Introducing Korça

A proud and cultured town high in the hinterlands of southeastern Albania, Korça (pronounced KOR-chä) is a world away from Tirana, and is indeed close to Greece in more than one way. Locals cross the border to nearby Kastoria and further afield to Thessaloniki and Athens for the latest fashion, religious festivals, education, jobs and family visits, and of many are fluent in both Greek and Albanian.

Korça is known for its pretty girls, its tradition of serenades, and good food. Despite its small size, it has quite a few great sights, including an excellent icon museum, a bustling bazaar, a fantastic Byzantine-era painted church, a top-rate beer brewery and a great beer festival. In the immediate surroundings, Pogradec has a lovely lakeside setting and Voskopoja and Dhardha make for great daytrips in the mountains.

This new Korça In Your Pocket guide is the first English language city guide to this fascinating destination. If you have any comments, please let us know at tirana@inyourpocket.com. Enjoy Korça.

About this guide

This Instant Guide contains the content of the Korça In Your Pocket mini-guide, the first English-language guide to Korça, Pogradec and surroundings, produced in March 2009 in cooperation with Korça municipality, GTZ Albania and the Gulliver OK Travel Agency. Copies of the printed mini-guide are free and can be found locally as well as in many other distribution points in Albania including hotels, embassies, airports and tourist information centres; copies may also be sold for 200 lek to allow bookshop distribution. The full content of this guide can be viewed at http://albania.inyourpocket.com. Find In Your Pocket guides to Tirana, Shkodra, Pristina, Skopje, Belgrade, Zagreb, Ljubljana, Athens and other cities online at www.inyourpocket.com.
Albania's population is 3,619,778 (2008 estimate). There are more than two million ethnic Albanians in Kosovo, hundreds of thousands in Macedonia and Montenegro, and an estimated two million in the United States, Switzerland, Germany, Greece, Italy and Canada. In Korça, some 65% of believers are Orthodox, with the rest split between Muslim, Bektashi and Catholic.

At 3,710 square kilometres, Korça prefecture is the largest in Albania. 265,000 inhabitants (2001). The prefecture's two cities are Peshkopi, at 2,751m.

Korça has plenty of hotels to choose from, with everything available from an Ostranger inn to comfortable three-star options. Breakfast is included unless mentioned otherwise.

**Instant Korça**

**World Cup** Blvd. Gjergj Kastrioti. Surfing at 100 lek./hr.  Open 08:30 - 24:00.

**Mobile phones**

Three rather expensive providers are active in Albania. AMC numbers start with 068, Vodafone numbers with 069 and Eagle Mobile numbers with 067. It’s easy to buy and recharge a mobile phone SIM card for around 600 lek at the operators’ shops; recharge vouchers are sold in kiosks too. National rates for pre-paid calls are between 30-55 lek per minute.


**Vodafone Rr. Guri Stratabordha 2, tel. 25 28 30.** Also at R. Themistokli Gërmenji, palt. 2.  Open 08:30 - 20:00. Closed Sun.

**Post**

Post Shopitpate has the following rates for postcards/ letters under 20gr: Albania 15/20 lek; Italy, Greece, France, Germany, Switzerland, USA, Canada 50 lek; rest of Europe 30/50 lek; Americas 50/90 lek; elsewhere 40/60 lek.

**Post office B-5, Blv. Gjergj Kastrioti, tel. +355 82 24 39 92, www.postashqiptare.al.**  Open 08:00 - 16:00.

**Public telephones**

Public card phones can be found on the street, at hotels and in post offices. Telephone cards are available at post offices and should be wrapped in clear plastic. If you don’t plan to talk away a whole card, you can rent one from the ‘businessmen’ often found lingering near the phones. Prices will run about 20 lek a unit.

**Telephone calls**

International calls: Dial the international access number (00), the country code, the area code and the subscriber’s number. Call 12 for international directory assistance.

Local calls: Korça numbers have six digits, all starting with 01.

**Calling Albania from abroad:** Dial the country code (355), then the city code (Korça is 82). To call a mobile phone in Albania from abroad, dial 355, then drop the 0 and dial 38.

**Exchange rates (per 1-4-09)**

€1 = 131 lek; £1 = 141 lek; US$1 = 99 lek

**Internet access**

There's free internet access at the Thimi Mitko Library. Open 09:00 - 19:00.

**Smarad**

How far does your euro, pound or dollar go in Korça?

How does the cost of living in Korça compare to Switzerland, the United States or Maryland. The highest mountain is Mt. Korabi near Peshkopi, at 2,751m.

For a peaceful night’s sleep, we certainly feel it’s worth oversleeping from an Ostranger inn to comfortable three-star options. Breakfast is included unless mentioned otherwise.

**George E-T, Rruga Korça-Mborje, tel. +355 82 24 37 94/+355 69 208 31 12.** Named after the owner’s father, the hotel is on the hillside just east of town. It has triangular rooms arranged like pieces of pie. Feel as easy as a cherry in one of the newly built suites with woolen bedroom sets and en-suite bathrooms. The quiet location makes air conditioning unnecessary so you can sleep without windows open. Along the road to Mborje, it’s a bit of a walk from the centre, but just a short taxi ride.

**Gold C-3, Rr. Kico Goleushi 5, tel. +355 82 24 68 49/+355 69 236 43 50.** A modern and friendly hotel with balconied rooms in various shades of brown, all equipped with en-suite bathrooms with reliable hot water. Just off Boulevard Gjergj Kastrioti. 10 rooms (2 singles 1,500 lek, 7 doubles 3,000-3,500 lek, 1 triple 4,000 lek).

**Grand B-5, Blv. Gjergj Kastrioti, tel. +355 82 24 31 68, fax +355 82 24 26 77, grandhotelkor@hotmail.com.** Recently brought back to grandness with a thorough renovation, the glistering marble hall of Korça’s largest hotel (and one of the best in Albania) leads to adequate, simple rooms overlooking the main square. The hotel brochure proclaims “yes, this miracle must be felt to be believed” and with good reason. Go. It’s all done with a B-5 flair. 25 rooms, 4 for foreigner (250 lek per bed). Breakfast not included.

**Han Elbasan B-5, Rr. Naum Kristo Vokopaja.** The wonderful 200-year-old inn built to accommodate traders from foreign lands was Korça’s oldest hotel and has been taking care of travellers for centuries (see also Sight). The four wooden rooms above the main gate that are available for foreigners are simple but clean, with basic shared facilities at the end of the corridor. With the bustling bazaar right outside, it’s an excellent and atmospheric option for budget travellers in the warm weather.

**Kochbili (Turizem)** B-5, Blv. Gjergj Kastrioti, tel. +355 82 24 37/94/+355 69 207 55 39, info@hotelt.com. Formerly the downtown Hotel Korça, this newly renovated hotel with its modern blue glass facade has decent rooms with cable TV and en suite baths or showers. Kochbili overlooks the busy main square, so ask for rooms at the back for a peaceful night’s sleep. 30 rooms (2 singles 2,500 lek, doubles 3,500 lek, triples 4,000 lek, suites 6,000 lek). Breakfast not included.

**Konti A-3, Rruga Korça-Pogradec, tel. +355 82 24 49 27.** Not the most romantic or central place to stay, but handy for a early morning escape to Tirana. The single rooms and cheaper double rooms have shared bathroom facilities; air-conditioning is available in the suites and some doubles. 27 rooms (3 singles 1,300 lek, 19 doubles 2,000-3,500 lek, 1 triple 4,000 lek, 5 suites 5,000 lek).

**Krisal D-4, tel./fax +355 82 24 89 92, tel. +355 69 208 12 21, repecasts@yahoo.com.** Up on the hill overlooking town, this former worker’s hotel is a large concrete block with standard rooms and good views over the city and the plains beyond. Unless you like long walks, you’ll need your own transport or a taxi to get to and from town. 61 rooms (4 singles 2,000 lek, 47 doubles 3,000 lek, 10 triples 4,500 lek).

**Pallas B-5, Rr. Misto Mame.** The convivial donarm of this ghastly hotel warned us that it should be closed down, and he’s absolutely right. Anything but a palace, this hotel has downtown shifty rooms with sagging beds, mouldy bathrooms, crumbling ceilings and broken mirrors. A smudge on Korça’s fine reputation – it’s but so cheap. Find Pallas in the alley next to the Procredit bank. No telephone. 8 rooms (singles 300-500 lek, doubles 600-1,000 lek). Breakfast not included.

**Regency B-5, Rr. Ismail Gemali 7, tel. +355 82 24 38 68/39 69 230 47 48, fax +355 82 24 38 70, hregencycom@hotmail.com, www.regencyalbania.com.** The ‘American-style’ Regency is one of few self-proclaimed three-star hotels in Albania actually living up to the standards. With good rooms and a quiet corner location in the city centre, it’s often of the hotel choice for business travellers, though it remains firmly Albanian, witness the ubiquitous chain-smoking men hanging out in the lobby bar. A good breakfast is included in the price. 18 rooms (2 singles €30, 14 doubles €40, 2 suites €40).

**Vila Sidhoni C-4, Rr. Mibledjha e Beratit.** Tel. +355 82 24 58 14/+355 68 205 64 45. Opened in early 2009, this small but modern business hotel was the first in town with key cards, is decorated with abstract art and has a funky-coloured bar area. The descending-sized rooms come with marble sinks and safes. In summer, there’s a piano bar here too. Away from all the action, it’s located 100m from the stadium, off Blvd. Republica. 10 rooms (4 doubles 4,500-5,000 lek, family rooms 6,000 lek).

**Korça style, while the cellar restaurant and rooms are furnished with the owner’s antique collection. Near the centre, just east off Boulevard Republica. 4 rooms (singles €25, doubles €50).**
Konça is one of the best destinations around for good Albanian food. Apart from the ubiquitous pizzerias, there are several welcoming restaurants serving local food in a great setting. Don’t miss out on the素晴rous small sausages. The price range in brackets indicates the average price of main courses.

**Albanian**

*Shtëpia Voskopojare C-5*, Rr. Gào Koroveshi, tel. +355 82 24 27 84, +355 68 205 44 48. This small villa beside the cathedral serves up cheap and excellent Albanian dishes. The small salad feeds two. The salads and dishes are fresh and tasty. Sit in one of two dining rooms in ‘ambiente luksoze’ behind the pretty porch with Ionian pillars, or on the sheltered terrace outside. *Open 08:00 - 15:00, 19:00-24:00, (800-1,200 lek).*

*Villa Themistokli C-5*, Blv. Themistokli Germenji, tel. +355 82 24 87 99. A well-known old café/bar along the main road, with a cheap drink in between sightseeing, and a good place to catch live music on summer weekends. *Open 07:30 - 24:00.*

*Valbona C-4*, Blv. Republika, tel. +355 82 25 31 74. It’s back to 1985 at the rambling komme-ira Valbona restaurant. There’s a popular terrace to escape all the history. *Open 08:00 - 24:00, (600-1,000 lek).*

*Moska C-5*, Blv. Republika, tel. +355 69 225 25 99. One of Korça’s best-looking bars, a first floor affair that’s shut for traffic for this purpose during the evening hours. *Open 07:00 - 24:00.*

*Antic Pizza C-4*, Blv. Republika, tel. +355 82 24 31 47. An old-fashioned pizzeria with great pizzettes at this popular restaurant are worth a try. Decorated with stone arches and wine bottles, Antic has just a few tables, so it’s a lay back scene, just across the street. *Open 11:30 - 24:00, (500-700 lek).*

*Verona C-4*, Blv. Republika, tel. +355 82 25 28 28. A quiet, modern pizzeria along the main drag, right opposite Antic and alive in dignity. *Open 11:00 - 24:00, (400-600 lek).*

**Italian**

*O2 Bar Blv. Republika, tel. +355 69 226 50 07. Set in a rambling building above the local chamber of commerce, this bar has brought new life to the old quarter. The sea-themed décor is a bit outdated, but even though the stuffed-smogging mermaid in the mural does her best to cheer you up, you’ll need more than one drink to process it emotionally. On the plus side, there’s a wooden stove cooking cosily away. *Open 08:00 - 14:00, 17:00-24:00.*

*Piazza C-5, Rr. 6 Dëshmorët, tel. +355 68 207 45 60, A down town pizzeria with a small terrace, family friendly, and modern songs, many of them typically Korçan. It’s best to ask before visiting to check if there’s a performance.*

**Out of town**

*Prince Park Rruga Korçë-Pogradec. Family fun can be found 10km out of Korça on the Pogradec road. This modern entertainment complex has a bar with indoor and outdoor seating, a garden, children’s playground and a small football field. *Open 08:00 - 24:00.*

*Turkish*

*Liceu Taverna C-5*, Rr. Setir Gërma, tel. +355 82 25 28 06. An old building opposite the imposing French school houses the Liceu Taverna. Entered through a garden with an old fancy, it has four cosy rooms with wooden furniture. On the menu are well-prepared Turkish specialties, grilled meat, fresh fish and salads. *Open 07:00 - 24:00.*

**Symbol key**

- Air conditioning
- Credit cards accepted
- Live music
- Take away
- Non-smoking rooms
- Guarched parking
- Wi-Fi
- Summer garden

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**RESTAURANTS**

**Cafés**

*Mësonjtorja C-5*, Blv. Themistokli Germenji, tel. +355 82 24 31 47. The café inside the Regency hotel is a convenient spot to have a relaxed coffee. *Open 08:00 - 24:00.*

*Niva Akullore B-4*, Blv. Gjergj Kastrioti. Delicious ice cream, of both the scooped and machine varieties. Look for the shop decorated with juggling puppets. *Open 09:00 - 20:00.*

*Serenata B-5, Rr. Ismail Gemal 7, tel. +355 82 24 38 67. The café inside the Regency hotel is a convenient spot to have a relaxed coffee. *Open 08:00 - 24:00.*

**Sky Café C-5/6, Blv. Republika, tel. +355 82 25 30 70.** South of the cathedral, the café perched on top of a modern high-rise building offers the best views over central Korça. The terrace seating is perfect but the lounge bar inside, where the locals prefer to have a drink, has windows that are useless for scanning the horizon. This was the first place in Korça to have wifi. *Open 07:00 - 23:00.*

There’s a concentration of bars at the far end of Blv. Republika near the Cathedral, with a lively scene and a great terrace, linked to that of Pizza next door. If you like it or not, there’s regular karaoke and a dj on the last Saturday of the month. *Open 07:00 - 24:00.*

**Nightlife**


*Vecchia Casa C-3, Blv. Republika, tel. +355 82 25 48 80. A bar set in a renovated building near Rinia park. Large terrace. *Open 08:00 - 24:00.*

*Zeus C-4, Blv. Republika. A bar with modern cream white oranges. It’s split over three floors, a basement level and a buzzing terrace overlooking the El Forno pizzeria. It’s named after the king of gods and Aphrodite’s daddy, and women can enter without fear as the bar’s approachable, friendly and ‘women friendly’ place; no dodgy smoking in leather coats huddled around low tables here. *Open 08:00 - 22:00.*

**Beer gardens**

*Family fun can be found 10km out of Korça on the Pogradec road. This modern entertainment complex has a bar with indoor and outdoor seating, a garden, children’s playground and a small football field. *Open 08:00 - 24:00.*

**Clubs**

*Omega D-3, Rinia Park, tel. +355 82 24 63 00. A bar set in the park behind the St. Sotir church. A very popular party place, two floors, a basement level and a buzzing terrace overlooking the cathedral. Next door to Shtëpia 1821. *Open 07:00 - 24:00.*

**Live music**

*Skena Park B-3, Rr. 1 Maji, tel. +355 82 25 49 84, 64. A bar set in the park behind the St. Sotir church. A very popular party place, two floors, a basement level and a buzzing terrace overlooking the cathedral. Next door to Shtëpia 1821. *Open 07:00 - 24:00.*

**Instant Korça**

2009 - 2010
Archaeology

Kamenica Tumulus (Tuma e Kamenicës) - Kamenica, near the Mitropolitan offices and also known as the St John the Forerunner tumulus. The site was excavated in 1910 and a large tumulus (72m across) was found. This was the tomb of St John the Forerunner, the patron saint of Korça. Inside the tumulus, considerable finds of mummies and other objects dating from the 18th century were found. The tumulus has been restored and a museum has been built to house the finds. The museum is open to the public, accompanied by an excellent little exhibition of funeral possessions, including fine silver reliquaries, gold crosses, and other items of great rarity. The exhibition is arranged in a sequence that can guide you around the site. The mound was used between the 13th to 6th centuries BC, and visitors can view several discoveries: the so-called ‘Celtic Circle’ that is dedicated to the ancient Albanian monumental structures. The tumulus is marked with flags, 8km south of Korça along the road to Gjakovë.

Archaeology Museum (Muzeu Komëtër Arke-ologjik) - C-5, Rr. Mihal Grameno, tel. +355 82 22 52 800/78 +355 69 26 23 217. Housed in two charming and well-preserved Ottoman-era buildings around a cobblestone courtyard that are worth a visit alone, the town’s archaeological museum holds 1,200 Hellenic, Roman and Paleo-Byzantine objects from 6000 BCE to 600 CE. Highlights of the museum are a Byzantine-era floor mosaic and various Roman graves. Call ahead to make sure the museum is open. Open 08:00-14:00 Mon-Thu, 08:00-12:00 Fri, closed Sat, Sun. Admission 200/100 lek.

Bratko Museum of Oriental Art (Muzeu Bratko) - D-6, Bv. Fan Noli, tel. +355 82 24 30 56/+355 69 215 65 61, http://users.rcn.com/laura2. This curious museum, which displays objects from the two thousand-year-old Islamic world, modern architecture houses the art collection of the Albanian-American Dhimritor Boris (1903-1990). Boris emigrated from Albania when he was 17, immediately before a 4-year stay before working in Hollywood in an early animation studio and as silhouette artist. Boris became a photographer for the USA Army in 1942 travelling widely in Europe and Asia. From 1950 until his death in 1990, Boris worked as a freelance photographer from 17 Asian countries. Oriental art objects like ceramics, textiles, batik, tanaka cloths, the Indian Hindu and Buddhist statues, the silver lobster and chickens, and the fabulous Indonesian masks. Some of the objects have been loaned to this museum by foreign museums as a good idea to phone before confirming the museum is open.

First Albanian School (Mësonjëtorja e Përi Shqiptarëve) - C-5, Rr. Grameno, tel. +355 69 246 17 92. Focus of considerable pride and symbol of national awakening under Ottoman rule, the first secular primary school for Muslim boys was opened in Korça on March 7, 1887. Until then, education was only given by travelling teachers. Korça was a logical place for the first school because the town was a port of entry by sea and by road, with many trade links to the east as well as to Western Europe and the USA, and an open attitude to foreign influence and change. The school was modelled on the new school opened at Voskopoja in 1879. It was opened in 1887 and has remained an educational institution ever since. In 1922, the school moved to its present location in the city center, where it is now housed in a modern building.

Museums

Korça’s charming museums are well worth visiting although they often suffer from a lack of funding and attention. They are all closed off from view, save for a few small windows, and are not always welcoming to visitors. The problem is not uncommon in Albania, where museums are often closed when they are not being used. The museums in the city center are all situated in the old town, and are generally open from 10am to 6pm, Monday to Saturday. The museums are not generally open on Sunday. The entrance fee is usually around 100 lek (€1) per person, although some museums offer free entry for students and children. The museums are well worth a visit, and can provide a great insight into the rich cultural history of Korça.

Archaeology

Kamenica Tumulus (Tuma e Kamenicës) - A prehistoric burial mound stands out in the landscape. The tumulus was used between the 13th to 6th centuries BC, and visitors can view several discoveries: the so-called ‘Celtic Circle’ that is dedicated to the ancient Albanian monumental structures. The tumulus is marked with flags, 8km south of Korça along the road to Gjakovë.

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Industrial tourism

Birra Korça Brewery D-6, Bv. Fan Noli 1, tel. +355 82 22 52 800, http://www.birrakorca.com, www.birrakorca.com. Korça’s industrial pride, and Albania’s only good-looking factory, is the brewery. It occupies the entire end of town. Founded in 1928 by the Italian Umberto Uberti, the brewery was in service until 2004, after which it was thoroughly renovated. The pristine building housed history collections restored, and visitors are welcome to tour the facilities. Birra Korça makes ‘blond’ beer and is also the only brew- ery in the Balkans to make dark beer, using the ancient Italian technology. It brews 120,000 hectoliters of beer annually. The specific taste originates from the traditional five-stage production method, and fermentation and maturation take place in a series of small fermentation tanks which sit on the roof. The massive steel brewing tanks are surrounded by tile tab- leaux depicting the brewing process and the consumption of the end product. The brewery brew the beer, pretty girls serving it and rowdy punters having a party. The brewery is happy to receive visitors and conduct 30-60 minute tours of the factory in Albanian or English. Phone ahead to make an appointment. Beer tasting is not part of the tour, but the adjacent Pandra Bar serves welcome to have a look and buy carpets too; it’s best to call ahead.

Carpentry B-3, Rr. I Maji, tel. +355 69 271 69 45. Korça has been a centre for carpentry-making for centuries, and this factory (the largest of its kind in Albania) is a must-see for visitors with an interest in the Turkish-style lanterns and other carvings. Visitors are welcome to have a look and buy carpets too; it’s best to call ahead.

Ottoman Korça

Bazaar (Pazarëzi tradicional) - C-5, Rr. Xhelal Beshiri. The slightly chaotic Old Bazaar district is perhaps the most interesting part of Korça. It is located in the old town, and is a good place to visit. It is also the main trade route of Korça must have been in Ottoman times, when merchants from as far away as Russia, Turkey, Greece and Italy came here to buy and sell at the 1,000 shops, staying a night at inns like the Han Elbasani. The haphazardly built street stalls are piled high with all kinds of goods, from shoes and clothing to vegetables, meat, and dairy products. The area in town to find a cheap traditional snack of byrek or grilled meat. The area bustles during the night hours, but the area has remained restored. The remaining shophouses are a very quaint backdrop for all the bustle, but many seem like they could collapse any minute. Come in the morning or early afternoon for the liveliest scenes.
Dardha

Mention Dardha to anyone in Korça and you’ll instantly get a smile, so good is the reputation of this small mountain village. Lovelier than any other village in Albania, Dardha is set in the Morava mountains, 20 kilometres southwest of Korça, at 1344 metres above sea level and home to 5000 inhabitants. The village is sheltered by the Shën Petër and the rugged Guri i Vjetër (Autumn Rock) mountains and is surrounded by forests and simple rills. It makes an ideal base for hikes in the surroundings.

Founded in 1500 by Orthodox Christians escaping from Ottoman conversion campaigns, Dardha is famous for felt processing (incorporated in the local black/red/folk dress). Dardha had 500 houses in the early 1990s. Nowadays, the village consists of a few narrow cobbled streets winding between stone houses, many of which are decorated with carved symbols and their traditional flagstone roof tiles. Most of the village’s stone houses look rather smart after recent renovations, yet there are few modern additions to spoil the atmosphere.

Dardha has few specific sights, though it’s worth entering the small Shën Gjergj (Saint George) church for its old icons. Scattered along the streets are several public fountains and wells spouting natural mineral water, believed locally to cure all manner of ailments. Drink sulphur-spiced water from the aptly named Uji i Qebur (“Filthy water”) spring if you have stomach problems.

Apart from the pretty streets and mountain views, the local cuisine is a reason to visit Dardha; it is famous for its huge fire-baked lápori (liver and tomato pies), the unusual side dish of asparagus leek stew with mushroom sauce, and all the best washed down with the local raki pear liquor.

Dardha can be reached across basic gravel roads by car or taxi; there’s no minibus service. Heading south out of Korça, tum left into Boboshtica after passing the new prison, and then left again at the World War II monument. The narrow track leading to the tombs is best tackled by 4WD car; call tel. +355 69 262 32 17 to speak to the caretaker.

The annual village festival is on Shën Maria (St Mary’s; 16 August), when the road is clogged with people returning to the ancestral home for the day, and everybody dresses up in their best folk clothes and joins in the religious rituals and traditional dances. In winter, some hardy types attempt to ski on the slopes around the village, though there are no rental or lift facilities at all.

The temple in Turan village, 2km west of Korça along the road to Dardha, has a flagstone roof tiles. Most of the village’s stone houses look rather smart after recent renovations, yet there are few modern additions to spoil the atmosphere.

Street scene in Pogradec’s old town

A town of modest pretentions, Pogradec (pronounced PO-gra-gets) enjoys a wonderful setting on the shore of magnificent Lake Ohrid, 40km north of Korça. Though its history goes back to the Iron Age, the town has a modern appearance. With its long sandy beach, fresh air and various sights in the surroundings, Pogradec can be visited en route to Korça or Ohrid. The word Pogradec is of slavic origin, meaning ‘below the hill’, and the scant ruins of a 5th-century castle high up on the hill indicate there was once an Illyrian settlement here.

Modern-day Pogradec is pleasant enough for a stroll. Just off the Kelly hotel is a newly pedestrianised street with old houses that show something of the fishing village that was once there. Nearby, the modern concrete Ebu Bekr mosque has an unusual double minaret.

Further east, the Church of the Resurrection (Ringjallja e Hyjëlindës) can be found in the Lagja e Tepolecit area. A sandy beach fringed by a well-tended park stretches for over a kilometre along the lakeshore from the centre. However, it’s not recommended to swim here until the new sewage treatment plant is functional.

Dilxon springs

Near the border 5km east of Pogradec, Dilxon is a lush and delightful park set around the ponds where crystal-clear water originating from Lake Prespa bubbles up from the side of Mal i Tsjal (‘dry’) mountain at an amazing 7 cubic metres per second. You can feed the ducks and swans and rent a boat for a quiet paddle around. The Villa Art restaurant (tel. +355 68 225 32 45) serves coffee, snacks and Albanian food. The small village of Tushemist, a few hundred metres east of the park, is worth a visit for its 6th century St. Pantaleon church with its original frescoes; ask around for someone to unlock the church if you find it closed. At Pogradec it’s possible to stay in guesthouses and enjoy the local food and rural roads.

Pogradec valley

The valley is best approached from Urake on the Ebasan road; there’s a direct gravel road to Pogradec but that’s impassable in wet weather. A daytrip by stydy taxi will cost up to 3000 lek.

Pogradec transport

Pogradec is small enough to walk around, though taxis can be found at the main hotels if necessary. To order a taxi, have an Albanian speaker contact Liri Taxi (tel. +355 69 235 09 38) or Bixhet Aliko Taxi (tel. +355 68 219 68 69). A ride to Dilxon park or the Macedonian border will cost about 200 lek, or 50 lek in a shared taxi. Furgon minibuses to Korça, Elbasan and Tirana depart very regularly early morning and mid-afternoon, travelling for customers along the main road simply flag one down.

Pogradec hotels

Enkelana Rr. Reshit Çollaku, tel. +355 83 22 20 10,
fax +355 83 22 21 73. The former state hotel dominating the town square has been turned into several simple rooms, some overlooking the lake. → 46 rooms (34 doubles 2500-3000 1000 lek, 6 triples 3500-4000 1000 lek, 6 suites 5000-6000, 1000 lek).

Pogradec tourist information

Internet & Tourist Information Center (Qendra Inku Sat Cyberspace) Rr. Reshit Çollaku, Pall. 23, tel. +355 83 22 60 80, pogradeck@gmail.com, www. pogradeck.info. A good internet café (100 lek/hr) where the internet access is in English, Italian, French, Dutch doubles as the local unofficial voluntary tourist information officer and FedEx representative. His website is the best local site about Pogradec. → Open 09:00 - 22:00.

good condition. Unfortunately, the whole complex is protected by a hideous modern concrete roof. Lin is along the road and railway between Pogradec and Elbasan. A taxi from Pogradec to Lin and back will cost around 1500 lek. Always call ahead to be sure that the site is open. → Open 08:00-16:00, later in the summer months, Admission 200 lek.

Shkumbin valley sights

Several ancient and medieval curiosities can be found in the upper reaches of the Shkumbin river valley, 30km northwest of Pogradec, a relatively untouched site of the ancient trading routes between the Adriatic and the lands beyond the lake. The first sight in the valley is the impressive Ottoman-era Gollk Bridge (Ura e Gollkut) with its three arches. A group of five monumental tombs can be found in the rocks near Selbë e Poshtme village, the main settlement in the valley of the Gollk river next to the fortress of the same shape of an amphitheatre, and another with two storeys and decorated colonnades. The graves may well have been for Illyrian nobility. The gravestone inscription in the 1st century BC is the oldest. The tombs were cut in the rock in 79 AD by the Romans. The grave of the Roman officer and Fedex representative. His website is the best local site about Pogradec.
Travelling to Macedonia

With Macedonia within sight across the lake, it’s easy to travel between Pogradec and Ohrid, stopping off at the beautiful Sveti Naum monastery, right next to the Macedonian checkpoint. There are rumours of a new ferry service between the two towns starting in summer 2009, but till then the easiest way is to take a taxi to Ohrid, costing 2,000 lek or 500 lek in a shared taxi, taking perhaps half an hour, or to take a bus to the border (200 lek), walk across the 500m of no man’s land, and hop on a bus (or an infrequent ferry) to Ohrid at Sveti Naum (the bus runs every two hours, costing 120 denars). Coming from Ohrid, you can expect taxis to be waiting on the Albanian side of the border between 09:00 and 19:00 (06:00 in winter); alternatively walk to Tushemistër village (10 minutes) or Drilon Park (15 minutes) and catch the bus to Pogradec there. Note that most foreigners entering Albania need to pay a €1 land border fee (leaving costs nothing; ask for a receipt. The border crossing is open 24 hours per day. When travelling on to Skopje, check our online and print Skopje In Your Pocket city guide.

Millennium 1 & 2

Rruga Pogradec-Tushemistër, tel. +355 68 228 39 11. Along the lakeside between Pogradec and Ohrid, this hotel has a pleasant garden overlooking the lake and a popular restaurant. The newly built annex has more modern facilities and conference rooms. → 50 rooms (29 doubles 2,000-3,000 lek, 17 triples 3,500 lek, 4 suites 5,000 lek). [601x300px]

Vila Bimbli Shëtitorja 1 Maji, tel. +355 83 22 26 75/76. A gleaming pink-and-white near the city centre. The rooms are well-appointed, though it’s the top floor suite with its huge private terrace with lake views that impress most. Downstairs, there’s a pleasant garden terrace. → 12 rooms (4 doubles 2,500-3,000 lek, 6 triples 3,000 lek, 2 suites 4,000 lek). [601x300px]

Pogradec Food & Drink

Although well-known for the fresh fish from Lake Ohrid, central Pogradec does not have many attractive restaurants yet. For a special meal, locals often head to the lakeside restaurants a short drive north and east of town.

Bleab Rruga Nacionale Pogradec - Qafe Thane, tel. +355 69 229 18 44. A well-known lakeside restaurant offering views over to Macedonia. There’s a beach here too. → (500-700 lek). [601x300px]

Great lakes: Ohrid and Prespa

Pogradec overlooks Lake Ohrid (Liqeni i Ohrit), the deepest tectonic lake in the Balkans (298 metres) and one of the oldest lakes in the world, formed 4 million years ago. Set at 695 metres above sea level and shared with Macedonia, one third of the 358 square kilometre surface is Albanian. The lake is fed by various rivers (including an underground spring from Lake Prespa) and exits to the north in the Black Drin. Ohrid is home to various endemic species of plants and animals, including the koran, ancient trout and very tasty variety of trout, the Ohrid sponge and various molluscs.

Lake Prespa, set at 850 metres above sea level, 20km north of Korça and shared with Macedonia and Greece, is another beautiful tectonic lake fringed by bare mountains. The whole area is a national park and is excellent for bird-watching. The region also has important Byzantine sites – the tiny uninhabited island of Maligrad in the Albanian part of the lake has the amazing 14th-century Kisha e Shën Meri (St. Mary’s church), in a cave set high on a rocky hill; the burnt-out ruin of the St. Prodhomi monastery, the renovated Voskopoja, and the renovated Voskopoja church. The nearby village of Vithkuqi, 25km southwest of Korça and reached by minibus or taxi, is a picturesque and ancient mountain village with narrow stone streets and several Orthodox churches that are worth a visit, most notably that of Shën Pjetër (St. Peter) monastery. Vithkuqi suffered the same fate as Voskopoja and was burned down to the ground in 1919. It was the seat of the Vlach community until 1999. It is a charming village with narrow cobblestone streets and small cafes dotted with old Aromanian language signs. The largest church is the St. Peter’s church, known as the “Stone Church.” The village is best reached by car and is about 20 minutes drive from Korça.

Vithkuqi

The nearby village of Vithkuqi, 25km southwest of Korça and reached by minibus or taxi, is a picturesque and ancient mountain village with narrow stone streets and several Orthodox churches that are worth a visit, most notably that of Shën Pjetër (St. Peter) monastery. Vithkuqi suffered the same fate as Voskopoja and was burned down to the ground in 1919. It was the seat of the Vlach community until 1999. It is a charming village with narrow cobblestone streets and small cafes dotted with old Aromanian language signs. The largest church is the St. Peter’s church, known as the “Stone Church.” The village is best reached by car and is about 20 minutes drive from Korça.

Natra e Qete Rruga Nacionale Pogradec, tel. +355 83 22 60 80 / +355 68 229 208. Famous for its fish and grilled meat, Natra e Qete is a large restaurant sited 4km along the main road north of Pogradec. → (600-800 lek). [601x300px]

Mateo Disko Shëtitorja Rinia, tel. +355 69 269 08 96. The cheapest and quietest option is this restaurant, located at the end of the street. → (3,500 lek). [601x300px]

Oxygen Beach Bar Rr. 10 Deshmorët e Pojskës, tel. +355 83 22 09 19 90, www.oxygenbeachbar.com. A popular beach bar, a few hundred metres east of the centre along the lakeshore. This is the best place to have coffee or fresh juice before a day out in the sun. → Open 09:00 - 04:00.

Tea Shëtitorja Fan Noli, tel. +355 83 22 29 47. A modest restaurant serving pizzas, fish and the usual grilled meat dishes. → Open 07:00 - 22:00.

Tek Mollët Rr. 10 Deshmorët e Pojskës, Ljg. 1, tel. +355 69 269 27 78. Local pies, meat dishes and two guest rooms. Call ahead to check it’s serving food today. → Open 12:00 - 23:00.

P Vogedër Rr. Naim Frashëri, tel. +355 69 229 18 44. A small traditional fishing village with a modest restaurant serving fish and fresh juice. → Open 09:00 - 16:00.

Tea Shëtitorja Fan Noli, tel. +355 83 22 29 47. A modest restaurant serving pizzas, fish and the usual grilled meat dishes. → Open 07:00 - 22:00.

The Shën Kolle (St. Nicholas) church from 1721 was the only church to be protected in the Communist era (the others were used for storage) and is the only church reliably open to visitors. It has an elegant painted gallery and a dark and moody interior, with fantastic examples of wood carving and sooty wall frescoes. The most valuable icons have been returned to the Medieval Art Museum in Korça, but if you find the church closed, simply ask around for someone with the key.

Vloch in Albania

Voskopoja is historically a centre for Vlachs or Aromanians, an originally nomadic minority speaking a Latin language similar to Romanian, who as shepherds spread widely throughout Central and Eastern Europe since early medieval times. Aromanians, the Vlachs in the southern Balkans who have been strongly influenced by Greek culture, are spread mainly in northern and central Greece and in Albania, where up to 200,000 Aromanians can be found in the area south of Vora. Voskopoja, or Moscopole as they called it, was an important urban centre for the Vlachs. Korça, called Curca in Aromanian, is the site of Albania’s only Vlach church, sponsored by the Romanian government, and also still has a Vlach district. Nowadays the Aromanian language is seldom heard in Albania, though there are attempts to revive the culture and start language education in some schools.

Aromanians are found near the Greek and Bulgarian borders, and in the Sutjeska mountains of Montenegro. They are divided into three groups: the Sutjeska Vlachs, the Litoral Vlachs and the Vithkuqi Vlachs. The Sutjeska Vlachs are found in Voskopoja. Prior to the 19th century, the Sutjeskans were the most numerous of the three groups and still hold the largest community. They are also known as the Sutjeska Vlachs.

As the Albanian government demoted the status of the Sutjeska Vlachs, they were met by Vlachs in Korça who fled from Vithkuqi and Voskopoja. The Vithkuqi and Voskopoja Vlachs formed the Vlachs of Korça, who spoke their own language. The Sutjeska Vlach community lived in the Sutjeska mountains and the Litoral Vlachs in the Litoral Vlachs. The Sutjeska Vlachs are the most numerous of the three groups and still hold the largest community. They are also known as the Sutjeska Vlachs.

The Sutjeska Vlachs are known for their traditional language, which is a unique blend of Latin and Albanian. They are also known for their traditional customs and traditions, which are still practiced today. They are also known for their traditional music, which is a blend of Latin and Albanian music. They are also known for their traditional food, which is a blend of Latin and Albanian food. They are also known for their traditional clothing, which is a blend of Latin and Albanian clothing. They are also known for their traditional sports, which are a blend of Latin and Albanian sports. They are also known for their traditional festivals, which are a blend of Latin and Albanian festivals. They are also known for their traditional holidays, which are a blend of Latin and Albanian holidays. They are also known for their traditional architecture, which is a blend of Latin and Albanian architecture. They are also known for their traditional history, which is a blend of Latin and Albanian history.
Directory

Banks
Intesa Sanpaolo Bank B-5, Rr. 28 Nëntori, tel. +355 82 25 28 38, www.intesasanpaolo.com
Rafifelsen Bank B-4, Rr. Midhi Kostani, www.rafifelsen.al, Also in Pogradec at Rr. Reshit Ciko. Open 08:30 - 15:00, Sat 09:00 - 12:30, Closed Sun.

Business Connections
Chamber of Commerce & Industry (Dhoma e Tregtise dhe Industrise), tel. +355 82 24 24 57, cciko@albtmail.com.

Greek Consulate (Konsullata Greke) C-5, Rr. Pavlo Katro 4, tel. +355 82 24 57 33/-355 82 24 57 34, fax +355 82 24 50 52, gregconen.koi@mg.a, In 3rd street behind the cathedral. Not on the phone ahead consul business. Open 08:00 - 16:00, Closed Fri, Sat, Sun.

Consulates
Find the details of all foreign embassies in Tirana on the Tirana In Your Pocket website, at tirana.inyourpocket.com.

Greek consulate, Konsullata Greke) C-5, Rr. Pavlo Katro 4, tel. +355 82 24 57 33/-355 82 24 57 34, fax +355 82 24 50 52, gregconen.koi@mg.a, In 3rd street behind the cathedral. Not on the phone ahead consul business. Open 08:00 - 16:00, Closed Fri, Sat, Sun.

Culture
Branding itself ‘the festive city’, Korça is the first city in Albania to make work of organising festivals and other events for locals and visitors. We’ve printed a selection of the main events here; you can download a full overview of 2009 events at http://korca.inyourpocket.com.

Cinemas & Theatres
Andon Zako Çajupi Theatre B-5, Blv. Gjergj Kastrioti, One of Albania’s oldest theatres, with performances in Albanian and foreign.

Kinema Majestik C-5, Blv. Republica, tel. +355 82 24 25 05. A lovely Art Deco style cinema with 350 seats that was renovated in 2001. Screenings at 17:00 and 19:30, Sat, Sun also at 11:00. Admission 150 lek.

Cultural centres & Sports
Skenderbeu stadium C2/3. The Skenderbeu stadium and sports complex includes a 7000-seat football stadium built in 1959 which regularly hosts matches against visiting teams and the Tamara Nikola sports hall (basketball and volleyball are popular). For schedules of matches, see the sports board opposite the cinema.
The Castle, tel. +355 69 263 20 38. An entertainment centre with go-karts and a bar, 2km south of town on the Eneksi road.

Thimi Milto Library B-5, Blv. Gjergj Kastrioti, tel. +355 82 24 29 49. Open 08:00 - 15:00, Closed Sun. Vangjash Mio Cultural Centre (Pallati i Kulturës), tel. +355 82 22 48 78. A centre for occasional exhibitions, concerts and festivals. Shows out for people of the city’s famous Lyra Choir, the City Band and the Skenderbeg Ensemble.

Institutions
Fan S. Noli University D3, Rr. e Blishtit, tel. +355 82 24 36 09/+355 82 24 89 44. Korça municipality (Bashkia) B-5, Rr. 28 Nëntori, tel./fax +355 82 24 33 53, tel. +355 82 24 30 55, www.bashkiklarokce.gov.al.
Prefektura C-5, Blv. Republika, tel. +355 82 24 27 00/+355 82 24 30 39.
Radio TV Korça B-6, Rr. Emin Duraku, tel. +355 82 24 28 07.

2009 events

Korça
April 16-18: Pottery fair, Blv. Republica by the cathedral. Display and sales of pottery.

June 1 Celebrations, Rinia Park: A festival for children, with plays and activities such as painting and drawing.

June 6: Korça Carnival. Nowhere in Albania is carnival celebrated as much as in Korça and this summer event with a parade of local and international groups attracts thousands of visitors.

June 25 - July 6: Sculptures in the Park, Rinia Park. An international sculpting symposium which sees the resulting sculptures given to the city for exhibition in Rinia Park.

July: Lakor Pie Festival, Rinia Park. A festival set around the delicious traditional-style lakor or pyrek pie. There’s a music, a children’s programme and lots of pie of course.

August 13-16: Beer Fest, near Rinia Park. The biggest event of the year with tens of thousands of people enjoying beer, traditional food, beer games, music and performances. See also www.festabeers.com.

September 22: Care-free day. Experience Korça without the traffic, but with a festive atmosphere.

September 29: Cultural Heritage Day, Korça and Pogradec. A celebration of local culture, with events, special exhibitions of object or heritage places, free admission to museums, and more.

October 25-28: Vangjash Mio Days. A festival of local and international painters, with the city as their muse and inspiration for 4 days.

December: End of year fair. Korça is decorated with twinkling lights and a winter fair with stalls selling sweets, baked apples, drinks like mulled wine. There’s music and exhibitions too.

December 30: Santa Parade, Babagjyshi, the Albanian Santa, rides through town in his carriage.

Pogradec
June 21: Lake Days. The municipalities of Pogradec and Ohrid and Struga in Macedonia organize joint events including concerts and exhibitions.

June: Puppet Theatre Festival. For two weeks, puppet troupes from Albania, Macedonia, Kosovo, Montenegro, Serbia, Croatia and other countries compete with each other, entertaining both young and old while they do it.

December: Wine Festival. Over three days, local wine makers fiercely battle for the first prize in this open-air home-made wine competition. It’s cold so it’s that good visitors are welcome to have a few sips too, best done with karnaca sausages and other barbecued food.

Korça