 1992. Washington, D.C: U.S. Government Printing Office.

262 Alain-Bertaud.com. Bertaud, Alain. "Urban Development in Albania: The Success Story of the Informal Sector [pp. 1-3, 6, 9]." 28 June 2006. http://alain-bertaud.com/AB_Files/AB_Albania%20Urban%20informal%20Sector%20paper.pdf

263 Federal Research Division, U.S. Library of Congress. Albania: A Country Study. "Chapter 3: The Economy: Work Force and Standard of Living: Population and Workforce [pp. 130-132]." 1992. Washington, D.C: U.S. Government Printing Office.

controls, government subsidies for goods and transportation, earning power (against inflation), and a sufficient number of jobs.^{264, 265}

Since the transition away from communism, the new economy has grown, although very unevenly. In certain respects, people living in the metropolitan area of Tirana-Durres have benefitted the most from urban growth. Construction, services, and trades here have been expanding rapidly, with construction becoming one of the economy's "most dynamic sectors."²⁶⁶ (Much of the growth in construction has been underwritten by Italian, German, and Greek sources.) Alongside this development, however, Tirana's newest residents appear to be poorer and lack access to city services and infrastructure. In conjunction with some small business growth, overall unemployment has remained higher in Tirana than in other cities. Although the urban investment climate has remained weak, many people have relocated here to open businesses, often using family money to invest. Problems faced by these entrepreneurs include difficult licensing procedures, burdensome regulations, and a corrupt business environment rife with bribery.^{267, 268} Women are unlikely to be self-employed under the current regime due to fewer opportunities and restrictions against owning property. Regardless of educational level, unemployment among women in Albania has remained higher and wages lower than among men.²⁶⁹ Though they typically work alongside men, Albanian women have greater representation in fields of nursing teaching, and retail sales.²⁷⁰

264 Federal Research Division, U.S. Library of Congress. Albania: A Country Study. "Chapter 3: The Economy: Work Force and Standard of Living: Trade Unions [pp. 132-133]." 1992. Washington, D.C: U.S. Government Printing Office.

265 Federal Research Division, U.S. Library of Congress. Albania: A Country Study. "Chapter 3: The Economy: Work Force and Standard of Living [p. 126]." 1992. Washington, D.C: U.S. Government Printing Office.

266 World Bank. Albania Urban Sector Review. "Albania Urban Sector Review – Executive Summary [pp. ii-iii]." 19 January 2007. http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTALBANIA/Resources/Albania_Urban_Sector_Review_English.pdf

267 World Bank. Albania Urban Sector Review. "Albania Urban Sector Review – Executive Summary [pp. iv-v]." 19 January 2007. http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTALBANIA/Resources/Albania_Urban_Sector_Review_English.pdf

268 A Fistful of Euros. Muir, Douglas. "Some Thoughts on Greater Albania, Part 2." 20 April 2008. <http://fistfulofeuros.net/afoc/minorities-and-integration/some-thoughts-on-greater-albania-part-2/>

269 Social Research Centre. INSTAT. "Women and Children in Albania, Double Dividend of Gender Equality: Executive Summary [pp. 11–12]." 2007. http://www.childinfo.org/files/Albania_Women_Children_Report.pdf

270 Centre for Intercultural Learning. "Cultural Information – Albania: Cultural Information – Religion, Class, Ethnicity, & Gender." October 2009. <http://www.intercultures.ca/cil-cai/ci-ic-eng.asp?iso=al>

Daily Urban Life

After the Hoxha regime ended, Albanians were forced to become more self-reliant, less connected to the relative security of rural networks as they migrated from the countryside to the cities. (During the communist years, the priority of one's family was replaced with loyalty to the working class and, especially, the Communist Party.)²⁷¹ Particularly in the cities, Albanian people began to adopt customs reflecting the lifestyles, family structures, and manner of dress from Greece, Italy, and other countries.²⁷²



© Doriflickr.com
View of downtown Tirana

Tirana remains the largest and most cosmopolitan of Albania's cities. After two decades of national economic paralysis, people here work in the city's industries, private businesses, and shops that offer services to tourists. Many have participated in energizing the city, remodeling and repainting old Soviet-style housing and supporting artists to redecorate cement buildings in bright colors.²⁷³ Many young people have moved to other countries to find jobs in recent years, but others are returning with degrees from abroad, hoping to find opportunities in Albania's growing cities.

In their leisure time, residents of Tirana have a variety of activities to choose from. People listen to music, attend movies, watch TV, and listen to FM radio. They can attend concerts (modern and classical) as well as opera, theatre, and ballet performances throughout the year.²⁷⁴ Other leisure choices include visiting Muslim or Christian religious shrines, the National Museum of History, and the National Library (Albania's largest museum and library, respectively).²⁷⁵ Skanderbeg Square, at the center of the city, is a popular gathering place for families to spend time together and socialize with others. Sporting events are also popular activities, and Albanian men often participate in soccer, basketball, and other competitive games. In the cities, it is typical for residents to dine

271 The Central and Eastern Europe Handbook. Heenan, Patrick and Monique Lamontagne, Eds. "Chapter 10: Albania [p. 119]." Rama, Shinasi. 1999.

272 ICBS. Likaj, Matilda, and Cemal Baltaci. "The Changes of Social Structure and Migration in Cities in Albania [pp. 57-59]." 2008. <http://ces.epoka.edu.al/icbs/5.pdf>

273 ArrivalGuides.com. "Tirana: The City." 7 July 2007.

<http://www.arrivalguides.com/GuidesDownload.aspx?partner=aftenposten.no&group=CITY&dest=TIRANA&lang=en&age=999&gender=X&email=aftenposten@aftenposten.no.se&source=aftenposten.no>

274 World Travel Guide. "Albania Entertainment." 2010.

<http://www.worldtravelguide.net/country/4/entertainment/Europe/Albania.html>

275 Many of the books in the National Library were acquired by confiscation from private sources during the communist era. Source: Sipa Tours. "Culture: Libraries and Museums." 2007. <http://www.sipatours.com/albania/culture.htm>

late, as is the custom in southern Europe. Popular locales in Tirana’s café culture and nightlife are actively patronized by the city’s younger residents.^{276, 277, 278}

Albanians maintain strong social ties and spend significant time with relatives and friends. Even though the pace of life is faster in the cities than in the countryside, urban residents take time to stay in frequent touch with neighbors and family members.

Exchange 16: What is your telephone number?

Visitor:	What is your telephone number?	saa e key noomreen e telefonit?
Local:	My phone number is 99643011.	numree eem ee telefonit esht nant, nant, djaasht , kaater, treh, zero, nyeh, nyeh

Mobile phone coverage in particular is extensive in the cities, where it is far more reliable than in the mountainous rural areas. Internet access is also available in sizeable towns. Thus, urban residents have access to e-mail—including the option of internet cafes—to maintain social contact with others.^{279, 280}

276 ArrivalGuides.com. “Tirana.” 7 July 2007.
<http://www.arrivalguides.com/GuidesDownload.aspx?partner=aftenposten.no&group=CITY&dest=TIRANA&lang=en&age=999&gender=X&email=aftenposten@aftenposten.no.se&source=aftenposten.no>

277 CultureGrams. “Republic of Albania: Recreation.” 2010.
http://online.culturegrams.com/world/world_country_sections.php?contid=5&wmn=Europe&cid=2&cn=Albania&sname=Recreation&snid=14

278 Centre for Intercultural Learning. “Cultural Information – Albania: Cultural Information – In-country Activities.” October 2009.
<http://www.intercultures.ca/cil-cai/ci-ic-eng.asp?iso=al>

279 World Travel Guide.net. “Albania Communications.” 2010.
<http://www.worldtravelguide.net/country/4/communications/Europe/Albania.html>

280 Index Mundi. “Albania Telephone System.” 2010. http://www.indexmundi.com/albania/telephone_system.html

Urban Health Care

Managed by the Ministry of Health, Albania's healthcare system exists mostly in the public sector. Services are divided into three levels: primary care and two levels of hospital care. Although the government provides most services for disease prevention and treatment, the private sector provides pharmaceuticals and dental care. In addition, private clinics and hospitals are the main sources of specialized health care in Albania.²⁸¹



© Jim Forest
Family visiting at a hospital

Exchange 17: Is there a medical clinic nearby?

Visitor:	Is there a medical clinic nearby?	aa kaa nye kleeneek myeyksoreh aafer?
Local:	Yes, over there.	po, aatyeh

The incidence of infectious disease has been reduced throughout the country, and public health has improved in other ways. Still, the infant mortality rate remains high due to poor nutrition and the unavailability of health services in many parts of the country.²⁸²

Among poor women throughout the country, including urban areas, access to reproductive and other health services is low. According to a 2002 survey, 3 out of every 10 pregnant women living below the poverty line did not receive any prenatal medical care. One of the consequences has been a high rate of maternal mortality.²⁸³

Exchange 18: Is there a hospital nearby?

Visitor:	Is there a hospital nearby?	aa kaa speetal ketoo aafer?
Local:	Yes, in the center of town.	po, ne chender te chueteyteet

281 Republic of Albania, Ministry of Health. "An Overview of the Health Care System in Albania: Some Performance Indicators [p. 7]." 2009. <http://www.moh.gov.al/analiza/buletini.pdf>

282 Encyclopædia Britannica. "Albania: Government and Society: Health and Welfare." 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-42636>

283 Social Research Centre. INSTAT. "Women and Children in Albania, Double Dividend of Gender Equality: Executive Summary [p. 10]." 2007. http://www.childinfo.org/files/Albania_Women_Children_Report.pdf

Most dental services, emergency treatment, surgical or hospital care, and specialized health care services are located in Tirana. Few medical specialists are located outside the city.^{284, 285}

Exchange 19: Is the doctor in?

Visitor:	Is the doctor in?	aa esht myekoo brenda?
Local:	No.	yo

At only 3.7% of the national budget, the government’s funding of health services is among the lowest in southeastern Europe.²⁸⁶

History of Healthcare in Albania

Much like other Eastern European countries, Albania’s healthcare system was relatively well developed under the communist regime, with many doctors and hospital beds. Although few specialists were available, an infrastructure was in place that supported medical education and technical training. Medical care was free to the public, and the government provided inoculation services to large sections of the population.^{287, 288, 289}



© Mårten Vaher
Old Tirana hospital exterior

284 Republic of Albania, Ministry of Health. “An Overview of the Health Care System in Albania: Some Performance Indicators [p. 7].” 2009. <http://www.moh.gov.al/analiza/buletini.pdf>

285 U.S. Department of State. “Travel.State.Gov: Albania, Country Specific Information: Medical Facilities and Health Information.” July 2010. http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1076.html#medical

286 UNICEF. “Country Profile: Education in Albania [p. 1].” December 2008. <http://www.unicef.org/ceecis/Albania.pdf>

287 Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation. SDC – Health. “Albania.” No date. http://www.sdc-health.ch/priority_countries/southeastern_eastern_europe/albania

288 Department for International Development Resource Centre for Health Sector Reform. “Albania: Health Briefing Paper.” 2000. http://www.dfidhealthrc.org/publications/Country_health/Albania.pdf

289 Federal Research Division, U.S. Library of Congress. Albania: A Country Study. “Chapter 2: The Society and Its Environment: Health and Welfare: Medical Care and Nutrition [pp. 94-96].” 1992. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.

By the end of the communist era (1991), basic health services were deteriorating. Health outcomes, reflected in maternal and infant mortality rates, were poor.^{290, 291} The decline of communism coincided with a severe drought, which was followed by food riots. Widespread hunger and poor nutrition in Albania led to dependence on emergency food aid from foreign countries.²⁹²

As privatization and liberalization of the economy moved forward, structural reforms were implemented, and the healthcare system improved. However, this upward trend was short-lived, ending in early 1997 with the collapse of the pyramid schemes. Most Albanians lost their life savings, which led to widespread impoverishment, unemployment, and economic collapse. The impact of these forces on the healthcare sector was immediate and severe. Clinics and hospitals were destroyed, equipment and drugs stolen, and programs for immunization disrupted. Many members of the medical community (especially in southern Albania) left their jobs, and social services broke down.²⁹³ Although the country began to rebuild its economy by the late 1990s, additional problems emerged from another direction. The armed conflict in Kosovo caused a large number of Kosovar Albanian refugees to flee to Albania, further straining the country's healthcare services.^{294, 295, 296}

290 Department for International Development Resource Centre for Health Sector Reform. "Albania: Health Briefing Paper." 2000.

http://www.dfidhealthrc.org/publications/Country_health/Albania.pdf

291 European Observatory on Health Care Systems. "Health Care Systems in Transition: Albania [p. 6]." 1999.

http://www.euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0011/96428/E68282.pdf

292 Federal Research Division, U.S. Library of Congress. Albania: A Country Study. "Chapter 2: The Society and Its Environment: Health and Welfare: Medical Care and Nutrition [pp. 94-96]." 1992. Washington, D.C: U.S. Government Printing Office.

293 European Observatory on Health Care Systems. "Health Care Systems in Transition: Albania [p. 4, 9]." 1999.

http://www.euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0011/96428/E68282.pdf

294 Department for International Development Resource Centre for Health Sector Reform. "Albania: Health Briefing Paper [p. 1]." 2000. http://www.dfidhealthrc.org/publications/Country_health/Albania.pdf

295 European Observatory on Health Care Systems. "Health Care Systems in Transition: Albania [p. 9]." 1999.

http://www.euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0011/96428/E68282.pdf

296 The conflict between Kosovo and Serbia lay outside Albania's control, yet Albania's economy and infrastructure were deeply affected by the hostilities. Hundreds of thousands of refugees were driven into Albania, where the economy was already weak. Caring for the displaced population and providing emergency humanitarian services forced the Albanian government to postpone long-term reforms that were in place. Source: The Central and Eastern Europe Handbook. Heenan, Patrick and Monique Lamontagne, Eds. "Chapter 10: Albania [p. 123]." Rama, Shinasi. 1999.

Exchange 20: My arm is broken, can you help me?

Visitor:	My arm is broken, can you help me?	kaam thue-er kraahoon, aa moondenee te me ndeemonee?
Local:	Yes, I can help you.	po, moondem tyoo ndeemoy

Educational System

For primary and secondary school children (ages 7–15), attendance is mandatory and educational services are free in Albania.²⁹⁷ Between 94% and 99% of the nation’s children—equally divided between boys and girls—enroll in primary school. In the early grades, school enrollment and attendance are lower in urban (compared to rural) areas. This trend lasts until the beginning of secondary level (grades 9–12), when twice as many urban children attend school than those in rural areas.^{298, 299}



© Robert Nagle
Vlore University

Exchange 21: Is there a school nearby?

Visitor:	Is there a school nearby?	aa kaa shkoll ketoo aafer?
Local:	Yes.	po

Currently among the lowest rates in Southeastern Europe, only 3% of Albania’s government funding is allocated to education (or 3.7% of its GDP). At approximately USD 250 monthly, teacher salaries are “significantly lower than the average national wage.” The dropout rate is high in secondary school, partly because about 20% of the nation’s girls and 30% of the boys take jobs to earn income before they are legally

297 Encyclopædia Britannica. “Albania: Government and Society: Education.” 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-42635>

298 UNICEF. “Country Profile: Education in Albania [p. 3].” December 2008. <http://www.unicef.org/ceecis/Albania.pdf>

299 EuroEducation.net. “Albania: Structure of Education System: School Education.” December 2009.

<http://www.euroeducation.net/prof/albanco.htm>

eligible to do so.³⁰⁰ Other reasons that students drop out of school in Albania include the under-resourced educational system, which leaves teachers with large classes and little time for struggling students. Under the circumstances, teachers tend to focus mainly on successful or outspoken students, while youth who struggle to learn typically disengage.³⁰¹ In spite of these institutional difficulties, approximately 90% of the population in Albania over the age of 15 is literate (defined as being able to read and write).³⁰²

Exchange 22: Do your children go to school?

Visitor:	Do your children go to school?	aa shkoyne femeyet too ne shkol?
Local:	Yes.	po

Higher education begins after secondary school in grade 13. Passage of an entrance examination is required for students to progress to this level. Albania’s higher educational system includes eight universities, most of them located in Tirana, but a few in the nation’s other large cities.^{303, 304}

History of Albania’s Educational System

During Albania’s communist era, the government tried to eliminate illiteracy. In 1949, a law was passed mandating that citizens (between ages 12 and 40) who could not read or write attend classes in those subjects. The government quickly set up an educational system based on Soviet models that included institutions for adult, technical, and higher learning. By 1991, Soviet specialists were withdrawn from the schools due to the



© Christian Guthier
Kids going to school in Shkoder

300 UNICEF. “Country Profile: Education in Albania [p. 1].” December 2008. <http://www.unicef.org/ceecis/Albania.pdf>

301 UNICEF. “Country Profile: Education in Albania [p. 4].” December 2008. <http://www.unicef.org/ceecis/Albania.pdf>

302 Encyclopædia Britannica. “Albania: Government and Society: Education.” 2010. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-42635>

303 EuroEducation.net. “Albania: Structure of Education System: School Education [and] Higher Education.” December 2009. <http://www.euroeducation.net/prof/albanco.htm>

304 SpainExchange. “Albania: The Education System in Albania.” 1999–2008. <http://www.spainexchange.com/guide/AL-education.htm>

conflict between Albania and the then-Soviet Union. With some changes, the school system remained essentially the same; by the late 1980s, illiteracy was nearly eradicated.³⁰⁵

When the communist era ended in Albania, education fell into disarray. As public order broke down, people vandalized schools, and textbook shortages became endemic. Thousands of teachers either left rural areas or fled the country entirely, leaving the highly structured school system headed for dysfunction.³⁰⁶

During the transition to a capitalist economy, schools were revived and the curriculum stripped of the Soviet-era ideology. The humanities, math, and science began to be emphasized, and topics such as civil society, law, human rights, and citizenship were explored. In addition, the new schools adopted exchange agreements with other European countries in an effort to modernize and introduce more democratic processes.^{307, 308}

Education for Roma Children

The Roma people form a small part of Albania's population (approximately 90,000–100,000), but half of them are under 18 years of age and required to attend school. Their enrollment numbers are problematic in that less than half of all Roma children in Albania actually register for primary school. Of those children who do, only one in four finishes. Poor attendance and high dropout rates are attributed to the lack of instruction in their mother tongue. Other contributing factors include reports of discrimination against Roma children and the long distances between Roma settlements and schools.³⁰⁹

305 Federal Research Division, U.S. Library of Congress. Albania: A Country Study. "Chapter 2: The Society and Its Environment: Education: Education under Communist Rule [pp. 91-94]." 1992. Washington, D.C: U.S. Government Printing Office.

306 Federal Research Division, U.S. Library of Congress. Albania: A Country Study. "Chapter 2: The Society and Its Environment: Education: Education under Communist Rule [pp. 91-94]." 1992. Washington, D.C: U.S. Government Printing Office.

307 SpainExchange. "Albania: The Education System in Albania." 1999–2008. <http://www.spainexchange.com/guide/AL-education.htm>

308 StateUniversity.com. "Albania – Educational System – Overview." 2010. <http://education.stateuniversity.com/pages/12/Albania-EDUCATIONAL-SYSTEM-OVERVIEW.html>

309 UNICEF. "Country Profile: Education in Albania [p. 3]." December 2008. <http://www.unicef.org/ceecis/Albania.pdf>

Public Places

Restaurants

Of all the cities in Albania, Tirana has the most active nightlife and social scene for young adults. A large number of restaurants, cafes, and nightclubs that serve drinks and offer entertainment stay open much of the night.^{310, 311} The café culture here also thrives, attracting a mix of local and foreign patrons.³¹²

Exchange 23: Please, may I have a bottle of mineral water?

Visitor:	Please, may I have a bottle of mineral water?	nye sheesheh ooye meeneyraal yoo lootem?
Local:	Yes, right away.	po, ne moment

Outside Tirana, restaurants tend to be informal, operating without fixed hours. They open when there are customers and close at other times. In these family-owned establishments, reservations are seldom necessary.³¹³

Many restaurants in Tirana serve a variety of European food. Italian and Greek dishes are especially popular because of Albania's proximity to Italy and Greece. Albanian food has also been influenced by the Ottoman occupation. Owing to these influences, some kind of meat or seafood appears on the menu of most restaurants, and vegetarian choices are limited. Meat dishes often



310 ArrivalGuides.com. "Tirana." 7 July 2007.

<http://www.arrivalguides.com/GuidesDownload.aspx?partner=aftenposten.no&group=CITY&dest=TIRANA&lang=en&age=999&gender=X&email=aftenposten@aftenposten.no.se&source=aftenposten.no>

311 World Travel Guide. "Albania Entertainment." 2010.

<http://www.worldtravelguide.net/country/4/entertainment/Europe/Albania.html>

312 Centre for Intercultural Learning. "Cultural Information – In-Country Activities." 2009. <http://www.intercultures.ca/cil-cai/ci-ic-eng.asp?iso=al>

313 The Bradt Travel Guide Albania. Gloyer, Gillian. "Chapter 2: Practical Information: Eating and Drinking [p. 42]." 2008.

tend to be heavy, but they are also balanced by generous servings of vegetables and usually include salads and soups. Lamb, pork, fish, or chicken is served with most meals.^{314, 315}

Exchange 24: I'd like five kabobs and pilaf.

Visitor:	I'd like five kabobs and pilaf.	oon doowa pes chebaap dhe due raatseeoyone peelaaf
Local:	Of course.	patyeyter

National specialties boast fish (including, eel) from the Mediterranean Sea, trout from Lake Ohrid and Lake Prespa, and meats. Sheep's head soup (*paçë koke*) is popular for breakfast, and a dish made of sheep innards wrapped in a casing (*kukurec*) is also a national favorite. Other organ meats (liver, heart, brains) are commonly eaten, although it may be difficult to find them on a menu. Lamb is typically roasted over a spit, or the ribs are grilled over charcoal. Sometimes lamb or other meat is cut into cubes and put on a skewer with vegetables, then grilled and served with salad. There are a number of ways to prepare meat, including marinating it before grilling or baking it with sauce. Cheese curd, feta cheese, and yogurt are often ingredients in main dishes that also include vegetables and small portions of meat.^{316, 317}

If diners want to know more about the ingredients used to prepare a dish, they should ask the waiter or the restaurant proprietor.

314 World Travel Guide. "Albania Entertainment: Food and Drink." 2010.

<http://www.worldtravelguide.net/country/4/entertainment/Europe/Albania.html>

315 TJC Global. "Doing Business in Albania: Eating Etiquette." 2007. http://www.tjc-global.co.uk/?lang=en&pid=etiquette_albania

316 World Travel Guide. "Albania Entertainment: Food and Drink." 2010.

<http://www.worldtravelguide.net/country/4/entertainment/Europe/Albania.html>

317 The Bradt Travel Guide Albania. Gloyer, Gillian. "Chapter 2: Practical Information: Eating and Drinking [pp. 40-41]." 2008.

Exchange 25: What type of meat is this?

Visitor:	What type of meat is this?	chfaar loy meeshee esht kue?
Local:	Lamb.	meesh cheendjee

Coffee is an integral part of meals and socializing in Albania, and restaurants almost always serve it. They usually have espresso machines to prepare strong coffee drinks. Alternatively, they may serve it the old-fashioned way, by boiling water together with fine ground coffee, and sugar (*kafe turke*).³¹⁸

Exchange 26: I would like coffee or tea.

Visitor:	I would like coffee or tea.	oon doowa chaay oseh kaafeh
Local:	Of course.	patyeyter

Alcoholic drinks in Albania include wine, beer, and *raki*, known as the national drink. It is made of distilled grape, mulberry, or other fruit juices. Typically, people consume it at any time of day.^{319, 320}

Dessert is not usually part of an Albanian meal, except on special occasions. Many people eat a small, sweet snack with coffee early in the evening before they go out walking (“*xhiro*, the early-evening promenade”).³²¹ They may eat fresh fruit with dinner or afterwards.

318 The Bradt Travel Guide Albania. Gloyer, Gillian. “Chapter 2: Practical Information: Eating and Drinking [p. 42].” 2008.

319 World Travel Guide. “Albania Entertainment: Food and Drink.” 2010.

<http://www.worldtravelguide.net/country/4/entertainment/Europe/Albania.html>

320 The Bradt Travel Guide Albania. Gloyer, Gillian. “Chapter 2: Practical Information: Eating and Drinking [p. 42].” 2008.

321 The Bradt Travel Guide Albania. Gloyer, Gillian. “Chapter 2: Practical Information: Eating and Drinking [p. 42].” 2008.

Exchange 27: Do you have fruit?

Visitor:	Do you have fruit?	aa kenee froota?
Local:	Yes, we have figs and apples.	po, keymee feeçh edhe mola

When dining in a restaurant with an Albanian host, the latter usually pays. Foreign visitors who are in his company are considered his guests. In most cases, it would be inappropriate for them to insist on paying even part of the bill.

Exchange 28: I would like to pay the bill for this table.

Visitor:	I would like to pay the total bill for this table.	oon doowa te pagoowaay faatooren per kete taavoleen
Local:	Ok.	ne Reygool

In the absence of a local host, foreign patrons should find out in advance what kind of payment method is accepted and be prepared to pay accordingly when they ask for the bill. Only high-end restaurants in the cities (mainly Tirana) accept credit cards. It is necessary to have cash (*lek*) on hand just in case other payment methods do not work. Sometimes restaurants will accept U.S. dollars or euros.^{322, 323, 324}

322 World Travel Guide. "Albania Money and Exchange Rate." 2010.

<http://www.worldtravelguide.net/country/4/money/Europe/Albania.html>

323 The Bradt Travel Guide Albania. Gloyer, Gillian. "Chapter 2: Practical Information: Eating and Drinking [p. 43]." 2008.

324 The Lonely Planet. "Albania: Practical Information: Money & Costs." 2010. <http://www.lonelyplanet.com/albania/practical-information/money-costs>

Exchange 29: Do you accept U.S. dollars?

Visitor:	Do you accept U.S. dollars?	aa praanonee dolaar?
Local:	Yes.	po

In Albanian restaurants, it is customary to leave a minimum 10% tip.³²⁵

Exchange 30: Thank you for the service.

Visitor:	Thank you for the service.	faleymeenderit per sherbeemin toowaay
Local:	Thank you.	faleymeenderit

Marketplace

The largest markets for buying souvenirs and crafts are located in Kruja, a city slightly northwest of Tirana. Here, shoppers can purchase woven rugs, antiques, copper items, and slippers and caps made of felt. Traditional crafts may be difficult to find in other cities, and only a few shops offering these goods can be found in Tirana.³²⁶



© Vesa Harkonen
Cheese for sale at a market

³²⁵ World Travel Guide. "Albania Entertainment." 2010.

<http://www.worldtravelguide.net/country/4/entertainment/Europe/Albania.html>

³²⁶ The Bradt Travel Guide Albania. Gloyer, Gillian. "Chapter 2: Practical Information: Shopping [p. 43]." 2008.

Exchange 31: Do you sell rugs?

Visitor:	Do you sell rugs?	aa sheetnee cheeleema?
Local:	Yes.	po

At most shops in Albania, bargaining over prices is expected. Before bargaining, it is a good idea for the buyer to have an idea of a price she considers fair for the item under consideration. A sale is never final until the shopper accepts the negotiated price.³²⁷

Exchange 32: Can I buy the rug with this much money?

Visitor:	Can I buy the rug with this much money?	aa moond taa bley cheeleemin mey kaach paaraa?
Local:	No.	yo

Buyers should closely examine the items they are interested in to be sure that the quality matches the price they are willing to pay.

Exchange 33: May I examine this close up?

Visitor:	May I examine this close up?	aa moond te perdoree telefoneen toowaay?
Local:	Sure.	seegooreesht

327 TJC-Global. "Doing Business in Albania: Business Negotiations." 2007. http://www.tjc-global.co.uk/?lang=en&pid=etiquette_albania

Prices are often not advertised or posted on items for sale. Since prices vary considerably, a buyer should shop around and return to the establishment where she can get the best deal. Shoppers should also be aware that foreigners may be quoted a higher price than locals and negotiate with this possibility in mind.³²⁸

Exchange 34: How much longer will you be here?

Soldier:	How much longer will you be here?	per saa koh do te yenee ketoo?
Local:	Three more hours.	edheh tree or

Snack foods are available to purchase at street stalls or kiosks, which are numerous in the cities. The cost of the food is low, and the quality can be quite good. Popular dishes that customers can obtain at these establishments include various kinds of kebabs served in unleavened bread, and *byrek*, a stuffed filo pastry. The filling may consist of chopped meat with a mixture of leeks, onions, spinach, and tomato. Pita bread is also a popular fast food item.³²⁹

As with other transactions in Albania, it is wise to plan payment arrangements in advance, be aware that credit card use is limited mostly to high-end establishments in Tirana. Large banks will give cash advances on credit cards. ATM machines are available in most cities.^{330, 331}

If planning to make purchases, find out in advance whether a seller can give change for large denominations. At shops in Tirana, travelers can sometimes cash a traveler’s check but cannot use them in restaurants or hotels.³³²

328 TJC-Global. “Doing Business in Albania: Business Negotiations.” 2007. http://www.tjc-global.co.uk/?lang=en&pid=etiquette_albania

329 The Bradt Travel Guide Albania. Gloyer, Gillian. “Chapter 2: Practical Information: Eating and Drinking [p. 41].” 2008.

330 World Travel Guide. “Albania Money and Exchange Rate.” 2010. <http://www.worldtravelguide.net/country/4/money/Europe/Albania.html>

331 The Lonely Planet. “Albania: Practical Information: Money & Costs.” 2010. <http://www.lonelyplanet.com/albania/practical-information/money-costs>

332 World Travel Guide. “Albania Money and Exchange Rate.” 2010. <http://www.worldtravelguide.net/country/4/money/Europe/Albania.html>

Exchange 35: Can you give me change for this?

Visitor:	Can you give me change for this?	aa moond tmeë ktheneë keto leyk?
Local:	No.	yo

Visitors can exchange U.S. dollars or euros at banks or currency exchange markets, usually located near a state bank or the town’s main post office.^{333, 334}

Transportation and Traffic

Albania’s transportation infrastructure has benefited from investments made by successive governments. Most of the improvements have been since the early 1990s, when domestic travel was limited. Now, most major roads between cities are built to a “reasonable standard,” although many exceptions exist in urban as well as rural areas.^{335, 336} Road signage is generally considered unreliable.³³⁷



© Andrew Savory
Traffic in Tirana

333 World Travel Guide. “Albania Money and Exchange Rate.” 2010.

<http://www.worldtravelguide.net/country/4/money/Europe/Albania.html>

334 The Lonely Planet. “Albania: Practical Information: Money & Costs.” 2010. <http://www.lonelyplanet.com/albania/practical-information/money-costs>

335 World Travel Guide. “Albania Transport: Getting Around by Road.” 2010.

http://www.worldtravelguide.net/country/4/internal_travel/Europe/Albania.html

336 Federal Research Division, U.S. Library of Congress. Albania: A Country Study. “Chapter 3: The Economy: Transportation and Communications: [pp. 150-155].” 1992. Washington, D.C: U.S. Government Printing Office.

337 Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada. “Travel Report, Albania: Travel and Currency.” 11 May 2010.

http://www.voyage.gc.ca/countries_pays/report_rapport-eng.asp?id=4000

Exchange 36: Which road leads to the airport?

Visitor:	Which road leads to the airport?	tseela Roog te chon ne aeroport?
Local:	The road heading east.	Rooga ne dreyteem te leendyes

Many people drive cars in Albania, where aggressive and erratic driving habits have led the country to have one of the highest fatality rates from auto accidents in Europe. Except on major routes, most cities lack street lighting at night or experience intermittent power outages. The lack of lighting and visible traffic signals adds to the danger of driving after dark. In addition, foreign drivers are advised to avoid provocation if involved in minor accidents; such situations can escalate quickly, and local drivers could be armed.^{338, 339, 340}

It is possible to rent cars in Tirana from several companies that operate internationally. Travel agencies may also arrange for chauffeur service.³⁴¹ In both cases, it is advisable to negotiate the fares in advance.³⁴²

Exchange 37: Where can I rent a car?

Visitor:	Where can I rent a car?	koo moond te maaR nye maakeen meh cheera?
Local:	In the city.	ne chuetet

338 Foreign & Commonwealth Office. "Europe: Albania: Road Travel." 2010. <http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/travel-and-living-abroad/travel-advice-by-country/europe/albania>

339 Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada. "Travel Report, Albania: Travel and Currency." 11 May 2010. http://www.voyage.gc.ca/countries_pays/report_rapport-eng.asp?id=4000

340 U.S. Department of State. "Travel.State.Gov: Albania, Country Specific Information: Traffic Safety and Road Conditions." 29 April 2010. http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1076.html#medical

341 World Travel Guide. "Albania Transport: Getting Around by Road." 2010. http://www.worldtravelguide.net/country/4/internal_travel/Europe/Albania.html

342 Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada. "Travel Report, Albania: Travel and Currency." 11 May 2010. http://www.voyage.gc.ca/countries_pays/report_rapport-eng.asp?id=4000

Taxis operate in the cities using a flat fare. As with rental cars, passengers using taxis are advised to negotiate fares in advance of travel, even though the service is considered “relatively economical.”³⁴³

Exchange 38: Can you take me there?

Visitor:	Can you take me there?	aa moond te me chosh aatyeh?
Local:	Yes, I can.	po, moondem

Bus service runs in and between cities. Intra-urban bus transport, however, can be difficult to negotiate because the buses run sporadically and do not always indicate the destination. Service is better in Tirana than in other cities, although it tends to be crowded.³⁴⁴

Exchange 39: Will the bus be here soon?

Visitor:	Will the bus be here soon?	koo moond te maaR taaksee?
Local:	Yes.	aatyeh

343 World Travel Guide. “Albania Transport: Getting Around by Road.” 2010.
http://www.worldtravelguide.net/country/4/internal_travel/Europe/Albania.html

344 The Bradt Travel Guide Albania. Gloyer, Gillian. “Chapter 2: Practical Information: Getting Around: Intra-Urban Transport [p. 36].” 2008.

Urban Street Crime and Solicitations

Albania is a very poor country, but its cities are relatively safe for foreign travelers. Although some violent incidents have occurred in Tirana and street crime is “fairly common” at night, foreigners are seldom deliberate targets. Instead, criminals seek out those in obvious (and possibly careless) possession of valuables. Common crimes include pick pocketing or passport theft, and thieves often steal from those who use public transportation.^{345, 346}



© Dori/flickr.com
Albanian motorcycle police

A number of desperately poor people, including Roma and ethnic Albanians, live and work in Albania’s cities. Many among these turn to begging as a way of earning money. To help their families survive economically, children as young as five years old work up to 18 hours a day on the streets of Tirana. Many of them are trafficked to other countries such as Greece or Italy, destined to become members of organized rings of beggars.^{347, 348}

Exchange 40: Please buy something.

Local:	Please buy something.	yoo lootem, bleenee deechkaa
Visitor:	A packet of cigarettes and a lighter.	nye paaket tsegareh edheh nye chaakmaak

Be aware that giving money to one person might attract a larger group of people who are begging. If others see someone handing out money, they are likely to pursue the source.

345 U.S. Department of State. Travel.State.Gov. “Albania, Country Specific Information: Crime.” 2010.

http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1076.html

346 Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada. “Travel Report, Albania: Crime.” May 2010.

http://www.voyage.gc.ca/countries_pays/report_rapport-eng.asp?id=4000

347 Reuters AlertNet. “Albanian Street Children’s Plight Recognized by Study.” 22 February 2008.

<http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/fromthefield/wvmeero/3de7024871e9a25db0c9ac281810b421.htm>

348 United States Department of Labor. “Albania: Incidence and Nature of Child Labor.” 12 July 2010.

<http://www.dol.gov/ilab/media/reports/iclp/tda2004/albania.htm>

Exchange 41: Give me some money, Mr.

Local:	Give me some money, Mr.	me yep tsa paaraa, zoteree
Visitor:	I don't have any.	nook kam asnye leyk

If someone is insistent on making an unwanted sale to obtain money, the target of the sale should directly decline the offer. One response could be to say "I'm sorry," or "I have no money," while walking away and avoiding eye contact.

Self Study Questions

Albania's communist government encouraged migration from the countryside to urban areas. True or False?

Unemployment in Albania rose after the Hoxha regime ended. True or False?

When the infamous pyramid schemes collapsed, most Albanians lost their life savings. True or False?

Literacy improved in Albania under the communist government. True or False?

Begging seldom occurs in Albanian cities because of government prohibitions against panhandling. True or False?

Rural Life

Land Distribution / Ownership

During communist rule, the Albanian state owned all land. After 1991, however, it began to redistribute and privatize landholdings according to emerging civil laws. Like other countries once allied with the former Soviet Union, the Albanian government returned confiscated property to its original owners in a process called restitution.



© Charles Roffey
Farm buildings in rural Albania

Exchange 42: Do you own this land?

Visitor:	Do you own this land?	aa yeh pronaaree ee kesaay tokeh?
Local:	Yes.	po

While some progress is evident today, privatization has been uneven across the country, and the results are mixed. Not only do land reform methods lack transparency, but they have been implemented in different ways according to region.³⁴⁹ In northern Albania, for instance, land redistribution sometimes followed rulings based on local clan customs rather than government decree. In such cases, the state continued to own the forests, while villagers were able to exercise their customary patterns of forestland use. In another example, land reverted to hereditary ownership according to the customary Kanun law of the north. Under this traditional body of law, land ownership is considered absolute. Before the communist era, if a property owner left his land, he would not lose title. Even if a hundred years passed, his heirs could reclaim the land upon their return. After 1991, the government began to restore this tradition in the north, where the communists had never been completely successful in eliminating such practices.³⁵⁰

349 The World Bank. "Status of Land Reform and Real Property Markets in Albania [pp. 7-9]." 2006.

http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTALBANIA/Resources/Status_of_Land_Reform_and_Real_Property_Markets_in_Albania.pdf

350 Conservation & Society, Vol. 2, Issue 1. de Waal, Clarissa. "Post-Socialist Property Rights and Wrongs in Albania: An Ethnography of Agrarian Change." 2004. <http://www.conservationandsociety.org/article.asp?issn=0972-4923;year=2004;volume=2;issue=1;spage=19;epage=50;aulast=de>

Exchange 43: Does your family live here?

Visitor:	Does your family live here?	aa yeton ketoo faameelya yoowaay?
Local:	Yes.	po

Restitution worked differently in central and southern Albania, where there had been a mix of practices, often based on corrupt politically motivated dealings/machinations. During electoral campaigns, for example, politicians could amass political capital by exploiting formerly state-owned farmland to woo migrants and squatters to an area. Such tracts of land were often located at the periphery of cities, where “informal sector” economic rules applied and regulation was absent. Often, squatters on such lands received promises of public services (water, electricity) or legal rights to their property claims. The tradition followed in central and southern Albania allowed rural land to revert to the original landowner’s heirs, if a prior claim could be established. Where there were no previous ownership records (or the records were inconclusive), the land was allocated according to a recipient’s family size. In cases where restitution could not be made, the government attempted to compensate displaced landowners with parcels of similar value.^{351, 352, 353} The government also sold property to the public at auctions where investors could purchase large state-owned farms.³⁵⁴

Near the end of the 20th century, many highland villagers moved to the plains, hoping to capitalize on the abundance of available land and the potential for employment or

351 Université de Fribourg. Regional Research. “Development Solutions Associates, Tirana: Assessing Land Rights Security in the Context of Agriculture and Social Development in Rural Albania (February 2010 – January 2011). 2008. <http://www.trpp-westernbalkans.net/albania3?phpMyAdmin=f72f1c3ac670ace9c6f45f52160020de>

352 Conservation & Society, Vol. 2, Issue 1. De Waal, Clarissa. “Post-Socialist Property Rights and Wrongs in Albania: An Ethnography of Agrarian Change.” 2004. <http://www.conservationandsociety.org/article.asp?issn=0972-4923;year=2004;volume=2;issue=1;spage=19;epage=50;aulast=de>

353 The Albanian Constitution of 1998 sets forth the right enjoyed by the citizens of Albania to own property. Source: European Parliament. Policy Department External Policies. “Briefing Paper: Property Restitution in Albania [p. 6].” September 2008. <http://www.tepsa.eu/Propertyty.pdf>

354 United Nations Development Programme. Sedik, David and Zvi Lerman. “Land Reform, Transition, and Rural Development: Land Reform in Eastern Europe and the CIS.” November 2008. <http://www.developmentandtransition.net/index.cfm?module=ActiveWeb&page=WebPage&DocumentID=692>

improved services. In some cases, people who held no legal claim to land they had lived on, for a period of time, were able to sell it when they moved.³⁵⁵

The Effects of Land Restitution

The failed policies for privatizing land and fairly granting its restitution has had severe consequences. While Albanians now have a constitutional right to own property, the land has been inequitably divided. Inconsistencies in determining boundaries and usage rights have led to vying ownership claims on the same piece of property.³⁵⁶ Not only have people been killed in property disputes, but the increase in inefficient subsistence farming has weakened the rural economy. In its implementation of land privatization, the state's inequitable restitution practices over the last two decades have undermined agricultural markets and social development in rural Albania.^{357, 358, 359}



© .oili. / flickr.com
Petrela farm village

Typical Source and Stability of Rural Income

The majority of rural Albanians continue to practice subsistence farming (meeting one's own needs with nothing left over for the market). Throughout the country, people may own small farms or compete for jobs in the agricultural sector, where the unemployment rate is high. People typically work as day laborers (preparing fields or planting and harvesting crops), equipment operators, or repairmen. Sometimes workers find jobs assisting



© Doron / Wikipedia.org
Lock-in tower, Theti

355 Conservation & Society, Vol. 2, Issue 1. de Waal, Clarissa. "Post-Socialist Property Rights and Wrongs in Albania: An Ethnography of Agrarian Change." 2004. <http://www.conservationandsociety.org/article.asp?issn=0972-4923;year=2004;volume=2;issue=1;spage=19;epage=50;aulast=de>

356 The Albanian Constitution of 1998 establishes the Albanian citizens' right to own property. Source: European Parliament. Policy Department External Policies. "Briefing Paper: Property Restitution in Albania [p. 4]." September 2008. <http://www.tepsa.eu/Property.pdf>

357 Université de Fribourg. Regional Research. "Development Solutions Associates, Tirana: Assessing Land Rights Security in the Context of Agriculture and Social Development in Rural Albania (February 2010 – January 2011). 2008. <http://www.rppp-westernbalkans.net/albania3?phpMyAdmin=f72f1c3ac670ace9c6f45f52160020de>

358 The World Bank. Valletta, William. "Status of Land Reform and Real Property Markets in Albania [p. 13]." 2006. http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTALBANIA/Resources/Status_of_Land_Reform_and_Real_Property_Markets_in_Albania.pdf

359 Policy Department External Policies, European Parliament. Frangakis, Nikos and Michaela Salamun, Eda Gemi. "Briefing Paper: Property Restitution in Albania [p. i]." September 2008. <http://www.tepsa.eu/Property.pdf>

with animal husbandry (the raising and breeding of domestic farm animals).^{360,361}

Exchange 44: Are you the only person in your family who has a job?

Visitor:	Are you the only person in your family who has a job?	aa yenee yoo ee vetmee ne faameelye che poononee?
Local:	No, everyone works.	yo, te djeeth poonoyñ

Inefficient farming practices contribute to poverty throughout the country, but especially in the rural north.³⁶² Albania’s entire rural infrastructure is undeveloped, with most of the agricultural equipment and means of transportation (including roads) in need of repair. Irrigation and energy sources are either nonexistent or barely established in rural areas. Resources such as parts, equipment, seeds, and fertilizer are difficult to acquire. Albanian farmers are at a significant disadvantage when they have to compete with highly subsidized EU agricultural imports. They also lack effective marketing and financing networks, which only began to develop after the demise of communism. Reportedly, property disputes among neighbors account for the majority of the nation’s multigenerational blood feuds.^{363, 364, 365}

Women in the Rural Work Force

Although women entered the Albanian work force in large numbers after World War II, they continued to have primary responsibility at home. To address existing labor shortages, the communist government encouraged women to accept paid jobs. In 1961,

360 CIA World Factbook. “Albania: Economy.” 24 June 2010. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/al.html>

361 Social Research Centre. INSTAT. “Women and Children in Albania: Double Dividend of Gender Equality: Executive Summary [p. 12].” 2007. http://www.childinfo.org/files/Albania_Women_Children_Report.pdf

362 Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Consumer Protection (MAFCP). “Inter-Sectoral Rural Development Strategy of Albania, ISRDSA: 2007-2013 [p. 1].” 2007. http://www.dsd.gov.al/dsd/pub/rural_development_strategy_173_1.pdf

363 Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor. U.S. Department of State. “Albania: Section 1 – Respect for the Integrity of the Person, Including Freedom From: a. Arbitrary or Unlawful Deprivation of Life.” 2007. <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2006/78797.htm>

364 Oxfam. “Oxfam’s World in Albania in Depth: Making Trade Fair.” 2010. <http://www.oxfam.org.uk/resources/countries/albania.html>

365 Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Consumer Protection (MAFCP). “Inter-Sectoral Rural Development Strategy of Albania, ISRDSA: 2007-2013 [pp. 4-9, 13].” 2007. http://www.dsd.gov.al/dsd/pub/rural_development_strategy_173_1.pdf

women made up approximately 41% of the rural work force countrywide. By the late 1980s (near the end of communist rule), their participation in agriculture and farm labor had increased to 53%; in some mountainous rural areas, the percentage was much higher.³⁶⁶

Exchange 45: Does your wife have a job?

Visitor:	Does your wife have a job?	aa poonon groowaaya yoowaay?
Local:	Yes, she is a teacher.	po, aayo esht messweseh

When the communist era ended, women’s participation in the labor force fell sharply in all economic sectors. In recent years, Albanian women are poorly represented in positions that involve decision-making. In the lowest-ranking positions of their fields, women are paid less than male coworkers with comparable levels of education.³⁶⁷

Rural Transportation

Because of the country’s poor roads, driving in rural Albania is a challenge. Roads are narrow, often in disrepair, and marked by rocks and potholes; road signs may be non-existent or improperly marked. While worse in the mountainous north, such hazards make driving at night particularly dangerous. In addition, motorists are known to drive fast and recklessly, ignoring the speed limits or warning signs. Winter in the mountains brings snow and ice, which cause the roads to be even more perilous and sometimes impassable.^{368, 369}



© Rob Hogeslag
Rural roads in poor condition

366 Federal Research Division, U.S. Library of Congress. Albania: A Country Study. “Chapter 3: The Economy: Work Force and Standard of Living: Women in the Work Force [p. 132].” 1992. Washington, D.C: U.S. Government Printing Office. “Albania: Women in the Work Force.”

367 Social Research Centre. INSTAT. “Women and Children in Albania, Double Dividend of Gender Equality: Executive Summary [p. 7].” 2007. http://www.childinfo.org/files/Albania_Women_Children_Report.pdf

368 U.S. Department of State. “Travel.State.Gov: Albania, Country Specific Information: Traffic Safety and Road Conditions.” 29 April 2010. http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1076.html#medical

369 Foreign & Commonwealth Office, U.K. “Albania: Road Travel.” 2010. <http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/travel-and-living-abroad/travel-advice-by-country/europe/albania>

Visitors may have difficulty finding gas stations in the countryside.

Exchange 46: Is there a gas station nearby?

Visitor:	Is there a gas station nearby?	aa kaa ndony karbooraant ketoo aafer?
Local:	Yes.	po

The undeveloped rural transportation system impacts the economy in negative ways. First, the lack of adequate roads reduces people’s ability to market their goods and contributes to a low standard of living in rural areas. Second, limited roads impair healthcare delivery and educational opportunities. Albania’s poor roads contribute to the increasingly high rate of migration from rural areas to the cities.³⁷⁰

Traveling by bus may be more reliable than driving or riding in a car. Bus and minibus service connects most towns. The larger buses (which are cheaper) run on a timetable, but minibuses leave whenever they fill with passengers. Both kinds of service are typically limited to travel early in the day; it may be impossible to locate either in the afternoon. In addition, signs that identify a bus line can be confusing since methods of marking destination are inconsistent.³⁷¹

Rural Health

Health services in rural Albania are limited to basic first aid. There are no rural facilities to adequately treat major medical emergencies or conditions requiring hospitalization.³⁷² Throughout the entire country, there are 41 public hospitals, representing 1.4 hospitals (or 291 hospital beds) for every 100,000 people.³⁷³

The nation’s surgeons and medical specialists practice almost exclusively in the cities, and most medical supplies and diagnostic equipment are found only in urban areas.³⁷⁴

370 AllBusiness. “World Bank – Results on the Ground – Connecting Rural Communities in Albania.” 25 May 2010.

<http://www.allbusiness.com/economy-economic-indicators/economic-news/14514203-1.html>

371 The Bradt Travel Guide Albania. Gloyer, Gillian. “Chapter 2: Practical Information: Getting Around [pp. 35–36].” 2008.

372 Travel Medicine. “Albania: Hospitals / Doctors.” 2008. <http://www.travmed.com/guide/country.php?c=Albania>

373 Ministry of Health, Republic of Albania. “An Overview of the Health Care System in Albania: Some Performance Indicators [p. 12].” 2009. <http://www.moh.gov.al/analiza/buletini.pdf>

374 Travel Medicine. “Albania: Hospitals / Doctors.” 2008. <http://www.travmed.com/guide/country.php?c=Albania>

Even in the cities, hospitals can be understaffed. This condition dates back to the 1990s, when many underpaid medical staff left the country. Hospital equipment is likely to be old, unreliable, and subject to electrical power cuts.³⁷⁵ In rural areas, these outages occur daily, affecting all services (including medical) that rely on electricity.³⁷⁶

Drugs and pharmaceutical supplies are in short supply in rural Albania. Those that are available may be of unreliable quality due to their “dubious origin.”³⁷⁷

Because the healthcare infrastructure is inadequate, many rural Albanians have no access to doctors or clinics. Those who live far from town are often unable to receive any kind of medical treatment for illness or injury.

Rural Education

Education is mandatory and free for children in Albania, but rural youth, especially those in the higher grades, are often found at home rather than in school.

Exchange 47: Are these your children?

Visitor:	Are these your children?	aa yaan ketaa femeeyet toowaay?
Local:	Yes.	po

During the primary school years, rural children enroll and participate at a higher rate than urban children. This pattern reverses itself, however, by the time they reach secondary school. Compared to 27.2% for urban children, only 13.6% of Albania’s rural children attend secondary school.³⁷⁸ The lack of access to schools is the most likely explanation for this disparity. In the cities, it is much easier for parents to send their children to school because there is usually one located nearby or within commuting distance. In rural areas,

375 The Bradt Travel Guide Albania. Gloyer, Gillian. “Chapter. 2: Practical Information: Health [p. 30].” 2008.

376 Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Consumer Protection (MAFCP). “Inter-Sectoral Rural Development Strategy of Albania, ISRDSA: 2007-2013 [p. 10].” 2007. http://www.dsd.gov.al/dsd/pub/rural_development_strategy_173_1.pdf

377 Travel Medicine. “Albania: Hospitals / Doctors.” 2008. <http://www.travmed.com/guide/country.php?c=Albania>

378 UNICEF. “Country Profile: Education in Albania [p. 2].” December 2008. <http://www.unicef.org/ceecis/Albania.pdf>

however, approximately 80% of residents have no secondary school in their community.³⁷⁹

Further undermining the chances for educational success among rural children is the fact that few of their parents have even a basic education.³⁸⁰ Rural parents are less inclined to see education offering a compelling advantage for their children's futures. Poverty is high in rural Albania, and families need their older children to help with work around the farm and household. Teenagers or young adults can take jobs and contribute to the family's income.³⁸¹

Roma children live mostly in cities, but also in rural areas. They face many barriers to education, including joblessness, discrimination, lack of teachers trained in multicultural education, and lack of institutional support. Additionally, Roma children are at a linguistic disadvantage in school since they do not receive instruction in their mother tongue. The result of these inequities for Roma of all ages is a disproportionately high poverty and illiteracy rate compared to the general population.^{382, 383}

Daily Life in the Countryside

People in the countryside rise early; the women prepare food and the men attend to their jobs. Men with free time may walk to the local villages to stroll around and socialize with other men. In the evenings, family members and friends often spend their leisure time visiting each other to share stories of events and keep in touch. Families who receive guests typically offer them coffee (or *raki*) and food or snacks.³⁸⁴

Life on small farms has kept people in Albanian villages closely tied to the land, organizing their work around the cycles of nature. Farmers and farm employees follow traditional methods in caring for land and livestock. They usually work without modern farm equipment and supplies, luxuries they cannot afford. Their work hours are long and labor-intensive. Incomes are so low that saving money is not an option for those



© wistuppert / flickr.com
Albanian Shepard in countryside

379 CERGE-EI Foundation. Hazans, Mihailsand Ija Trapeznikova. "Access to Secondary Education in Albania: Incentives, Obstacles, and Policy Spillovers [p. 7]." July 2006. http://www.cerge-ei.cz/pdf/gdn/RRCV_85_paper_01.pdf

380 CERGE-EI Foundation. Hazans, Mihails and Ija Trapeznikova. "Access to Secondary Education in Albania: Incentives, Obstacles, and Policy Spillovers [pp. 7, 11]." July 2006. http://www.cerge-ei.cz/pdf/gdn/RRCV_85_paper_01.pdf

381 CERGE-EI Foundation. Hazans, Mihails and Ija Trapeznikova. "Access to Secondary Education in Albania: Incentives, Obstacles, and Policy Spillovers [p. 11]." July 2006. http://www.cerge-ei.cz/pdf/gdn/RRCV_85_paper_01.pdf

382 UNICEF. "Country Profile: Education in Albania [p. 3]." December 2008. <http://www.unicef.org/ceecis/Albania.pdf>

383 UNDP. "Albania." November 2006. <http://www.undp.org.al/index.php?page=detail&id=37>

384 Cultures of the World: Albania. "Lifestyle: Rural Life [pp. 74-75]." 2005. New York: Marshall Cavendish.

dependent on the farming economy. For this reason, family members living in the same household work closely together to help each other survive.^{385, 386}

Exchange 48: How many people live in this house?

Visitor:	How many people live in this house?	saa nyeres yetoyn ne kete shtepee?
Local:	Four.	kaater

Among rural Albanians, financial hardship is intensified by the lack of a social safety net. Any social services that were in place under communism disappeared in the 1990s. Moreover, in the majority of cases, people are not able to secure credit or borrow money for farming or building purposes, and they end up trapped in a cycle of poverty.³⁸⁷

Asking to Speak to a Person in Charge

The police are the principal civil authorities throughout Albania, although a limited number serve rural areas. In villages, a police department may be available to help visitors if they need help. They can assist with small matters, such as getting directions to a place that offers lodging.

Exchange 49: Is there lodging nearby?

Visitor:	Is there lodging nearby?	aa kaa otel aafer?
Local:	Yes.	po

385 Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Consumer Protection (MAFCP). "Inter-Sectoral Rural Development Strategy of Albania, ISRDSA: 2007-2013 [pp. 1, 6]." 2007. http://www.dsdc.gov.al/dsdc/pub/rural_development_strategy_173_1.pdf

386 Social Research Centre. INSTAT. "Women and Children in Albania: Double Dividend of Gender Equality: Executive Summary [p. 14]." 2007. http://www.childinfo.org/files/Albania_Women_Children_Report.pdf

387 IFAD (International Fund for Agricultural Development). "Rural Financial Services in Central and Eastern Europe and the Newly Independent States." 26 April 2010. http://www.ifad.org/evaluation/public_html/eksyst/doc/prj/region/cen/financial.htm

If police are not available, visitors should speak to the local leader in a village, almost always a male (often an elder). Women are under-represented in positions that involve decision-making, such as political leadership.³⁸⁸

Exchange 50: Can you take me to the village leader?

Visitor:	Can you take me to the village leader?	aa moond te me chosh te krueetaree ee komoons se fshateet?
Local:	Yes.	po

In northern Albania, a tribal society still exists, following traditional *Kanun* law that perpetuates the social order of the past. Male clan leaders exercise leadership over specific areas. They apply the *Kanun* tradition to “every aspect of life, marriage, hospitality, personal conduct, and even just retribution in cases of adultery, theft, and murder.”^{389, 390}

In many areas of the north where *Kanun* law exists, village chiefs have broad local authority. They may have official administrative jurisdiction, receiving any government aid provided by the state and making decisions about how to distribute it to local families. In interacting with regional government, the village chief represents his people, and it is appropriate for visitors to ask him for assistance.³⁹¹

388 Social Research Centre. INSTAT. “Women and Children in Albania; Double Dividend of Gender Equality: Executive Summary [pp. 13-14].” 2007. http://www.childinfo.org/files/Albania_Women_Children_Report.pdf

389 Slovene Anthropological Society. Anthropological Notebooks, Vol. XIV, Issue 2. Mustafa, Mentor and Antonia Young. “Feud Narratives: Contemporary Deployments of Kanun in Shala Valley, Northern Albania [p. 88].” 2008. http://www.drustvo-antropologov.si/AN/PDF/2008_2/Anthropological_Notebooks_XIV_2_Mustafa.pdf

390 BBC News. Donkin, Mike. “Eyewitness: Albania’s Blood Feuds.” 5 May 2002. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/1964397.stm>

391 Slovene Anthropological Society, Anthropological Notebooks, Vol. XIV, Issue 2. Mustafa, Mentor and Antonia Young. “Feud Narratives: Contemporary Deployments of Kanun in Shala Valley, Northern Albania [p. 90].” 2008. http://www.drustvo-antropologov.si/AN/PDF/2008_2/Anthropological_Notebooks_XIV_2_Mustafa.pdf

Exchange 51: Honored village leader, we need your advice.

Visitor:	Honored village leader, we need your advice.	ee nderoowaree, krue-taar ee komoones, naa doohen kesheelat toowaaya
Local:	Of course	patyeyter

Border Crossings and Checkpoints

Visitors traveling by land can enter Albania only through official border crossings staffed by customs and police or military officers. Here, the customs officials will look at ID and stamp passports.³⁹²

Exchange 52: May I see your ID?

Police:	May I see your ID?	aa moond tyoo shoh leternyofteemin?
Visitor:	Yes.	po

The land crossings allow passage from Greece, Montenegro, Macedonia, and Kosovo (the latter region monitored by the UN). One of the four crossings in Macedonia (located at Tushëmishti-Sveti Naum, just east of Pogradec) is crossed primarily on foot. Two border crossings exist between Albania and Montenegro.³⁹³

392 U.S. Department of State. "Albania: Country Specific Information: Entry / Exit Requirements." 29 April 2010.

http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1076.html

393 The Lonely Planet. "Albania: Getting There & Away." 2010. <http://www.lonelyplanet.com/albania/transport/getting-there-away>

Exchange 53: Where is the nearest border crossing?

Visitor:	Where is the nearest border crossing?	koo esht posta koofeetaareh me ey aafert?
Local:	It's about 2 kilometers from here.	esht Reth due (2) keelomeetra ngaa ketoo

Border crossings between Kosovo and Albania are considered dangerous because of the possibility of unexploded ordnance. Mines were placed during the Kosovo Crisis (1999), when fighting erupted in response to Serbian efforts to drive Albanians out of Kosovo.^{394, 395, 396}

Visitors do not have to have a visa in their possession to enter the country, but their passport must be valid for at least six months. If they do not have a visa, they are allowed to stay a maximum of 90 days, within a specific 180-day period. The government strictly enforces these regulations and officials may ask for ID, passports, or other official papers without warning.³⁹⁷

Exchange 54: Show us the car registration.

Police:	Show us the car registration.	naa treygo RedjeestReemin e makeenes
Visitor:	OK.	ne Reygool

Checkpoints may be located at random sites inside the country. Although Albania's security situation has been relatively calm, including the border area around Kosovo,

394 Smartraveller.gov.au. "Travel Advice: Albania: Summary." August 2010. <http://www.smartraveller.gov.au/zw-cgi/view/Advice/Albania>

395 Foreign & Commonwealth Office, U.K. "Travel & Living Abroad: Albania: Travel Summary." 29 July 2010. <http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/travel-and-living-abroad/travel-advice-by-country/europe/albania>

396 Encyclopedia.com. "Kosovo Crisis (1999)." 2000. <http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1O126-KosovoCrisis1999.html>

397 U.S. Department of State. "Albania: Country Specific Information: Entry / Exit Requirements." 29 April 2010. http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1076.html

indiscriminate attacks can occur. Occasionally they take place in areas where there are tourists or foreign visitors. Police or military forces will intervene when necessary to conduct vehicle searches and provide crowd control and checkpoint security.

Exchange 55: Please get out of the car.

Police:	Please get out of the car.	yoo lootem, deelnee yaasht ngaa maakeena
Visitor:	OK.	ne Reygool

Sometimes police will distribute leaflets at border crossings to increase drivers' awareness of traffic accidents caused by careless driving. This is in response to an increasing number of traffic accidents on Albanian roads.³⁹⁸

Land Mines

In 1999, a large number of land mines were placed near the Albanian-Kosovar border region during fighting that erupted in Kosovo that year. Forces of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY), under the leadership of President Slobodan Milosovic, laid the minefields.^{399, 400}

Albania has since been officially declared free of land mines in the border region it shares with Kosovo.^{401, 402} Still, some countries have chosen to err on the side of caution and issue travel warnings for that border area. (Both the British and Australian governments still post land mine warnings on their consular sites.)^{403,404}

398 OSCE. Shala, Suela. "OSCE Presence in Albania: OSCE Presence Supports Safe Driving Campaign in Albania." 6 May 2007.

http://www.osce.org/albania/item_2_26111.html

399 Landmine & Cluster Munition Monitor. "Albania: Mine and ERW Problem." 1999–2008. <http://www.the-monitor.org/index.php/publications/display?url=lm/2006/albania.html>

400 Encyclopedia.com. "Kosovo Crisis (1999)." 2000. <http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1O126-KosovoCrisis1999.html>

401 United Nations Development Programme. "Albania: Handover of Remaining Mine-Affected Lands to Local Communities Heralds New Era of Prosperity in Kukes." 29 January 2010. <http://www.undp.org.al/index.php?page=detail&id=134>

402 Internal Campaign to Ban Landmines. "States Parties: Albania." 1998–2009.

<http://www.icbl.org/index.php/icbl/content/view/full/23567>

403 Smartraveller.gov.au. "Travel Advice: Albania: Summary." August 2010. <http://www.smartraveller.gov.au/zw-cgi/view/Advice/Albania>

Exchange 56: Are there landmines in this area?

Visitor:	Are there landmines in this area?	aa kaa fooshaa te meenoowaara ne kte zon?
Local:	No.	yo

Albania ratified the Mine Ban Treaty in February 2000.⁴⁰⁵ (The official name of the treaty is the 1997 Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on their Destruction.)⁴⁰⁶ In Albania's northeastern districts of Kukes, Tropoja, and Has (near the Kosovar border), 39 villages were located in the vicinity of the land mines. Since 1999, the triggering of unexploded ordnance and land mines caused the deaths of 34 people and injuries to 238 others. The United Nations Development Programme worked with the Albanian government to provide support to those injured by explosions.⁴⁰⁷

Albania ceased producing land mines in 1991, converting those facilities to other purposes. Using international funding, the country destroyed its stockpile in 2002 under the auspices of NATO. The Albanian government chose not to keep any land mines for purposes of training or research.⁴⁰⁸

404 Foreign & Commonwealth Office, U.K. "Travel & Living Abroad: Albania: Travel Summary." 29 July 2010. <http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/travel-and-living-abroad/travel-advice-by-country/europe/albania>

405 Landmine & Cluster Munition Monitor. "Albania: Mine Ban Policy." 1999–2008. <http://www.the-monitor.org/index.php/publications/display?url=lm/2006/albania.html>

406 Internal Campaign to Ban Landmines. "States Parties: Albania." 1998–2009. <http://www.icbl.org/index.php/icbl/content/view/full/23567>

407 United Nations Development Programme. "Albania: Handover of Remaining Mine-Affected Lands to Local Communities Heralds New Era of Prosperity in Kukes." 29 January 2010. <http://www.undp.org.al/index.php?page=detail&id=134>

408 Landmine & Cluster Munition Monitor. "Albania: Stockpile Destruction, Production, Transfer and Use." 1999–2008. <http://www.the-monitor.org/index.php/publications/display?url=lm/2006/albania.html>

Self Study Questions

After Hoxha's regime ended, the new government began to return confiscated property to former landowners. True or False?

Albania's agricultural sector must compete with EU (European Union) subsidized imports in the marketplace. True or False?

More urban than rural children enroll in primary school. True or False?

Traditional Kanun law prevails in northern Albania. True or False?

Albania maintains land mines along its border with Kosovo. True or False?

Family Life

Typical Household & Family Structure

Albania has long been a nation grounded in a communal culture and patriarchal worldview. Through the mid-to-late 20th century, village households were typically collective, composed of two and three generations. Both the decline of communism and the increased urban migration that followed weakened the common extended family.



Exchange 57: Is this your entire family?

Soldier:	Is this your entire family?	aa esht ey djeeth kyo faameelya yoowaay?
Local:	Yes.	po

Traditionally, a rural extended family would include a husband, a wife, unmarried daughters, and sons, as well as married sons and their wives and children. An adult male was the undisputed head of the household, and his role was to provide income to ensure the family’s survival. Then and now, women handled all domestic responsibilities. All members of the family shared in its economic support and contributed to the well-being of the kinship group.^{409, 410}

Northerners were divided into clans, each headed by a chief who wielded absolute power. He followed traditional Kanun law in ruling on political, matrimonial, and inheritance matters, and settling property disagreements and blood feuds. Despite the communist ban

409 Social Research Centre, INSTAT. Women and Children in Albania, Double Dividend of Gender Equality. “Chapter. 1: Inequalities and Gender Based Discrimination in Albania [p. 7].” 2007.
http://www.childinfo.org/files/Albania_Women_Children_Report.pdf

410 Federal Research Division, U.S. Library of Congress. Albania: A Country Study. “Chapter 2: The Society and Its Environment: Social System: Traditional Social Patterns and Values [pp. 74-77].” 1992. Washington, D.C: U.S. Government Printing Office.

on Kanun law in the north, its use reemerged to define family and social life after the fall of the communist government.^{411, 412}

In central and southern Albania, the family was tempered by five centuries under Ottoman control and, later, by communist philosophy and values. Under the former, religious and civil customs took on more importance than clan traditions. Ottoman authority was greater than that of Albanian clan leaders. Consequently, families here became less clannish and patriarchal in nature, compared to those in the north. In the 20th century, communist state policies further weakened the traditional family structure. In demanding loyalty to the party, the objective was to replace family ties with those based on social class. In the wake of the communist era, its dictates were replaced by civil law, and a middle class was able to develop in some areas.^{413, 414}

Ruled by the oldest male and organized around the extended family, the Albanian family structure has persevered. Relying on one’s family members has served as a social safety net when governments have failed or acted against people’s interests.⁴¹⁵

Exchange 58: Are these people part of your family?

Soldier:	Are these people part of your family?	aa yaan ketaa pyestaar te fameelyes soowaay?
Local:	Yes.	po

411 Conservation & Society, Vol. 2, Issue 1. de Waal, Clarissa. “Post-Socialist Property Rights and Wrongs in Albania: An Ethnography of Agrarian Change: Mirdita and Property Rights in Hilly-Mountainous Areas: Decollectivisation and the Kanun.” 2004. <http://www.conservationandsociety.org/article.asp?issn=0972-4923;year=2004;volume=2;issue=1;spage=19;epage=50;aulast=de>

412 Federal Research Division, U.S. Library of Congress. Albania: A Country Study. “Chapter 2: The Society and Its Environment: Social System: Traditional Social Patterns and Values [pp. 74-77].” 1992. Washington, D.C: U.S. Government Printing Office.

413 Federal Research Division, U.S. Library of Congress. Albania: A Country Study. “Chapter 2: The Society and Its Environment: Social System: Traditional Social Patterns and Values [pp. 74-77].” 1992. Washington, D.C: U.S. Government Printing Office.

414 The Central and Eastern Europe Handbook. Rama, Shinasi A. “Chapter 10: Albania [p. 119.]” 1999.

415 A Fistful of Euros. Muir, Douglas. “Some Thoughts on Greater Albania, Part 2.” 20 April 2008. <http://fistfulofeuros.net/afoc/minorities-and-integration/some-thoughts-on-greater-albania-part-2/>

Status of Women, Children, and Elders

Women

The burden of custom still impacts the status of Albanian women today. Longstanding traditions that relegate women to a secondary role have undermined recent government attempts to elevate them socially and politically. According to a UN report, “In Albanian traditional history the prevalence of patriarchal customs is one of the main reasons behind gender-based discrimination. Norms and social organization in the Albanian family and society position women as inferior to men.”⁴¹⁶



© Robert Nagle
Albanian shopkeeper in Vlore

The same report notes specific ways in which the post-communist Albanian government tried to address the status of women “from the perspective of democratic concepts and principles of human rights.”⁴¹⁷ Recognizing that women’s traditional domestic work has been undervalued, the Albanian government produced a constitution that guarantees women’s equality and prohibits sexual discrimination.⁴¹⁸ A patriarchal mindset prevails, however. The country’s fragile social infrastructure coupled with sexist attitudes have hampered government efforts to promote gender equality. For instance, the failure to achieve meaningful educational reform has depressed upward mobility in many ways. Lack of education diminishes women’s economic standing, which is characterized by low and unequal pay, few job opportunities (including self-employment), and a greater likelihood of being fired than men. Few childcare programs exist, and women’s family responsibilities can often conflict with job demands. The unemployment rate for women is much higher than for men, and professional jobs are almost always held by men.⁴¹⁹

416 Social Research Centre, INSTAT. Women and Children in Albania, Double Dividend of Gender Equality. “Chapter 1: Inequalities and Gender Based Discrimination in Albania [p. 8].” 2007.

http://www.childinfo.org/files/Albania_Women_Children_Report.pdf

417 Social Research Centre, INSTAT. Women and Children in Albania, Double Dividend of Gender Equality. “Chapter 1: Inequalities and Gender Based Discrimination in Albania [p. 9].” 2007.

http://www.childinfo.org/files/Albania_Women_Children_Report.pdf

418 SIGI. Social Institutions & Gender Index. “Gender Equality and Social Institutions in Albania.” 2009.

<http://genderindex.org/country/albania>

419 Social Research Centre, INSTAT. Women and Children in Albania, Double Dividend of Gender Equality. “Chapter 1: Inequalities and Gender Based Discrimination in Albania [pp. 9-12].” 2007.

http://www.childinfo.org/files/Albania_Women_Children_Report.pdf

Exchange 59: Where do you work, sir?

Soldier:	Where do you work, sir?	koo poononee zoteree?
Local:	I am a dentist, sir.	oon yaam denteest, zoteree

Under communism, Albanian women had stronger rights to equal education and broader job opportunities than before or after. Though some temporary gains for women were realized, overall success was limited, particularly in the north. Since the end of the Hoxha era, women’s unemployment has increased nationwide, and their representation across various professions has fallen.^{420, 421} Although the equality established under communism “had shallow roots and no tradition behind it,” the communist government opposed the nation’s patriarchal double standards in many ways.^{422,423}

As in most parts of the world, a woman’s level of education influences how she is treated, socially and professionally. Within the Albanian family, women customarily defer to the male head of household. Men make decisions concerning finances, children’s education, and marriage arrangements for adult offspring. Women have few opportunities to hold leadership positions, including in government. As expected, women with an advanced education (usually in urban areas) have greater access to information and resources, which enable them to have greater influence in their families.^{424, 425}

In other respects, women’s rights in Albania are protected only in limited ways. Female inheritance rights are guaranteed by the Civil Code, which addresses legal and testamentary succession. In practice, however, women seldom inherit family property because tradition dictates that they reside in their husband’s home after marriage. Women receive very little protection from the courts or civil authorities with respect to domestic

420 Cultures of the World: Albania. Knowlton, Mary Lee. “Lifestyle [pp. 80-81].” 2005. New York, NY: Marshall Cavendish.

421 Federal Research Division, U.S. Library of Congress. Albania: A Country Study. “Chapter 2: The Society and Its Environment: Social System: Social Structure under Communist Rule [pp. 77-82].” 1992. Washington, D.C: U.S. Government Printing Office.

422 Cultures of the World: Albania. Knowlton, Mary Lee. “Lifestyle [p. 81].” 2005. New York, NY: Marshall Cavendish.

423 Federal Research Division, U.S. Library of Congress. Albania: A Country Study. “Chapter 2: The Society and Its Environment: Social System: Social Structure under Communist Rule [pp. 77-82].” 1992. Washington, D.C: U.S. Government Printing Office.

424 Social Research Centre, INSTAT. Women and Children in Albania, Double Dividend of Gender Equality. Chapter 1: Inequalities and Gender Based Discrimination in Albania [pp. 10-14].” 2007.

http://www.childinfo.org/files/Albania_Women_Children_Report.pdf

425 Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor. U.S. Department of State. “Albania: Section 5 – Discrimination, Societal Abuses, and Trafficking in Persons: Women.” 2007. <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2006/78797.htm>

violence, which has long been endemic in the country. It is “estimated [that] one in three women in Albania” is subject to being struck or beaten. In addition, human trafficking, specifically of women and girls, is a widely recognized problem in Albania. Violence against women is “widely tolerated on grounds of tradition, even at the highest levels of the government, police and judiciary.”^{426, 427, 428, 429}

Sworn Virgins

Until recently, women could avoid marriage by choosing to become a “sworn virgin”—a custom of Kanun law in northern Albania. To do so, a woman had to take an irrevocable oath to remain celibate her entire life and become a head of household (or otherwise follow prescribed social roles for males). Dressing and acting as men, sworn virgins would also adopt traditionally male names. Their position allowed them to engage in behavior normally forbidden for women, such as smoking, carrying guns, avenging blood feuds, and doing work traditionally assigned to males. Men in the community accepted the sworn virgins’ official role by including them in council meetings, socializing and negotiating with them openly, and attending mosque alongside them. The tradition enabled women to function publicly within a cultural context that rigidly relegated women to the home and domestic life.^{430, 431, 432}

A daughter could opt to take on the role of a son when her own household had none. In the rural north, this shortage was often the result of a blood feud. To prevent a revenge feud that could erupt and lead to bloodshed, a daughter would sometimes become a sworn virgin after turning down a suitor. Under communist rule, the practice was discouraged, and it has since been in decline.^{433, 434}

426 Amnesty International. “Albania: Violence Against Women in the Family ‘It’s Not Her Shame’ Summary.” 19 April 2006.

<http://asiapacific.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGEUR110052006?open&of=ENG-ALB>

427 SIGI. Social Institutions & Gender Index. “Gender Equality and Social Institutions in Albania.” 2009.

<http://genderindex.org/country/albania>

428 Social Research Centre, INSTAT. Women and Children in Albania, Double Dividend of Gender Equality. “Chapter 3: Reducing Women’s Poverty is a Call for Equality [p. 27].” 2007. http://www.childinfo.org/files/Albania_Women_Children_Report.pdf

429 Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor. U.S. Department of State. “Albania: Section 5 – Discrimination, Societal Abuses, and Trafficking in Persons: Women.” 2007. <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2006/78797.htm>

430 The New York Times. “Albanian Custom Fades: Woman as Family Man.” 25 June 2008.

http://www.nytimes.com/2008/06/25/world/europe/25virgins.html?_r=1

431 Elsie, Robert. A Dictionary of Albanian Religion, Mythology, and Folk Culture. “Sworn Virgin [p. 245.]” 2001. New York, NY: New York University Press.

432 Welt Online. “Tradition of ‘Sworn Virgins’ Dying Out in Albania.” 10 June 2008. <http://www.welt.de/english-news/article2536539/Tradition-of-sworn-virgins-dying-out-in-Albania.html>

433 The New York Times. “Albanian Custom Fades: Woman as Family Man.” 25 June 2008.

http://www.nytimes.com/2008/06/25/world/europe/25virgins.html?_r=1

Children

From an early age, Albanian children are expected to help with household work. Daughters are taught to sew, cook, clean, and help care for babies and household animals. Sons in rural areas learn to work in the fields, care for farm animals, and do mechanical work. Children also learn communal values under the care of extended family members as well as their parents. If a parent is absent from the home, a child may live with his or her uncle or another relative.



© Zsuzsanna Formanek
Albanian children in Berat

Exchange 60: Do you have any brothers?

Soldier:	Do you have any brothers?	aa kenee veleyzer?
Local:	Yes, I have one brother.	po, kaam nye velaa

Though children are afforded certain protections under the law, few are enforced. Free education, for instance, is mandatory for nine years, but many children do not attend school because parents often cannot afford to pay for supplies. Poverty, family beliefs, and traditions are all contributing factors to low school attendance and high dropout rates. In addition, illegal child labor and crimes against children, including trafficking, have been problematic. Many children, especially Roma youth, are homeless or displaced. Though the laws are not enforced, girls cannot legally marry until they are 16. Early and arranged marriages take place nonetheless, particularly in the northern mountains and among the Roma^{435, 436, 437}

434 BBC News. Lanchin, Mike. "Last of Albania's 'Sworn Virgins.'" 22 October 2008.

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/7682240.stm>

435 Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor. U.S. Department of State. "Albania: Section 5 – Discrimination, Societal Abuses, and Trafficking in Persons: Children." 2007. <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2006/78797.htm>

436 SIGI. Social Institutions & Gender Index. "Gender Equality and Social Institutions in Albania." 2009.

<http://genderindex.org/country/albania>

437 Social Research Centre, INSTAT. Women and Children in Albania, Double Dividend of Gender Equality. Chapter 1: Inequalities and Gender Based Discrimination in Albania [p. 9]. 2007. http://www.childinfo.org/files/Albania_Women_Children_Report.pdf

If a father dies, children customarily end up living with his relatives; the mother seldom receives custody.⁴³⁸

Elders

In keeping with familial interdependence, Albanian elders (especially males) occupy an important position within the household. In rural and urban areas, children and grandchildren benefit from the close social interaction that surrounds the elders’ role as caregivers to the young. This responsibility includes telling stories about Albanian life as well as sharing folk tales and histories. Storytelling allows older family members to pass on cultural traditions and educate children about familial responsibilities.



© Gabor/ flickr.com
Older man taking a smoke break

In the north, male elders are often the clan leaders. They wield a great deal of political influence and are decisive voices for their families as well as the broader community.⁴³⁹

Exchange 61: Did you grow up here?

Soldier:	Did you grow up here?	aa yenee Reetoo ketoo?
Local:	Yes.	po

Economically, elders have been vulnerable to Albania’s extreme poverty, which tends to weaken family networks and social cohesion. Older members of the community lack health care services and often have no way of treating chronic diseases, mental illness, or conditions that impair their mobility.⁴⁴⁰ In addition, as many young people have migrated to the cities or out of the country in search of employment, elders have often remained in the countryside looking after small farms. Consequently, many live alone, without access to transportation, and may have to walk long distances to get supplies or medicine from the nearest town.

438 SIGI. Social Institutions & Gender Index. “Gender Equality and Social Institutions in Albania.” 2009.

<http://genderindex.org/country/albania>

439 A Fistful of Euros. Muir, Douglas. “Some Thoughts on Greater Albania, Part 2.” 20 April 2008.

<http://fistfulofeuros.net/afoe/minorities-and-integration/some-thoughts-on-greater-albania-part-2/>

440 SOROS. “The Public Health Program.” 26 October 2009. <http://www.soros.al/en/legacy/health.htm>

If finances and lifestyle allow, younger family members may try to follow the custom of caring for older relatives. In the past, it was not uncommon for three generations to live under the same roof, especially in rural areas. The Western practice of placing elders in live-in care facilities has never been part of Albanian tradition. Rather, the family has always served as the traditional safety net for elders and other vulnerable family members.⁴⁴¹

Marriage, Divorce, and Birth

Marriage

According to the country's Family Code, males and females may legally marry at 18 and 16, respectively.⁴⁴² Although not common, forced or arranged marriages do occur, and can involve underage children. Such marriages are more likely among the Roma population or within clans in the northern mountains.⁴⁴³



© Martin Gevonden
Bride and groom in Berat

Exchange 62: Are you married?

Soldier:	Are you married?	aa yenee ee maartoowar?
Local:	Yes.	po

A woman's parents typically choose her spouse, though this tradition is becoming less common in large urban areas. Sometimes, however, a woman chooses her own husband. Marriage between members of different religions is common throughout Albania.^{444,445}

441 A Fistful of Euros. Muir, Douglas. "Some Thoughts on Greater Albania, Part 2." 20 April 2008.

<http://fistfulofeuros.net/afoe/minorities-and-integration/some-thoughts-on-greater-albania-part-2/>

442 SIGI. Social Institutions & Gender Index. "Gender Equality and Social Institutions in Albania." 2009.

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443 Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor. U.S. Department of State. "Albania: Section 5 – Discrimination, Societal Abuses, and Trafficking in Persons: Children." 2007. <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2006/78797.htm>

444 A Fistful of Euros. Muir, Douglas. "Some Thoughts on Greater Albania, Part 2." 20 April 2008.

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445 Wedding Day Beauty. "Wedding: Albanian Wedding Wedding [sic] and Traditions." 2009. <http://www.wedding-day-beauty.com/wedding-albanian-wedding-wedding-and-traditions>

Following the communist period, the importance placed on marriage and procreation as women’s primary goals in life did not change.⁴⁴⁶ To be unmarried and childless was considered an extreme misfortune, unless a compelling reason existed for such a choice. With a preference for male heirs, many couples have been willing to give birth to several daughters until a son is born. Since the advent of technology that can determine a baby’s sex, selective abortion has often been used to limit the birth of female children.⁴⁴⁷

Since the 15th century, Albanians have strictly upheld exogamous marriage traditions (the requirement to marry outside the kin group). Under the Kanun law of the north, elaborate marriage codes forbade choosing a mate even from “among individuals whose tribes had a common godparent.”⁴⁴⁸ The law further stipulated, “there must be at least seven generations without common blood between spouses, and that spouses must come from different *bajraks* (districts).”⁴⁴⁹ These restrictions were taken seriously; violating a clan marriage law could generate a blood feud that might involve entire families.

Exchange 63: Is this your wife?

Soldier:	Is this your wife?	aa esht kyo groowaaya yoowaay?
Local:	Yes.	po

446 United Nations. Republic of Albania Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women: 3rd National Periodic Report. “Chapter 4: Marriage and the Life in Family: Legal Framework for Marriage and Life in Family [p. 115].” 19 December 2008. <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/refworld/rwmain?page=search&docid=4a646c080&skip=0&query=Albania,%20marriage%20and%20divorce>

447 Goliath. “Albanians’ First Post-Communist Decade. Values in Transition: Traditional or Liberal?” 22 June 2003. http://goliath.ecnext.com/coms2/gi_0199-3072714/Albanians-first-post-communist-decade.html

448 Goliath. “Albanians’ First Post-Communist Decade. Values in Transition: Traditional or Liberal?” 22 June 2003. http://goliath.ecnext.com/coms2/gi_0199-3072714/Albanians-first-post-communist-decade.html

449 Conservation & Society, Vol 2, Issue 1. de Waal, Clarissa. “Post-Socialist Property Rights and Wrongs in Albania: An Ethnography of Agrarian Change: Mirdita and Property Rights in Hilly-Mountainous Areas: Decollectivisation and the Kanun.” 2004. <http://www.conservationandsociety.org/article.asp?issn=0972-4923;year=2004;volume=2;issue=1;spage=19;epage=50;aulast=de>

An Albanian bride traditionally moves into the home of her husband's family following marriage. Especially in rural areas, women are subject to male control of most aspects of their lives.⁴⁵⁰

Divorce

In the late 20th century, Albania's divorce rate remained one of the lowest among European countries.⁴⁵¹ The establishment of networks between extended patrilineal families is taken seriously.⁴⁵² Even though spousal abuse of women has remained a "serious problem," women usually follow tradition in choosing to remain with their husband rather than go through a divorce.⁴⁵³ With no means of support and no assistance from the state, divorce leaves women socially and economically vulnerable. In most cases, mothers lose custody of their children because the courts favor fathers. Finally, women often feel compelled to stay in difficult marriages because divorce can create a social stigma for her family.^{454, 455} For all these reasons, divorce is uncommon.

Though Albania's Family Code (2004) guarantees a woman's right to initiate divorce and receive fair treatment with respect to property rights, alimony, child support, and child custody, tradition usually trumps enforcement of the law.⁴⁵⁶ Women have not been very successful in receiving state protection or enforcement of their legal rights.⁴⁵⁷

450 SIGI. Social Institutions & Gender Index. "Gender Equality and Social Institutions in Albania." 2009.

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451 DivorceMagazine.com. "World Divorce Statistics: Albania." 1996.

<http://www.aldridgeshs.eq.edu.au/sose/modresp/families/divorce/Divorce%20Magazine%20World%20Divorce%20Statistics.htm>

452 A Fistful of Euros. Muir, Douglas. "Some Thoughts on Greater Albania, Part 2." 20 April 2008.

<http://fistfulofeuros.net/afoc/minorities-and-integration/some-thoughts-on-greater-albania-part-2/>

453 Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor. U.S. Department of State: Women. "2008 Human Rights Report: Albania." 25 February 2009. <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2008/eur/119064.htm>

454 Refworld. UNHCR. "Albania: Violence Against Women in the Family 'It's Not Her Shame' Summary." 30 March 2006.

[http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-](http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/refworld/rwmain?page=search&docid=445616ae2&skip=0&query=Albania,%20marriage%20and%20divorce)

[bin/texis/vtx/refworld/rwmain?page=search&docid=445616ae2&skip=0&query=Albania,%20marriage%20and%20divorce](http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/refworld/rwmain?page=search&docid=445616ae2&skip=0&query=Albania,%20marriage%20and%20divorce)

455 SIGI. Social Institutions & Gender Index. "Gender Equality and Social Institutions in Albania." 2009.

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456 United Nations. Republic of Albania Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women: 3rd National Periodic Report. "Chapter 4: Marriage and the Life in Family: Legal Framework for Marriage and Life in Family [pp. 112, 115]." 19 December 2008. [http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-](http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/refworld/rwmain?page=search&docid=4a646c080&skip=0&query=Albania,%20marriage%20and%20divorce)

[bin/texis/vtx/refworld/rwmain?page=search&docid=4a646c080&skip=0&query=Albania,%20marriage%20and%20divorce](http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/refworld/rwmain?page=search&docid=4a646c080&skip=0&query=Albania,%20marriage%20and%20divorce)

457 Refworld. UNHCR. "Albania: Violence Against Women in the Family 'It's Not Her Shame' Summary." 30 March 2006.

<http://www.unhcr.org/cgi->

Childbirth and Maternity

Life in Albania remains family centered. In rural villages and households, children represent a source of labor in farm work and domestic duties. They are also seen as part of the greater social security network that enables parents to be cared for and supported in their old age. Thus, married couples typically plan for children.



© Gabori flickr.com
An Albanian Family

Historically, families among the northern clans desired sons, not daughters, whose births were often greeted with disappointment. In Berat (northern Albania), “the main beam of a house was painted black at the birth of a girl as a token of the family’s disappointment and mourning.”⁴⁵⁸ Baby boys typically received better care and protection than daughters.

Superstitions related to pregnancy and childbirth are common, especially in rural areas. These include divining the baby’s sex, caring for the child appropriately, and warding off the “evil eye” (a malevolent force considered a danger to newborn children). To avoid the latter, a mother gives birth in a secret place, and she and the child are secluded in the home for 40 days afterward. Another custom calls for a family ceremony three days after the birth of a son. Gathered around the child, the family breaks a piece of cake or bread over the infant’s head. This event is believed to signal the arrival of the three fates, who determine the child’s future.⁴⁵⁹

Family Events, Rites of Passage

Families get together to celebrate birthdays, marriages, and other special events. For orthodox families in Albania, church activities are often significant, adding a layer of ritual to the event. Family gatherings typically involve sharing specially prepared foods. Usually, extended family members and friends are invited to attend the celebration.



© Jom Verwey
A birthday party in Qerret

bin/texis/vtx/refworld/rwmain?page=search&docid=445616ae2&skip=0&query=Albania,%20marriage%20and%20divorce

458 A Dictionary of Albanian Religion, Mythology, and Folk Culture. Elsie, Robert. “Birth Customs [p. 37].” 2001. New York, NY: New York University Press.

459 A Dictionary of Albanian Religion, Mythology, and Folk Culture. Elsie, Robert. “Birth Customs [pp. 39–40]” 2001. New York, NY: New York University Press.

One such family celebration is a child's first haircut, which usually takes place around the age of two. Traditionally, the godfather is present to cut the child's hair. Details of the ritual vary, though, depending on whether the child is Muslim or Christian.⁴⁶⁰

Another important tradition still followed among many Albanian families is the name day. This pre-Christian, rural custom of the Balkans was later adapted to and embedded within Christian practices. Name day remains a religious ceremony, its practice varying by region, family, and level of involvement with the church. On this day, which holds more significance than a birthday, male heirs and the head of the household honor their patron saint. The celebration often involves a ritual meal with family members and invited guests who share a special cake or sweet bread. Families in some areas of rural southern Albania honor a saint who is the patron or guardian of the entire household, not just one individual.^{461, 462}

Weddings

Wedding traditions vary throughout Albania, depending on the region and the degree to which old customs have been superseded by contemporary ones. Some of the most common traditions in modern Albania are similar to those in the West due to shared religious practices.

One Albanian custom takes place in the week preceding a wedding, when friends and family members visit the home of the bride and groom to pay their respects. They offer their congratulations, bring gifts, and dine together.⁴⁶³



© Martin Gevonden
Bride and groom in Berat

460 A Dictionary of Albanian Religion, Mythology, and Folk Culture. Elsie, Robert. "Hair Cutting [p. 106]." 2001. New York, NY: New York University Press.

461 A Dictionary of Albanian Religion, Mythology, and Folk Culture. Elsie, Robert. "Name Day [p. 185]." 2001. New York, NY: New York University Press.

462 umiacs.umd. "Religious and Holyday Foods: Saints Blessing." No date.

http://www.umiacs.umd.edu/users/lpv/YU/HTML/food_religious.html

463 Babylon Productions Wedding Centre. "Albanian Wedding Wedding [sic] and Traditions." 2009.

<http://www.videobabylon.ca/tips/ceremonies/albanian-wedding-ceremonies-and-traditions.html>

Exchange 64: Congratulations on your wedding!

Soldier:	Congratulations on your wedding!	ooreemeh per maartesen!
Local:	Thank you for coming.	faaleymeenderit che erdhet

On the day of the wedding, the bride receives gifts of cash from her relatives. At some point in the ceremony, it is customary to throw coins in the air and drink a toast to the bride and groom.

Exchange 65: May you have children. May you have a happy life.

Soldier:	May you have children. May you have a happy life.	teh traashegohenee. yet te loomtoor
Local:	Thank you so much.	faleymeenderit shoom

Funerals

In Albania, burial is traditionally arranged to take place no more than 24 hours after death. During this time, a vigil is held, attended by friends, family members, and other visitors who stop by to offer their condolences.^{464, 465}

Exchange 66: My condolences.

Soldier:	My condolences.	ngoosheleemet ey meeya
Local:	Thank you.	faleymeenderit

464 A Dictionary of Albanian Religion, Mythology, and Folk Culture. Elsie, Robert. "Funeral Customs [pp. 94]." 2001. New York, NY: New York University Press.

465 The Albanians: An Ethnic History from Prehistoric Times to the Present. Jacques, Edwin E. "The Stalinist Government of Enver Hoxha (1944–1985) [p. 569]." 1995.

Burial (rather than cremation) is the usual practice for dealing with the remains of the dead. A funeral procession escorts the coffin to the gravesite, and a person close to the deceased delivers a eulogy. Small objects favored by the departed might be placed in the grave, such as a pipe or a tin or tobacco. Afterwards, mourners typically return to the home of the bereaved family to wish them well.

Exchange 67: May God be with you.

Soldier:	May God be with you.	zotee choft mey yoo
Local:	Thank you.	faleymeenderit

After the funeral, families gather periodically to remember and honor the deceased. The dates and nature of such gatherings vary, depending on religious and personal preference.

Naming Conventions

The naming of a child in Albania is similar in some respects to the practice in Western culture. The parents choose a first (given) name, which is followed by the child’s surname (last or family name).⁴⁶⁶ In Albania, the surname is from the paternal side of one’s family.

Albanian names can be recognized by certain conventions. Family names often end in “-aj” (Sylaj, Cobaj, Dreshaj). Female’s first names often end in “-a” (Justina, Ada). Given names for males vary. A few examples are Arjan, Thoma, Adil, Agron.⁴⁶⁷

Family names in Albania may indicate clan or tribal affiliation. They can also signal the location of origin, such as a city or region. A name may indicate a religious affiliation (as in the surname *Abdullahi*), but it may be linked to the past rather than the person’s present religious status.⁴⁶⁸

466 A Guide to Names and Naming Practices. “Western Balkans: Albanian [p. 29].” March 2006. http://www.fbiic.gov/public/2008/nov/Naming_practice_guide_UK_2006.pdf

467 A Guide to Names and Naming Practices. “Western Balkans: Albanian [p. 30].” March 2006. http://www.fbiic.gov/public/2008/nov/Naming_practice_guide_UK_2006.pdf

468 A Guide to Names and Naming Practices. “Western Balkans: Albanian [p. 30].” March 2006. http://www.fbiic.gov/public/2008/nov/Naming_practice_guide_UK_2006.pdf

Self Study Questions

The communist party in Albania banned the use of traditional Kanun law in the north. True or False?

Ottoman influence on the Albanian family structure was strongest in the north. True or False?

The Albanian government has tried to protect women from discrimination through constitutional protections. True or False?

Women's inheritance rights in Albania today are guaranteed by the Civil Code. True or False?

Albania has one of Europe's lowest divorce rates. True or False?

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Appendix A: Answers to Self study Questions

Profile

1. Albania's main rivers begin in the west and flow toward the east.
False.
Most rivers begin in the eastern mountains or beyond and flow westward, emptying into the Adriatic.
2. The Albanian capital of Tirana was founded centuries ago.
False.
Tirana was founded in 1920, although the area where it stands has been inhabited for centuries. Roman Emperor Justinian built a castle in the region in 520.
3. Albania stagnated politically and economically under Ottoman domination.
True.
Ottoman governance was inefficient and corrupt, and Albania stagnated through centuries of Ottoman domination (1385–1912).
4. The U.S. helped Albania assert its independence.
True.
Occupied by Serbia and other nations, Albania saw its independence restored at the Congress of Lushnje (1920) with the help of President Woodrow Wilson. He opposed a post-World War I European plan that would have dismembered independent Albania.
5. The Hoxha regime's close bilateral ties with Yugoslavia lasted for decades.
False.
After World War II, Albania's initial close relations with Yugoslavia deteriorated quickly due to the Hoxha regime's fear of Yugoslav aggression.

Religion

1. Enver Hoxha, Albania's Stalinist leader, viewed religion as potentially divisive.
True.
Hoxha viewed religious institutions as a threat and campaigned against them in Albania.
2. The national ban on religious practices in Albania lasted until Ramiz Alia came to power.
True.

Enver Hoxha's successor, Ramiz Alia, reacted to international criticism and established more tolerant policies with regard to religion. In 1988, clergy who had left the country were allowed to return to Albania. Since the late 1990s, Albanians have been free to practice religion.

3. Today, Albanians are considered largely secular in their beliefs and lifestyle.

True.

Even when they identify with organized religions, Albanians are considered largely secular. Having historically practiced religious tolerance alongside nationalism, they identify as Albanian before any religious affiliation.

4. The majority of Albanians is Catholic.

False.

Albania's Catholic population is a minority within the country. They are concentrated in the mountainous northern region, particularly in and around the city of Shkodër.

5. Mother Teresa Day is a national holiday in Albania.

True.

The national holiday known as Mother Teresa Day honors its namesake, who was called Agnesë Gonxhe Bojaxhiu at birth. Mother Teresa was born in Albania and rose to prominence as a Catholic nun who ministered to the poor in India.

Traditions

1. Albania was historically divided into two linguistic subcultures.

True.

The tribal Ghegs lived in the north, and the semifeudal Tosks lived south of the Shkumbin River.

2. The tribal blood feuds of the north are based on a body of customary law codes known as Kanun.

True.

This code stipulates that the family of a murdered victim had the right to avenge itself on any male (over a certain age) who belonged to the extended family of the man who committed the crime.

3. The national holiday known as Summer Day was banned by the communist government.

False.

Summer Day is based on an old pagan festival honoring the summer season. The communists left this festival intact.

4. Albanian Independence Day celebrates the nation's independence from the Serbs.

False.

It celebrates Albania's independence from the domination of the Ottomans.

5. The traditional cap worn by men in Albania is usually white.

True.

Known as a *qeleshe*, the traditional cap of Albanian men is typically white. The name *qeleshe* derives from the Albanian word for "wool." The shape of the cap varies according to region.

Urbanization

1. Albania's communist government encouraged migration from the countryside to urban areas.

False.

The communist government's policies blocked migration to cities, since agricultural development was its top priority. As recently as the early 1990s, between 65% and 75% of Albanians lived in rural areas.

2. Unemployment in Albania rose after the Hoxha regime ended.

True.

In 1991, estimates placed the unemployment rate at around 50% throughout the country. Factories closed, unable to secure energy, raw materials, and equipment.

3. When the infamous pyramid schemes collapsed, most Albanians lost their life savings.

True.

Occurring during the period of privatization, the collapse of pyramid investment schemes led to widespread impoverishment, unemployment, and economic ruin.

4. Literacy improved in Albania under the communist government.

True.

In 1949, the government passed a law requiring citizens who could not read or write to attend classes in those subjects. Education followed Soviet models that addressed productivity in a controlled economy. By the late 1980s, most of the population had become literate.

5. Begging seldom occurs in Albanian cities because of government prohibitions against panhandling.

False.

On the streets of Tirana, it is not unusual to see children as young as 5 years of age forced into begging as a means of helping their families escape poverty.

Rural

1. After Hoxha's regime ended, the new government began to return confiscated property to former landowners.

True.

The new government implemented a policy of restitution (returning confiscated property to its original owner). The process varied by region and has not been effective because boundaries, usage rights, and divisions of property were inconsistently determined.

2. Albania's agricultural sector must compete with EU (European Union) subsidized imports in the marketplace.

True.

Albanian farmers are at a disadvantage in the marketplace because they have to compete with subsidized agricultural imports from the EU.

3. More urban than rural children enroll in primary school.

False.

More children from rural areas enroll and participate in primary school than those from urban areas. This discrepancy is reversed, however, by the time Albanian youth reach secondary-school age. There are fewer secondary schools in the countryside, and urban children outnumber their rural counterparts by 2 to 1 at this stage of education.

4. Traditional Kanun law prevails in northern Albania.

True.

Male clan leaders in the north apply *Kanun* law to all domains of daily life: marriage, hospitality, interpersonal relations, and "retribution in cases of adultery, theft, and murder."

5. Albania maintains land mines along its border with Kosovo.

False.

Although land mines were placed near the Albanian-Kosovar border in 1999, the region has since been declared officially free of mines (according to a UN report).

Family

1. The communist party in Albania banned the use of traditional *Kanun* law in the north.

True.

Despite the communist ban on *Kanun* law in the north, the traditional practice persisted. Following the demise of the Hoxha regime, *Kanun* law reemerged to govern family and social life.

2. Ottoman influence on the Albanian family structure was strongest in the north.

False.

After five centuries of Ottoman control in what is now central and southern Albania, imperial customs dominated the development of the indigenous family structure. In the north, where the Ottoman influence was less extensive, clan traditions prevailed.

3. The Albanian government has tried to protect women from discrimination through constitutional protections.

True.

Besides guaranteeing women's equality, the Albanian Constitution prohibits discrimination based on sex. This effort has been undercut, however, by strong patriarchal traditions and a weak social infrastructure.

4. Women's inheritance rights in Albania today are guaranteed by the Civil Code.

True.

While women's rights are guaranteed by law, tradition and custom still favor men.

5. Albania has one of Europe's lowest divorce rates.

True.

Albanians marry to establish networks between patrilineal families. Divorce leaves women socially and economically vulnerable, with no means of support and no assistance from the state. For these reasons, divorce is relatively uncommon.