Getting reliable travel information for the main cities in the Balkans has been a problem since the Illyrians arrived. Now, the international city guidebook publisher In Your Pocket brings you several new English-language guides to the region, boldly going where no city guide has gone before.

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FOREWORD

A diamond-shaped city wedged between the Rozafa Citadel, the magnificent Albanian Alps, deep blue Lake Shkodra, a 30-kilometre sand beach and the serene Buna River Delta reservaton - Shkodra is a diamond in the rough with plenty of potential. While many visitors quickly breeze through the city, Shkodra's turbulent history has left plenty of interesting relics that make a short stay in Albania's cultural capital worthwhile. Hundreds of years of non-nonsense religious and ethnic tolerance resulted in booming trade, witnessed by Shkodra's grand merchants' homes, and dozens of mosques and Catholic and Orthodox churches standing in close proximity to each other. With travel to Albania now easier than ever before, and the number of visitors to Shkodra increasing, facilities for travellers are improving rapidly, with good hotels and several excellent new restaurants now established.

This new Shkodra In Your Pocket city guide is the first of its kind here, enabling foreign visitors to get the most out of the Shkodra. We welcome all comments about the guide and its content; please write in to shkodra@inyourpocket.com with your praise, tips, corrections and complaints! Now, as the poet Filip Shiroka wrote, “be off to Albania on your flight, off to Shkodra, my native town!” Enjoy Shkodra.

From the mayor

Dear visitors,

On behalf of all citizens I wish a warm welcome to all visitors to Shkodra. Whatever your reason for visiting our city, do take some time and enjoy your self-taking in the sights and visiting a whole range of natural attractions in the area, from the shores of the largest lake in the Balkans to the rocky out crop of Rozafa Castle, which stands majestically above our 2400-year-old city. Shkodra In Your Pocket offers a complete overview of things to see, do and experience in our city and its surroundings. It is the first time that we have published such a guidebook with English-language information on all Shkodra's historical, artistic and natural highlights, and I would like to thank In Your Pocket and the donors for making it possible. I hope you enjoy your stay in the city of Shkodra.

Arian Haxhi
Mayoer

Cover story

The ruins of the church and mosque of Rozafa Castle tower over Shkodra and the snow-capped mountains in the distance. The ancient castle is one of the most impressive landmarks in Albania.

in your pocket

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ARRIVING

Shkodra In Your Pocket

Arriving by plane

The nearest airport to Shkodra is 75km away in Podgorica, Montenegro. Apart from a taxi, which will cost €50-70, the only direct transport to Shkodra is the bus (€40, book in advance) run by the Sami sale travel agency in Shkodra, Tirana International Airport, also called Nënë Tereza (Mother Teresa) or Rinas Airport is 100km to the south. After passport control, you pay a €10 visa fee (see also visas). There's an ABA Bank ATM (accepting Mastercard and Visa cards) and a public phone that accepts both lek and euro coins (local/international calls cost from 50/100 lek per minute). An AMC kiosk (open roughly 09:00 - 17:00 daily) sells SIM cards for 2000 lek. Outside the arrivals hall, there is an ABA bank branch with another ATM, and a slew of grinning taxi drivers; expect to pay 4500-5000 lek (€37-41) to get to Shkodra, and 3000 lek (€25) for a trip to the centre of Tirana (30-40 minutes). There's no public transport here, and the cheapest way to get to Shkodra is to take a taxi to Tirana's train station where you catch a bus or furgon minibus. You can also gamble on catching a bus or furgon along the main road – take a taxi to the main road near Fushe-Kruje (15 minutes over an awful road) and flag down the first bus or furgon (the bus should pass here at about 15 minutes past every hour until 16:15).

Arriving by bus

Buses from Tirana drop passengers off at the Radio Shkodra bukung on Sheshi 5 Herontje square, next to the Rozafa hotel in the centre. The furgon minibuses from Ulcijn in Montenegro stop right outside the Rozafa hotel. Other furgons can drop you off in the centre, or drop you off along the main road south of the city centre (G/H-S); taxis and the city bus are at hand to take you to the city centre; else, walk straight up Rruga Vasil Shanto for 20 minutes.

Arriving by train

Shkoder’s train station is a surprisingly clean and pleasant building at the eastern edge of the city. At present, there is only one train per day from Tirana and Tirana. Driving in Albania is an interesting challenge, made even more fun by the combination of a nearly complete lack of signs and the presence of at least three different names, but no asphalt. To find the city centre, drivers approaching from Tirana should follow the traffic flow which turns to the right at the first main roundabout after passing the castle (Sheshi ne hyre) - after a while there's another roundabout (Sheshi Parseshi) with a large statue, where you see a sign pointing the way to the central (centre). At the first main crossroad turn left onto Rruga Marin Barleti (if you pass the cathedral you're too far) to reach the centre after 200 metres. Those driving from Ulcijn in Montenegro cross the bridge over the Buna river south of the city; turn left and follow directions as above. Drivers coming from Podgorica in Montenegro enter the city from the north; turn left at the large roundabout with the statue in the middle to find the central square.

Arriving by car

Driving in Albania is an interesting challenge, made even more fun by the combination of a nearly complete lack of signs in Shkodra and the cute habit of having streets with three different names, but no asphalt. To find the city centre, drivers approaching from Tirana should follow the traffic flow which turns to the right at the first main roundabout after passing the castle (Sheshi ne hyre) - after a while there's another roundabout (Sheshi Parseshi) with a large statue, where you see a sign pointing the way to the central (centre). At the first main crossroad turn left onto Rruga Marin Barleti (if you pass the cathedral you're too far) to reach the centre after 200 metres. Those driving from Ulcijn in Montenegro cross the bridge over the Buna river south of the city; turn left and follow directions as above. Drivers coming from Podgorica in Montenegro enter the city from the north; turn left at the large roundabout with the statue in the middle to find the central square.
An alphabetical listing of seemingly random useful facts for the traveller.

Body language and sounds

Albanians, like Bulgarians, Turks, Indians and a handful of others, shake (or perhaps: wobble) their heads to mean ‘yes’ and nod (or perhaps: waggle) them backwards while emitting a hold clutch to mean ‘no’. Every time you see it done, it’s a little passive little cultural shock. To attract attention, Albanians clutch, hiss ‘ah’, or in more desperate cases hunch darkly, or emerge to Italy.

City names

You’ll find that names of cities (and, for that matter, all other nouns) have two different endings in Albanian. One is definite (for instance, Shkodër and Tirana), the other is indefinite (Shkodra and Tirane). Even when the names appear in English text, translators don’t agree on which version to use. Don’t let this throw you.

Crime & Safety

The well-being of honoured guests (you) is a major source of concern and pride for the locals - a tradition dating back to Illyrian times - and rather than being mugged, you’re more likely to be overwhelmed with hospitality. Still, the same rules for personal safety that you follow elsewhere in the world also apply in Albania. Stay alert at all times, hide valuables or leave them at home, don’t wander around until alleys at night. Shkodra suffers a lack of street lighting, and away from the main streets in the city centre it can be pitch dark at night.

Customs

Customs inspection is usually cursory, unless you’re carrying loads of electronic goods. Some items are subject to customs fees. Special export permits are required for precious metals and antiques, including coins, books and artwork. Travellers may import the following products tax free: 200 cigarettes or 100 cigars, 500g of coffee or 250g or tobacco; alcohol (if over 18): 1 litre of spirits or strong liquors (over 22% volume) and 2 litres distilled drinks (under 22% volume) and two litres of wine; 50g of perfume; any medical products for personal use; goods and gifts up to a value of 30,000 lek.

Electricity

When it works, electrical current is 220 Volts; you’ll need standard European plugs. The power cut is sporadic. In winter, usage is 15k: 200 cigarettes or 100 cigars, 50 or 50c or 250g or tobacco; alcohol (over 18): 1 litre of spirits or strong liquors (over 22% volume) and 2 litres distilled drinks (under 22% volume) and two litres of wine; 50g of perfume; any medical products for personal use; goods and gifts up to a value of 30,000 lek.

Health

Although the locals say the water is safe to drink, it’s probably best to stick to bottled water, which is readily available. Shkodra can be very dusty, so contact-lens wearers should carry eye drops with them or consider wearing glasses. Travellers should beware of holes or bits of metal sticking out of the pavement, and missing sewer lids. Piles of garbage attract stray dogs at night. Pedestrians should use caution when crossing busy streets, even ones with traffic lights and dozing policemen. Finally, up-to-date tetanus and hepatitis B inoculations are recommended if you want to play it safe and are staying some length of time in Albania, particularly rural areas. In case of problems, see the list of clinics on p.41.

Old habits - new leks

Old habits die hard, and old Albanian habits in particular never seem to die. Take the currency, the lek. In 1964 and 1991, a zero was cut from the currency and new banknotes and coins introduced to make the numbers easier to handle. But still, you’ll get something in get quoted amounts in old leks in shops. This is not to rip you off – it’s just an old habit that’s just as confy as those yellow slippers you wear at home, and even if you do put down ten times the amount necessary, you’ll get the right change. Even though the signs and price tags in shops are new lek, not all Albanian minds have made the transition.

Money

The Albanian currency is the lek (plural leke). The exchange rate is: €1 = 123 lek, £1 = 179 lek, US$1 = 95 lek (5 June 2006). Banknotes come in denominations of 100, 200, 500, 1000 and 5000 lek. While there are coins of 5, 10, 20, 50 and 100 lek. Although hotels and some other services quote prices in foreign currency, payment is nearly always made in lek. If payment in foreign currency is possible, it usually means you’re getting a bad rate. Just recently, Albania became the last country in Europe to have ATMs (bankomats) connected to the international grid, and nowadays getting cash using your debit or credit card is no problem. Albanian ATMs do not charge for transactions, but your home bank may. In Shkodra, the Raiffeisen and ProCredit bank ATMs accept foreign cards (both Maestro and Visa systems).

If you insist on bringing along cash foreign currency, you can change your euros or dollars at banks (and better at exchange offices (see p.41) in town. People who still believe in traveller’s cheques in this electronic era can cash them at most banks at a fee. Finally, the money changers waving wads of banknotes outside the main mosque offer competitive rates and are generally honest, but it’s always wise to ask the exchange rate and carefully count and examine the lek they give you.

Other terms you may encounter:

brikola = block of flats
Blv. = bulevard = boulevard
kryq = cross
kulla = tower
qendra = center
rugicë = alley
sheshi = square
udhëkryq = intersection
urë = bridge

Roads

Before 1991, only Party officials were allowed to own and drive around in cars. There were about 600 cars in Albania, most of them deluxe Mercedes and Volvos. When the restriction was lifted, Albanians brought thousands of cars into the country from Italy and Greece. At the time, there were no traffic regulations, no driver’s license requirements, no traffic enforcement and no traffic lights. Fortunately, all this has changed. The standardization of roads has improved dramatically and driving around is fun as foreigners gain “new Albanian driving skills.”

Scams

Travellers should always beware of pickpockets, particularly in large crowds or on buses. Young boys may offer to sell you cell cards and telephones, probably stolen goods. Gold for sale on the streets is also probably stolen or fake. Taxi drivers are usually honest; however, it’s always a good idea to have the hotel or restaurant phone a reliable taxi from the list on p.35, or negotiate a fare before getting in the car.

Shkodra is hot and dry in summer, and cool and wet (but rarely cold) in winter. The graph below shows the average daily temperature and the average precipitation. Average temperatures in Shkodra vary between 5 and 28°C, with measured extremes at -22 and 43°C. There are 2600 sun hours per year. The average annual rainfall is 1700mm, and snow usually doesn’t stay on the ground for more than a week each winter.

Street smarts

Here’s a typical Albanian address: Rr. Sami Frashëri, Pall. 20/1, Shk. 1, Ap. 8. And here’s how to decipher it: Rr. means “Road.” Blv. means “boulevard.” Kryq means “cross.” The abbreviation “P” or “Pall.” stands for “pallati” (building, or block of flats). “Sh.” stands for shkala (“entrance” - since there is often more than one). “Ap.” means apartment. Until recently, guidebook writers and other foreigners, Albanian addresses often do not include street numbers. Instead, a close location like “by the center school, ministar, statue,” etc is mentioned for reference, prefixed by “pranë” (“near”), or përbërë (“in front of”). The medieval logic behind this is that the locals know where it is and you can ask them, so why bother painting an ugly number on it when you can sit down and have a nice cup of coffee instead? In this guide we mention these landmarks where necessary, and together with our map references we hope you’ll find your destination.

Tipping

It’s customary to tip about 10% or round up to the nearest lek note at restaurants and bars, and for short taxi rides. At restaurants the tip is usually given directly to the waiter upon paying, rather than left on the table.

Visas

All citizens of Western European countries, US, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Israel, Japan, Turkey, Croatia, Romania, Bulgaria, Malaysia and Singapore need a visa, but can simply buy one at the border, port or airport for €10 in cash euros please; pounds and US dollars are sometimes grumpily accepted too. Citizens from Poland and Slovenia enter for free; those from Malta and Israel pay €30. Travellers of most other nationalities need to get a visa from an Albanian embassy or consulate abroad before travel to Albania. Before you set off, confirm your entry requirements at the nearest Albanian embassy or consulate. Note that the silly €10 departure tax has been abolished in early 2005.

Sons and daughters

Famous Shkodran include:

Fing Gent (21st century BC)
Marin Barleti, first Albanian historian (15th/16th century)
Kara Mahmut Pashë Bushatlliu, leader and statesman (18th century)
Pashko Vasa, Prizren League ideologist
Gjergj Fishta, poet
Luigi Gurakuqi, politician and the first education minister in the first Albanian government
Cardinal of the Roman-Catholic Church
Pjetër, Kel und Gegë Marubi, photographers
Migjeni, poet
Tinka Kurti, singer of Shkodra city songs

Other terms you may encounter:

Shkodër@In Y our Pocket

www.shkoder.net – The best local English-language site; history, photos, cultural information and some jokes.

www.infoshkodra.com – In Albanian only, but worth visiting for the easily browsed photo galleries.

www.saraci.it/shkoder – A good collection of old photos of Shkodra.

www.shkodra.gov.al – The municipality website; Albanian only but with some great background music.

Shkodra In Your Pocket 2006 - 2007

Lost for choice

Shkodër
By the seventh century BC, the Illyrians (the apparent ancestors of the Albanian nation) settle in what is now Albania. Shkodra, known as Scodron, becomes the capital of the Illyrian empire in 181 BC. In 168 BC the Romans defeat the Illyrians and establish the protectorate of Illyricum. Shkodra becomes an important trade town on the main route between the Dalmatian coast and Kosovo.

4th-13th Centuries
The Roman Empire is divided in 395 AD, and the territory of today’s Albania falls into the Eastern (Byzantine) Empire. In the centuries that follow, this territory is invaded by the Huns, the Visigoths and the Ostrogoths, Slavs invade the north in the 13th century. The Byzantine Empire re-conquers the region several times.

14th Century
Shkodra is a well-developed trading town, and in 1360 becomes centre of the Balshaj Principality. In 1396 this falls to the Venetians who rename the town Scutari and reinforce the castle. The Ottomans invade what is now Albania in 1385, finally capturing Shkodra in 1479. Their rule lasts more than 500 years.

15th Century
Skanderbeg, the Albanian leader, wages a war of independence against the Ottomans starting in 1443 and enjoys remarkable success until his death in 1468.

16th Century
The Ottoman Empire conquers Durres, the last stronghold of independent Albania, in 1501. The most ancient book known, published in Albanian language dated in 1555.

18th Century
As Ottoman power wanes, Albanian feudal rulers called beyas arise and flourish. Their holdings are merged into two semi-autonomous estates called pashalis. Shkodra is the centre of the Bushati Préshësh Palaishi, whose leader Mahmut Pasha establishes an independent Albanian principality, only to be suppressed by the Ottoman Empire. Shkodra now has 50,000 inhabitants and is a booming trade town, with six foreign consulates, a chamber of commerce and a bazaar with 2500 shops and 80 professions.

19th Century
In the 1830s, the Ottomans crush Albanian autonomy. Uprisings break out over taxation policy in the 1840s. In the mid-1860s, intellectuals begin to promote the teaching of Albanian (prohibited under Ottoman rule). After Russia defeats the Ottoman Empire, the Prizren League is founded in 1878 to fight for autonomy and against the partitioning of Albanian territory. A provisional government is proclaimed in 1881 but is soon crushed by the Ottomans.

20th Century
Local uprisings break out in 1909-1912. After other Balkan states declare war on the feeble Ottoman Empire, Albanians proclaim independence in Vlora on November 28, 1912. The Treaty of London recognises Albania in 1913, but Kosovo is given to Serbia. In 1914, during WWI, Italy invades Albania. In 1920 Albania regains independence. Under Fan Noli, Albania’s first, short-lived democratic government is formed in 1934. In 1925 Ahmet Zogu becomes president of the new Republic of Albania. But in 1928 Zogu proclaims a kingdom and crowns himself King Zog I. On April 7, 1939, Italy invades again, occupying Albania until 1943, when the Germans take over. In November 1944 the Germans retreat. The Communist led National Liberation Front takes power. Yugoslavia, Albania’s erstwhile ally, tries to absorb the country causing Albania to break with Belgrade in 1948. The Communists attempt to rebuild this poor, rural land into an industrial state. Forced collectivisation and harsh political persecution ensue. Even after 1956, when most of Eastern Europe undergoes de-Stalinization, Albania maintains a hard-line stance. It criticises the Soviet Union, with which it breaks relations in 1961. In 1968, after the Soviets invade Czechoslovakia, Albania withdraws from the Warsaw Pact. After falling out with Moscow, Albania cultivates relations with China. Imitating Beijing, Albania purges ‘reactionary’ influences. In it’s own version of the Cultural Revolution in 1987, it outlaws religion and closes all 2169 of the country’s churches and mosques. The regime’s Stalinism and xenophobia make Albania one of the world’s most isolated countries. In 1978 the leadership condemns even China as ‘revisionist,’ and the alliance collapses. The subject of an intense personality cult, longtime Party head Enver Hoxha dies on April 11, 1985.

1990
After the totalitarian regimes collapse everywhere else in Eastern Europe, Communist Party leader Ramiz Alija announces a cautious ‘democratisation’ in March. Reform comes slowly. The People’s Assembly rescinds the ban on religion and on travel abroad in May. In July, Albanians seek asylum in foreign embassies after security forces fire on pro-democracy rallies. In October, celebrated Albanian author Ismail Kadare seeks asylum in Paris. Later, students demonstrate against such restrictions and hold a rally for a multi-party system. On 12 December the Democratic Party is founded Albania’s first non-Communist party in the postwar era. In Shkodra, 13 December sees the first violent anti-Communist street protests; many shops on Rr. 13 Dhjetori are destroyed and the street later gets named after the date. A week later, the authorities dismantle the statue of Stalin in Tirana.

1991
In February, students at Tirana’s Enver Hoxha University launch a strike, demanding reforms; weeks of protests culminate in the toppling of Enver Hoxha’s statue in Skenderbeg Square. While some refugees flee the country in March, Diplomatic relations with the United States are restored, a month later with the United Kingdom. On March 31 the first multi-party elections in 68 years result in a victory for the Communists. On April 29 the Republic of Albania is proclaimed. A general’s strike on May 16 leads to the resignation of the Communist government. A multi-party government is then formed, the first in 47 years. Massive crowds greet visiting U.S. Secretary of State James Baker in June, but the faults in the economy become clear when thousands of Albanians seeking asylum in Italy commandeer ships. An estimated 100,000 Albanians had fled the country in the previous 12 months.

1992
The Democratic Party defeats the Socialists (the former Communists) in national elections in March. Ramiz Alija resigns as president and is replaced by Sali Berisha.

1993
Pope John Paul II visits Albania in April, consecrating the new archbishop in Shkodra’s Cathedral. In July, Socialist Party chairman Fatos Nano is arrested on charges of corruption.

1996
The Democratic Party wins national elections by a landslide in May. The Socialists allege voting irregularities.

1997
Collapsing pyramid schemes spark months of rioting and lawlessness throughout Albania in January. A multiparty government of national reconciliation is agreed upon to stave off the country’s slide into anarchy. In June, parliamentary elections, held amidst nationwide unrest, result in a landslide victory for the Socialists. Berisha resigns as president.

1999
In response to Serb attacks on ethnic Albanians in Kosovo, NATO launches an air war on Yugoslavia on March 24. The war turns Albania into a NATO base of operations, as well as a vast Kosovar refugee camp: by May 500,000 Kosovars have flooded into the country.

2001
The Socialist Party, led by Fatos Nano, is re-elected during violent elections. In October, Edi Rama, a former art lecturer and painter supported by the Socialist Party, is elected mayor of Tirana.

2002
Alfred Moisiu, a former general, is elected president; he is the only candidate. In October, Geraldine of Albania, wife of Sali Berisha, is elected queen of Albania.

2004
Some 20,000 people march in Tirana against Prime Minister Fatos Nano and his Socialist-led government.

2005
In July, Sali Berisha’s Democratic Party wins the national elections from Fatos Nano’s Socialists, and returns to power after 8 years, his party now controlling 80 seats in the new 140-seat parliament. The elections results are delayed after allegations of voting irregularities and three deaths. OSCE monitors report that the elections only partially complied with international standards, noting that progress to date has been made since the last elections. In June, novelist Ismail Kadare wins the first international version of Britain’s Man Booker Prize.

2006
In February, Albania signs the Stabilisation and Association Agreement with the EU, seen as the very first step towards closer cooperation and eventually membership of the EU.

Population: Albania 3,133,000; Tirana 750,000, Shkodra 110,000 (2005 estimate).
Albania’s population growth rate is 0.97% per year, the highest in Europe. The population of Tirana is growing as a result from migration, especially from the northeast of Albania.

Shkodra specifics
Shkodra is the largest city in Northern Albania with 110,000 inhabitants. It’s 90km from Tirana, 36km from the border with Montenegro at Hani i Hotit, 50km from Podgorica, and 32km from the beach at Velpoja.

Ethnic composition: 99% Albanians, 1% Greeks and Macedonians.

Religious composition (estimated): 70% Muslim, 20% Orthodox, 10% Catholic. After decades of religious oppression, only 30-40% of Albanians are practicing believers.

The Albanian nation: Apart from those living in Albania proper, there are 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.

1400 - 1700

Geography
At 28,748 sq. km, Albania is a bit larger than Maryland or Wales. Major rivers are the Drini, Semani and Vjosa. Major lakes are Shkodra, Ohrid and Prespa. The highest mountain is Mt. Korabi, at 2751 m.

Local Time
Albania is in the Central European Time Zone (GMT+1). During daylight savings time (end of April to end of October), the time is GMT+2. When it is noon in Albania, it is 06:00 in New York, 11:00 in London and 12:00 in Berlin.

2006 - 2007

The Al-Zamil mosque

Alejandro L. Duarte

DURING BUILDWORK

Shkodra In Your Pocket
Cinema
Kinema Millennium D/E-2, Rr. Marin Barleti, tel. 4916. Shkodra’s grand cinema, just west of the main square, has a few screenings per day of recent films, all in the original language with Albanian subtitles. There’s a popular café in front of the building too. Tickets 150-250 lek.

Library
Luigi Gurakuqi University Library E-1, Sheshi Dugajt e Reja, tel. 427 86. Inside the Faculty of Natural Sciences. Marin Barleti Library B/C-3, Sheshi 2 Prilli, tel. 423 07/069 258 42 24, bibliogj@yahoo.com. Open 08:00 - 16:00, Closed Fri, Sat.

Sports
FC Vllaznia B-1, Rr. Musa Luli, tel. 423 05, www.fcvllaznia.com. Shkodra is proud of its football club, which plays home games in the stadium just west of Sheshi 5 Heronjte square along Rr. Bujar Bishanaku. Vllaznia was founded in 1919 and is Albania’s oldest sports club.

Theatre & Opera
Migjeni Theatre Sheshi 5 Heronjte, tel. 423 46/437 58. Plays, concerts and other events; plays are mostly in Albanian but sometimes an Italian group drops by. Admission 200-500 lek.

Shkodra Jazz Festival
August
If you’re in town in August, look out for the Shkodra Jazz Festival, when a host of Albanian and international bands come to play jazz. In the successful 2005 edition, there were some 16 bands in total, and this year, Mano Mano from France has been invited. Concerts are held at the theatre and a small admission fee is charged. The festival will probably be held on Aug 26-27 from 19:30 each night – check posters, the website www.omionweb.com or ask the Italian consulate, one of the sponsors, to be sure.

Giffoni Film Festival
September
The real Giffoni international children’s film festival takes place in Giffoni, a small town in southern Italy. After that, however, it goes on a tour of the world, and one of the stops is Albania, where it will be held in the first or second week of September. In Shkodra, the Millennium cinema will be showing various films from the festival. Further details were not known at time of writing, so contact the cinema for further details, or surf to www.giffoniff.it.

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The people of Shkodra have the reputation of being good-humoured, tolerant and happy, and perhaps this all has led to the wonderful local songwriting tradition. Shkodra has developed a special kind of music over the centuries that is quite different from anything else in Albania of the Balkans, somewhat clumsily called ‘citizen’ or ‘urban’ songs. Traditionally, the music made in the villages of the mountain regions consists of simple rhythms, with patriotic themes or talking of shepherd life, and was used at weddings and other ceremonies; less susceptible to change, this is still the most authentic music in Albania. In Shkodra, altogether more sophisticated music was made, with lyrical, romantic texts, a restrained tempo and oriental-sounding scales. Uniquely, Shkodra’s tradition of religious tolerance means that the songs were common and popular among all communities, Muslim, Catholic and Orthodox, and the songs were greatly influenced by this multicultural mentality combined with the beauty of the houses and gardens of this merchant city. Until recently the songwriters craftily used symbols and metaphors to get around certain taboos that existed at the time, making odes to flowers rather than addressing the woman they had their eyes set on; nowadays songs are more direct but no less lyrical. The topics change a little with the times too, with some songs now addressing the pain of missing people who have migrated abroad. The two texts below are of the most popular songs. When it comes to city songs, both men and women can play instruments and sing; there are group songs but also solo songs (called jare) which are very demanding of a singer’s talents. Instruments used include clarinets, violins, harmoniums, the def (a type of drum), the dajre (tambourine), and the saz, a sleek, long-necked lute with three strings. If you visit the Marubi photo exhibition you’ll see beautiful shots of groups of musicians posing with their instruments, invariably seated around a plate of sweets and a few glasses of raki. Shkodra’s long relationship with music lead to a number of Albanian firsts. The first brassband was formed here in 1878 – and there are still occasional brass band festivals, the last held in April 2006. In the 1930s the first public concerts took place, with music presented as something to enjoy rather than merely as the backdrop to an event, with both men and women performing. The Catholic cardinal of Shkodra was involved in setting up the first public music house shows in 1936. Early shows staged there included topics such as the legend of Rozafa, the brutal Turkish siege of Shkodra, the Turkish invasion, and the Albanian flag. In 1913 Franciscan monks wrote Albania’s first opera, though never performed it – the first opera premiere was here in 1968. Under the repressive post-war regime, songwriters had it difficult, with obligatory nationalistic texts being sung and some old religious-themed songs changed for political reasons – but even at the time these changes were disliked. Albania has changed immensely since the early days of citizen songs, with modern communications and mass emigration both influencing songs and bringing competition in the form of foreign pop, but there’s strong proof that the tradition will survive, with new and newly interpreted songs regularly hummed on the streets.

### Lule Bore

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tuj kerku’ n’are dhe koder</strong></td>
<td>I searched fields and hills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tuj prek lujet gjith me dore</strong></td>
<td>I touched flowers everywhere</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vec n’jip kopesht te vogel n’Shkoder</strong></td>
<td>Only in a small Shkodra garden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ty te gjeta lulebore</strong></td>
<td>I found you, snow flower.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Je e vogel, por je plot</strong></td>
<td>You’re small but cheerful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ty T’kerkoj te kish te mot</strong></td>
<td>You’re the one I’m looking for</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tash sa mot ije ty T’kerkoj</strong></td>
<td>Many years I was trying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ng’ozi me ty jiten ta shkhoj</strong></td>
<td>Finding joy in life with you, my lover</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Eja, eja lule bore</strong></td>
<td>Come, come snow flower</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Une me ty do thur kuner</strong></td>
<td>You and I will merge together.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pashe ma te bukuren stine prandvere</strong></td>
<td>I saw the most beautiful spring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pashe nivnethesen drandoffil</strong></td>
<td>I saw the Rose Queen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mos t’ja falish ku’ti eren</strong></td>
<td>Don’t give your flavour to anyone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Se per mu vetem ke cile</strong></td>
<td>Because you are the one for me</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Snow flower

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**Shkodra In Your Pocket** would like to thank Zef Coba for his cooperation for this article.

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**Photo removed to make this download version of Shkodra In Your Pocket lighter; refer to a print version, available locally, for all photos.**
As the centre of Albanian cultural life, Shkodra has attracted and inspired many writers and poets. The most famous local poet was Migjeni, although others include Filip Shiroka and Gjergj Fushta, who lived here with some poems. We’d like to thank Robert Elsie (www.albanianliterature.net) for the biographies and translations.

Migjeni

Migjeni, a name derived from the first letters of each word of Millosh Gjergj Nikolla, lived his short life from 1912 to 1938 and never managed to publish a book, but his work still kick-started contemporary Albanian poetry. He was born as Milos Doka Nikolic in Shkodra to a Serb family, and at 14 went to study Russian, French Greek and Latin at St John’s Orthodox Seminary in Bitola, then the Kingdom of Serbia, now in Macedonia. On his return to Shkodra he gave up on becoming a priest and became a teacher in Vraka, a Serb village north of town, where he started writing poems and prose in Albanian. In 1936 his book containing 36 poems called Voci e Lira (Verse) was banned (it was reprinted in 1944 with two ‘inappropriate’ poems deleted and eight new ones added). In 1935, Migjeni fell ill with tuberculosis and was sent to the sanatoriums in Greece and Italy and as a priest in the mountain town of Puka, he died in an Italian hospital at the age of 26. His work consists of just 24 short prose sketches and 44 poems. Whereas most poets from the regions stuck to describing the beauties of the Albanian mountains and the sacred traditions of the nation, Migjeni focused on misery and suffering: “I suffer with the child whose father cannot buy him a toy. I suffer with the young man who burns with unslaked sexual desire. I suffer with the middle-aged man drowning in the apathy of life. I suffer with the old man who trembles at the prospect of death. I suffer with the peasant struggling with the soil. I suffer with the worker crushed by iron. I suffer with the sick suffering from all the diseases of the world... I suffer with man.”

Migjeni’s poems were successful in literary circles even thought he never published a book; ironically when his book finally did appear, it was in the same year that Stalinism was decided to be the best way forward in Albania.

On ancient citadels perch carion ravens, Their depicted wings drooping - the symbols of lost hopes. In despair do they crook of an age gone by When the ancient citadels once gleamed with hallowed joy.

Song of noble grief

Oh, noble grief of the suffering soul That into free verse bursts out... Would you perchance take comfort In adorning the world with jewels?

Oh, noble grief in free verse, Which sincerely sounds and resounds. Will you ever move the feelings of men, Or wither and die like the autumn leaves?

Oh, song worthy of noble grief... Never rest! But with your twin, Lamentation, sing out your suffering. For time will be your consolation.

Resignation

In tears have we found consolations... Our heritage in life has been Misery... for this whole world Is but a grave in the universal womb, Where human reptiles are condemned to creep, Their will crushed under a granite hill. An ash embers in purest tears of profound pain Shines from the far side of hell, And at times, the reflection of a fleeting thought Flashes round the globe To give vent to awesome wrath. But the head hangs, the sorrowful eyelids droop And through the lashes wails a crystal tear, Rolls down the cheek and splashes on the earth, And in every splash of a teardrop a man is born To take to the road of his own destiny, In the hope of the smallest victory, he roams from land to land, Over roads covered with brambles, among which he passes Graves washed in tears and crazy folk who snigger.

Under the banners of melancholy

The banners Of a mournful melancholy Wave Throughout our land... Nor can it be said That here live a people Who are building Something new, Here and there in the shadow Of the banners An effort can be seen, A gigantic allegro To triumph over death, To give birth to something great, To bring a jinn to light! But (oh any of rate) From all that labour Only a mouse is born. And thus this comedy Bursts our veil of humour, And we ourselves Burst into rage, Over the threshold of each house That contains a sign of life Mournful melancholy Unfolds its banner.

Filip Shiroka

Filip Shiroka (1859-1935) was born and raised in Shkodra, but spent much of his life in exile after the defeat of the Ottoman Empire. He wrote more than sixty mostly romantic poems, three short stories, articles and several religious translations before he died in Beirut.

Be off, swallow

Farewell, for spring has come, Be off, swallow, on your flight, From Egypt to other lands, Searching over hill and plain Be off to Albania on your flight, Off to Shkodra, my native town!

Convey my greetings To the old house where I was born, And greet the lands around it Where I spent my early years; Be off thither on your flight, For ages I have not been to Albania To attend those graves; You, swallow, robed in black, Weep there on my behalf, With that exquisite voice of yours Lament them with your song!

Blasphemy

The mosques and churches float through our memories, Prayers devoid of sense or taste echo from their walls. Never has the heart of god been touched by them, And yet it beats on amidst the sounds of drums and bells.

Majestic mosques and churches throughout our wretched land, Spires and minarets towering over lowly homes, The voice of the hodja and priest in one degenerate chant, Oh, so many fair angels at the gates of hell.

The highland lute

Once the shkja advance was broken Did the Albanians hold assembly, Sent stern message to the sultan That they’d pay no tithes and taxes Neither to that Prince Nikolla Nor to Stamboul, to the sultan They’d no longer show submission, They now wanted independence, For Albania was not fashion, Made by God to bealle———————————————————————————-

This Franciscan pater was the greatest and most influential figure of Albanian literature in the first half of the twentieth century, his work more than anyone else’s the voice of the newly sovereign Albanian nation. Fushta (1871-1940) was born near Torashin in Northern Albania and studied languages, theology and philosophy in Bosnia to prepare for life as a priest. He headed the Franciscan schools in Shkodra, changing the language of instruction from Italian to Albanian and helping defin- ing the Albanian alphabet. He became a prolific writer (his masterpiece being the 15,613 line epic verse ‘The highland lute’) and experienced politician, greatly helping the Albanian cause in international politics. Between 1944 and 1989, he was branded a ‘clerical and fascist poet’ and his works were taboo. Below we publish part of ‘The highland lute’.

SHKODRA POETRY

2006 - 2007

Gjergj Fushta

Gjergj Fushta (1859-1935) was born and raised in Shkodra. He spent much of his life in exile after the defeat of the League of Prizren in 1880, working as a railway engineer in Egypt and Lebanon. He wrote more than sixty mostly romantic poems, three short stories, articles and several religious translations before he died in Beirut.

Under the banners of melancholy

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Shkodra’s hotel scene is little varied, with a few good options priced between 4000-8000 lek (30-60 euros) and the rest merely offering merely adequate rooms at about 1200 lek. ***Star spangled banter***. Budget travellers will be pleased to hear that some of the cheaper hotels charge the same price for single and double rooms. Prices listed here include breakfast unless otherwise specified.

Camping enthusiasts can pitch their tents along the beach next to the Panorama restaurant in Zogaj (see Where to Eat), a 25 minute drive west along the lake.

**Upmarket**

Three decent hotels.

**Colosseo** D-2, Rr. 13 Dhjetori, tel./fax 475 13, tel. 475 14, info@colosseohotel.com, www.colosseohotel.com. Shkodra’s preferred hotel, witness the guest book with scribbles from ambassadors and other bigwigs. The reasonably comfy three-star rooms behind the half-circle façade overlook the central square and the mosque. Some rooms have balconies. The staff is friendly and speaks English and Italian, the plumbing works well, there’s a good restaurant and bar, the breakfast room is the place to meet anyone doing anything in town, and when the city’s electricity is switched off at 0800 every morning you hardly notice the transition to generator power. Note that the double glazing is no match for the loudspeakers of the mosque just across the road, so bring earplugs to sleep when you pay for an early power cut at 06:45. The Colosseo is currently being expanded. ➤ 14 rooms (single 350, double 560, suite 660 - 700).

**Mondial** D-2, Rr. 13 Dhjetori, tel./fax 401 94, tel. 068 229 22 38, hotelrestorantmondialshkoder@hotmail.com. The Colosseo may get all the foreign attention, but the Mondial, just a few metres from the central square, actually has better rooms; clean, quiet and compact, with balconies and modern furnishings. The rooms at the front overlook the leafy ‘hotel’ terrace which is not too loud, though light sleepers may want to ask for a room at the back. A pleasant rooftop terrace is reserved for hotel guests. The suites are the best rooms in town; very nice indeed and well worth the extra leks. ➤ 14 rooms (single 1500 lek., double 3000 lek., suite 4700 - 1100).

**Konpy** F-2, R. Skenderbeg, tel./fax 454 92, tel. 069 211 82 64, kolpingshkoder@yahoo.it. A large house set back from the road just north of the Cathedral with neat small rooms and quite a nice view east over the mountains. The parking lot at the back doubles as a basketball court. Not too central, but certainly good value for money. The more expensive rooms have air-conditioning, ‘Italian breakfast’ is included. ➤ (single 151 - 184, double 460 - 490).

**Kolping** F-2, R. Skenderbeg, tel./fax 454 92, tel. 069 211 82 64, kolpingshkoder@yahoo.it. A large house set back from the road just north of the Cathedral with neat small rooms and quite a nice view east over the mountains. The parking lot at the back doubles as a basketball court. Not too central, but certainly good value for money. The more expensive rooms have air-conditioning, ‘Italian breakfast’ is included. ➤ (single 151 - 184, double 460 - 490).

**Argent** H-4, Rr. Alqi Kondi, tel. 439 09/069 205 20 65. In the southern part of town, along the main road towards the centre, Argent offers small, adequate budget rooms that are just far enough from the busy street to be quiet, although the hotel is within walking distance of the centre. The rooms are a little dowdy, but in the best-looking of areas and badly lit at night. ➤ 34 rooms (single 1500 lek., double 3000 lek.).

**Brindi** K-4, Rr. Stacioni e Trenit, tel. 069 262 02 39. A friendly hotel near the train station on the dusty road towards the centre. The rooms are a bit sombre, but are adequate for staying over the night. The windows are set in rows of casements, the bathrooms are clean, but suffer from traffic noise outside. ➤ 6 rooms (single 1200 lek., double 2000 lek.).

**California** G-5, Rr. e Pazarit te Vjeter, tel. 069 249 06 17. A simple roadside hotel between the bridge across the Buna and the furgon bus station – useful for a late arrival or an early departure, but not much else. Rooms are clean enough, but suffer from the traffic noise outside. ➤ (single 1200 lek., double 2000 lek.).

**Favorit** G-5, Rr. e Pazarit te Vjeter, tel. 069 268 56 19. A rather optimistically named roadside hotel, right next to the bridge across the Buna river. Rooms are a tad musty but clean enough, and some have air-conditioning, when the electricity works. Unusually for Albania, there’s a rather earthy soft-focus photo in the hall as an extra bonus. But the best thing about Favorit is sitting and watching the poor policeman on the bridge trying to order the traffic across the single-lane bridge. ➤ 6 rooms (single 3000 lek., double 3000 lek.).

**Outskirt options**

**Amerika** G-5, Rr. e Pazarit te Vjeter, tel. 069 257 89 44. The first hotel you see when entering Shkodra from the south is not really well-placed for anything except a quick escape to Tirana or across the border to Montenegro. The forlorn concrete building at the foot of the castle hill has an echoing and small, cleanish rooms, some pretty basic facilities. Fortunately, it’s a bit run-down. ► 5 rooms (single 3000 lek., double 5000 lek.).

**Marku** G-5, Shkodra-Shiroke road, tel. 068 268 56 19. A rather optimistically named roadside hotel, right next to the bridge across the Buna river. Rooms are a tad musty but clean enough, and some have air-conditioning, when the electricity works. Unusually for Albania, there’s a rather earthy soft-focus photo in the hall as an extra bonus. But the best thing about Favorit is sitting and watching the poor policeman on the bridge trying to order the traffic across the single-lane bridge. ➤ 6 rooms (single 3000 lek., double 3000 lek.).

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**Out of town**

**Marku** G-5, Shkodra-Shiroke road, tel. 417 71/068 204 96 30. If you have a rental car or don’t mind taxis, try the Marku, set on the other side of the Buna river in a shady bit of forest overlooking the lake and Shkodra. It’s best known with the locals for its views and garden restaurant, with tables and chairs spread out beneath the trees, and a huge concrete scale model of Rozafa Castle. The rooms are comfy and quiet (the terrace closes at 2300), French and English spoken. Cross the bridge, turn right and left after 200m following signs for Marku up the signposted road. ➤ 4 rooms (single 2500 lek., double 3500 lek.). Breakfast not included.
Shkodra lacks the variety of restaurants that worldly Tirana has to offer, but it’s not bad at all, with some very good options for local and international food. A nice twist to the Shkodran menu is the ‘Malezi’ cuisine – if you don’t spot it on the menu, don’t expect to find Malaysian items like chicken saté; Malezi is the Albanian word for black mountains, and the former refers to dishes from the mountain regions to the north of town and in Montenegro which usually consist of grilled meat and fish. Restaurant prices are pretty similar everywhere, from 150-600 lek for a main dish and 100 lek for a drink – count on paying around 1000 lek per person for a good dinner. If you have the time, try visiting one of the lakeside restaurant in Shkoi, just west of Shkodra, for the best fish dishes.

Albanian

Tradita G&T
Tel. 068 208 60 56, tradita_gt@yahoo.com. Set in a 17th century stone house, this tourist favourite is part museum, part restaurant. The owner of Tradita G&T (standing for Gheg & Tosk, the two Albanian peoples) is an avid collector of traditional costumes, and if he’s around ask to be shown some pieces from his priceless collection which includes shublitas, heavy black wool ceremonial dresses, different for unmarried and married women. On the ground floor various old tools are exhibited, while there’s a quiet garden to sit in (with one table built on a cart). On the first floor there are wooden chests, quilts cupboards built into the walls and a seating area looking down at the hearth where food is prepared on a wood fire. And the food is good – local and regional mountain dishes, Albanian tave (oven) specialities, cheeses, and plenty of fish options, all washed down with potent raki. Unfortunately the lighting is so bad that it’s hard to see what you’re eating, and unless Madonna is a Gheg or a Tosk, the music and occasional karaoke hardly fits the surroundings. Find Tradita 100m south of the crossing with Rr. Marin Barleti. Open 07:00 - 01:00.

Cocja (Vila Bektashi)
D/E-1, Rr. Vaso Kadola, tel. 070 99/069 286 74 45. The best-looking building in town (by far) appropriately houses one of the best restaurants. Also known as the Vila Bektashi, this recently renovated and nicely lit villa restaurant is so civilised that it has a bicycle rack. There’s a pleasant downstairs bar and leafy garden terrace where the walls have been constructed in traditional Shkodra style, using rounded rocks from the riverbed. Upstairs, the dazzlingly white dining area provides access to more outside seating. The waiters are used to foreigners here and promptly whip out the English-language menu, which lists Italian pasta dishes, fish (fresh from the lake or sea) and wines from Italy, Greece and France. We were very disappointed that all the Albanian specialities on the menu must be ordered a day in advance - a missed opportunity for most foreign visitors. Not to be confused with a plain restaurant called Cocja on Rr. 16 Nentori. Open 08:00 - 24:00.

Country Club
E-1, Rr. 13 Dhjetori, tel. 068 219 78 81, 068 214 07 89. The only proper restaurant in the historical stretch of old buildings on Rruga 13 Dhjetori, the Country Club has that obligatory wooden barn look and serves simple but delicious grill dishes; try the lamb grill with flatbread and a fresh salad, for instance. No outside seating. Open 07:00-15:00, 17:00-24:00. Closed Sun.

Hapa te Lehte
E/F-2, Rr. Branko Kadola 57, tel. 440 22, qendraqushk@yahoo.com. Set up as a place where local women can meet, get some working experience, empower themselves with computer skills, or simply let their children play safely in the courtyard, Hapa te Lehte (‘light footsteps’) runs an splendidly decorated café that’s open to all, even men. Snacks on byrek and pizza or sample the excellent Italian dishes with fith homemade pasta. In the the pink building near the corner with Rr. Skenderbeg, opposite the Cathedral. Open 07:30 - 20:00. Closed Sun.

Table talk
Welcome! Mirëseerdhët!
What do you recommend? Çfarë rekomandoni?
I would like...
May I have a...
...spoon
...fork
...knife
...please?
The bill please
Thank you
Mësimeshët!
Do të prefetoja...
Ndërkohë...A mund të kem një...
lagu
pirur
...fita
...jutem?
Faturën ju lutem
Valeminderi!
Outside seating
Guarded parking
Occupational live music
Guarded parking
No smoking
Café culture is very prominent in Albania, and the locals just love sitting on a terrace, watching people stroll by and sipping coffee with friends, all day long if need be. Shkodra is no exception, and especially along the southern half of Rruga 13 Dhjetori you’ll find dozens of pretty similar cafes sitting side by side, mostly populated with groups of young males. We’ve reviewed the most popular and female-friendly ones here. Unfortunately, Shkodra’s classic landmark cafe, the old Kafa e Madhe or Grand Café, is closed due to legal wrangling over the ownership.

Cafés

Café talk
May I have a...
espresso
turkish coffee
coffee
filter coffee
tea
caj
sugar
cal"
cigarettes
matches
ashtray

Mondial
D-2, Rr. 13 Dhjetori, tel./fax 401 94. One of central Shkodra’s most pleasant terrace restaurants. A large shaded seating area and a tastefully decorated dining room inside is where you can sample Albanian and Italian food while watching the evening xhiro roll by. Not as showy as nearby Piazza Park. Open 06:00 - 24:00.

Muzë
D/1, Sheshi 5 Heronjte, tel. 069 226 42 49. Occupying the historical building with the stone ‘English tower’ attached to it, the Muzë restaurant is a disappointment. The pizza may be good and the terrace seating plentiful, the stuff couldn’t be less sury, and the main first-floor room of the house with a traditional carved wooden ceiling, always seems to be locked up. A missed opportunity if there ever was one. Open 07:00 - 23:00.

Palma
E1, Rr. 13 Dhjetori, tel. 408 64. Popular with the young ones and certainly attractive from a distance, the shaded garden around this villa set back from the main street in central Shkodra’s most pleasant terrace restaurants. A large shaded seating area and a tastefully decorated dining room...
Piazza Park D-2, Rr. 13 Dhjetori, tel. 490 90. A loud, brash terrace restaurant decked out with fountains, lush plants and a small playground for children. Popular with families and young Shkodrans, it’s a non-threatening place good for people watching at the halfway point of the xhiro mass evening stroll. Food on offer includes decent pizzas and other Italian dishes, and the restaurant delivers home too. Open 08:00 - 01:00.

**Castle dining**

Rozafa Castle restaurant G-6, Rozafa Citadel. Occupying the upper fortress catacombs, the café and restaurant in Shkodra’s Rozafa citadel is an atmospheric place for a drink or meal, and the main goal for most local visitors who make the trip here. The first and main room is a long stone cellar space. A smaller second room is nicely decorated with carpets and low seating on pillows, with white bamboo slats to wear instead of shoes and in the corner a rather scary redhead doll decked out in a traditional costume complete with Ottoman-era coins. A doorway leads to a terrace area outside the massive walls, with fantastic vistas to the west across the floodplains. Waiters dress in traditional garb too, complete with eggshell hats, and a karaoke system is set to play Albanian pop. Food on offer includes all the usual suspects; fresh sea and lake fish, grilled meat. Open 10:00 - 22:00.

**Lakeside dining**

Marku G-5, Shkodra-Shiroke road, tel. 417 71/068 204 96 90. A short taxi ride from the centre, the Marku can be found across the bridge, and 200m to the right up on the hillside, overlooking the lake. The tables are set wide apart beneath the pine trees, offering privacy and fresh air for diners digging into the Albanian and Italian food. If you’re too lazy or hungry to visit the real thing, Marku has an impressive concrete scale model of Rozafa Castle plonked in the garden as well. Open 10:30 - 23:00.

Panorama Zogaj, tel. 068 284 10 50. Just before you reach Zogaj, a road leads steeply down to this restaurant that is located in a tiny bay with a small arc of beach – one of the few along the lake shore. The Panorama restaurant is specialised in fish, of course, as proved by the small pool with the catch of the day right next to the building – you can simply point at the eel or carp of your choice. Seafood can also be prepared, though it’s best to book that case. If you’re in a group and call ahead, the owner can have someone pick you up in Shkodra. Ideal for a quick swim followed by a good meal. Outdoorsy types are welcome to pitch a tent in one of the spots behind the restaurant, though keep in mind the music played all day can get on your nerves. French and Italian spoken. Open 07:00 - 22:00.

Are you ready to go out and be active on your next vacation. In that case, Shkodra is a must-visit. There are countless restaurants and bars to choose from, offering a wide variety of cuisines and drinks. Whether you want to try traditional Albanian dishes or enjoy international cuisine, you'll find it all in Shkodra. One of the most popular eating spots is the famous 'Café on the Bridge', located in the old town near the castle.

Eating at Cocja

Open 10:30 - 23:00.

**Waiting for dinner**

Shkodra's Castle dining area is full of small cafes and restaurants. One of the most popular is Rozafa Castle restaurant, located in the upper fortress catacombs. The restaurant offers a great view of the city and serves traditional Albanian cuisine. 

**Nightlife**

Outside Tirana, nightlife in Albania is limited to a few dodgy discos and seasonal party venues along the coast. In Shkodra, everything goes very quiet after the xhiro ends around 22:00, with just a few venues offering late night entertainment.

Enigma D/E-1, tel. 069 293 11 34. Shkodra's only true bar, Enigma is set in an attractive split-level space next to the Colosseo hotel. The bar does some good cocktails and other drinks at amiable prices, and is a great place to meet the friendly locals. If you get hungry, you can order a plate of snacks. Be nice to the person behind the counter when everyone’s in the right mood there may even be some dancing here. Once the construction work on the hotel is done, Enigma's large terrace will again become one of the best places to watch the xhiro walk by. Open 08:00 - 22:00.

Extsy Club E-1, Rr. 13 Dhjetori, tel. 069 263 48 87. Set on the first floor of a building near the northern end of the street, this bar is where students come for a coffee and a smoke in a relaxed atmosphere. The technicolour walls are hung with modern art, and seating is on low chairs spread around the room. Although nobody gets ecstatic when we visited, it’s a pleasant place to meet open-minded students. Open 08:00 - 22:30.

Jadore B-3, Sheshi 2 Prilli, tel. 069 221 66 66. A vibrant bar and club next to the Economic Faculty of the University of Shkodra, that understandably mostly packs in students, playing Albpop and international hits. Open 08:00 - 24:00, Sat 08:00 - 02:00.

Orient (Banje e vogel) B-4, Rr. Esat Gjyli, tel. 069 240 76 49. Despite the Western trend of opening up wellness centres everywhere, all over the Balkans the characteristic old hamams, or bath houses, have been transformed into galleries, shops or simply locked up and forgotten. Shkodra’s old ‘small hamam’ (Banje e vogel) has been painted red inside and is now a bar and party venue. The squat building with it’s impressive central space is decked out in oriental style, with seating on cushions and Ottomans, and more intimate small areas in the corner rooms. There are parties a few times a month, attracting a crowd of students. Walk 300m south from the city park along Ruga Vasil Shanto and take the first right. Open 09:00 - 21:00.

Shqiponja G-6, Rr. e Qafes, tel. 416 25. At the foot of the castle hill on the northern banks of the Drini river, the large Eagle restaurant has ample terrace space overlooking the peaceful river as it flows towards the bridge. The restaurant is near the original site of Shkodra, before the inhabitants decamped to the other side of the hill after increasingly annoying floods, and you can have a look at the preserved Lead Mosque, just down the road, before dining here. Open 11:00 - 23:00.

One of the best things about urban Albanian life is the nightly xhiro, the ritual evening walk through the centre of town, also known as giro in Italian and corso in Spanish. It’s the time of day when all the work is done (or postponed), when the temperatures drop to pleasant levels and when literally hundreds of people stroll up and down the main streets of town, meeting friends, watching their children play in the park, drinking coffee at the bars and exchanging gossip along the way. In a way, this is an ancient version of the internet, with the xhiro surfers rapidly and efficiently exchanging information as they talk to everyone they know, and with viruses such as bad gossip spread even faster here than in the real internet. In some cities such as Tirana, traffic and building projects have made the xhiro nearly impossible, forcing it along the pavements and across busy roads. But in other towns (notably Vlora is famous in this respect) the xhiro is a respected institution, and streets are shut off for traffic to allow pedestrians to reclaim the city centre. In Shkodra too, the atmosphere of the xhiro is quite special, with people wandering between the city park at the southern end of a traffic-free Rruga 13 Dhjetori, past the Mondial and Piazza Park terraces and the Colosseo hotel to the northern end of the street. You’ll see that the first few hours attract many families, but that after 19:00 the girls and women somehow disappear leaving just the men chatting and sipping coffee until the xhiro winds down around 20:00 or 21:00. After 22:00 Shkodra’s city centre is deserted again.

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Al-Zamil Mosque D-2, Rr. 13 Dhjetori. Placed on the site of an earlier war-damaged predecessor and surrounded by gardens, the huge Turkish-style Sheik Zamil Abdullah Al-Zamil Mosque was built with Egyptian and Saudi money in 1955, and forms the focal point of Shkodra’s proud Muslim community. Although it could do with a bit of fixing up here and there, it’s a stunning building, with an intricately designed brass and copper Vortic is welcome, after perusal. The entrance is on the side facing away from the Colosseo hotel. Note the old partisan war monument in the park behind the mosque.

Cathedral of the Nativity (Kisha Ortodokse) D-1, Rr. Vaso Kadia. The brand new Orthodox Cathedral was built in 2000 on the spot of a temporary wooden church, and you can nearly smell the paint. For a new church, it’s very beauti ful, with a delicate interplay of domes and cupolas inside and out. High up, it stands separate from the main building in the courtyard. Time your visit with a Sunday service to hear beautiful chanting and singing.

Catholic Cathedral (Kisha e Madhe) F-3, Rr. Skenderbeg, www.kishakatolike.shkoder.com. The ‘large church’ as it is called in Albanian is just that – a church built (very slowly) between 1856 and 1898; at the time it was the largest of its kind in the Balkans. After 1967, it was vandalised and then converted into a sports hall, with concrete stands on two sides sloping up towards the windows so people could watch the basketball and volleyball being played. In 1998, it was restored by Italian specialists, and inaugurated by Mother Teresa on her visit to Albania. Two years later, Pope John Paul II visited the Cathedral and conversed with its 2,000 strong congregation, at the head of which sat His Holiness Pope Irinej, who was originally condemned to death 25 years earlier for his beliefs but ended up being imprisoned for life. A statue of Pope John Paul II can be found inside the left entrance outside the Cathedral, an elegant Italian-style building now is the archbishop’s residence.

Church of Our Lady of Shkodra (Zoja e Bekteume) G-6, Rr. e Pazarit te Vjetër. The first building of note that you see when entering Shkodra from Tirana is the newly restored 17th century Church of Our Lady of Shkodra, which sits right below the citadel. Curiously, this church is famous for a fresco that isn’t there any more. The miracle goes thus: in the 1960s, a hunchback came to the Mother of God ‘begging for mercy’. During times of trouble, of which there were plenty in 19th century Shkodra. During the Turkish conquest of the town in 1478, it was converted into a mosque, and in 1756 it was designated Genazzano, near Rome. In all probability the painting is in fact a 14th century Umbrian fresco, and not the result of an original miraculous event. Unfortunately, the Albanians adore Mary and this image in particular, and numerous chapels and churches across the region have been named after it.

Franciscan church (Kisha e Freteneve) E-2, Rr. e Pazarit te Vjetër. Walking along the alley next to the Colosseo hotel to find this large Italian-style church crowned with religious statues. During the atheist years, the building was turned into a department store. Since it reopened in 1998, visitors are welcome to escape the heat and ponder life for a while in its simple interior.

Lead Mosque (Xhamia e Plumbit) H-6, Rr. e Pazarit te Vjetër. Once in the heart of Shkodra’s old bazaar area, the Lead Mosque (named after the material used on the roof) was built in 1773 by Mehmet Pasha Bushihi, and was inspired by the great Sultan Ahmed mosque in Istanbul. In the 18th and 19th century the Kili and Dini rivers changed their course and flooded the old bazaar so often that the area was abandoned for a safer spot in Tirana’s current location. The Lead Mosque is all that remains, standing like an Indian palace in a small lake. The minaret was destroyed by lighting in 1967, the same year as the cultural revolution that stood between the pull of modern other religious buildings, but the mosques was left in peace until it was restored recently and the building’s courtyard and beautiful domes are in reasonable condition. The mosque is just a short walk down from the Citadel.

Shkodra has always been a multicultural city, with each religious or ethnic community playing an important role in the economy and cultural development of the city. In 1967, the Communist Party declared Albania to be the world’s first atheistic state and unleashed a light version of China’s cultural revolution, resulting in the senseless destruction of many religious buildings. After 1990, the four main religions in Albania (Islam, Roman Catholicism and Buddhism) all got along very well, and the monuments dotted around Shkodra attest to this traditional spirit of tolerance and cooperation.

Walking around Shkodra’s streets you’ll soon enough learn that the locals have a deep-seat ed love for birds – you’ll see small metal or wooden cages hung from many balconies with the birds twittering away like there’s no tomorrow. This is a Shkodra speciality not seen in other Albanian towns, and perhaps the strongest tradition of local songs has contributed to the locals being able to ad mire the birds song more. Or perhaps they just taste good. Therefore, if you’re looking for that special present to give to a local, perhaps drop by the Zoo Shop kiosk between the Rozafa Hotel and Sheshi 5 Heronjte square, where a variety of bird cages and Esq for sale (open 09:00-13:30, 15:30-20:00).

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WHAT TO SEE

Shkodra In Your Pocket

WHAT TO SEE

2006 - 2007
The soul of a city can be seen in its monuments.

**5 Heronjte e Vigut D-1, Sheshi 5 Heronjte.** This large statue in the middle of Sheshi 5 Heronjte square represents the five heroes of Vig (in the Mirdite region), who died heroically, fighting bravely to the death without thinking of surrender, for the cause of the Communist Party forces on 21 June 1944. Their actions were commemorated in a 1977 Albanian film. The statue was damaged when someone tried to blow it up in 1999.

**Isa Boletini D-4, Sheshi i Perashit.** The fierce-looking statue of a chap with a bushy moustache and guns in his belt represents Isa Boletin (1864-1916), a nationalist who spent four years imprisoned in Istanbul and then went to fight in the liberation movement against the Turks, and later against Serbia and Montenegro in order to include Kosovo inside the borders of the new state of Albania. The Great Powers decided otherwise, and Boletini was eventually killed in Montenegro during an attempt to capture Podgorica.

**Luigj Gurakuqi D-2, Sheshi L. Gurakuqi.** An elegant statue of this gentleman stands in a little park next to the Piazza Park terrace. Gurakuqi (1879-1925) was a writer and activist for the Albanian cause. After his studies in Naples where he started writing articles and poetry he returned to Albania and played a leading role in the independence movement and later the anti-Zogist movement. The Zogist regime recruited his own cousin to assassinate him in Bari, Italy.

**Obelisk Heronjte e Demokracise C-2, Sheshi 2 Prillë.** The monument consisting of a series of white marble pillars commemorates the brutal killing of four young people and the wounding of 82 others by police forces on 2 April 1991, two days after the first multiparty election in Albania. The crowd was peacefully demonstrating against the victory of the communists in those elections when the police opened fire. The director of police later fled Albania rather than face court, only to return when the Socialists were back in power again in 1997. Nobody has been arrested for the killings yet.
Shkodra’s greatest treasure is locked up in a dark, cool room, on the first floor of a nondescript and unmarked block of flats along Rr. Clirimi. A few dozen white wooden cupboards in this room each hold hundreds of small carefully labeled cardboard boxes, and each of those holds a set of thin glass plates, separated from each other by a thin piece of paper. Hold any of these glass plates against the light and you look back in time – for these are all original glass photo negatives with images of a Shkodra that has long gone.

With 250,000 negatives covering every major event in the region between 1856 and 1959, this is one of Europe’s most valuable collection of photos.

The fascinating story of this collection starts with an inverted refugee story. Pietro Marubi (1834-1905) from Piacenza in northern Italy, fled his homeland for political reasons, and settled in tolerant, open-minded Shkodra in 1856, establishing himself as an artist and architect and taking the name Pjetër Marubi. Two years later he took the first-ever photograph in Albania, set up the first photo studio of the country, and made a living making portrait photos of the local upper class families and the odd revolutionary. In 1885, he hired an apprentice called Mikel Kodheli (1870-1940), whom he later adopted, renaming him Kel Marubi. Apart from the studio work, Kel Marubi prolifically documented city life:

- festivals, people at work, street scenes, landscapes with people, buildings and more. He became active in the Albanian national resistance and was in a unique position to document major historical events and personalities. Kel’s son Gege Marubi (1907-1984) studied in France at the Lumière Brothers’ school before working for the family business until the Communist takeover. Gege Marubi donated the whole collection to the Albanian state in 1974.

By that time, the family photo collection had grown to an astounding 150,000 glass negatives. As all Marubis had meticulously kept notes of topics and dates, and carefully stored the photo plates, the collection represents a unique documentation of regional history over a period of nearly 100 years.

The Marubi collection has since been expanded to about 250,000 negatives with the collections of the Pci family (70,000 negatives from 1924-62), the Jakova photo studio (50,000 negatives, 1932-59) and of the Nersishti photo studio (250,000 Leica and Kodak negatives, 1959-85). The latter runs a photo shop on Rruga 13 Dhjetori, and is still documenting city life. With the aid of a French NGO and UNESCO, the collection is now protected from deterioration and properly guarded, and is temporarily housed with a small exhibition space while plans for a proper museum (in the former state bank building on Rr. 13 Dhjetori) are being developed. Another major project is the digitalisation of the collection – some 20,000 photos have now been painstakingly scanned. The manager of the collection, Mrs. Osmani, has been involved with preserving the collection for decades and has spent so much time identifying the topics and people on unmarked photos that she can recognise many long-dead members of Shkodra’s prominent families.

The Fototeka currently consists of a hallway hung with about 50 of the most evocative photos from the collection, most with French, Spanish and Italian captions.

Practicalities

National Marubi Photo Collection (Fototeka Kombetare Marubi), D-1, Rr. M. Gjollesha, tel. 434 67, fotomarubi2004@yahoo.it. Open 08:00 – 16:00, closed Sat, Sun. Admission 100 lek. Contributions to upkeep the collection are welcome, and beautiful postcards (100 lek) and calendars (800 lek) with photos from the collection are for sale from the office. Large A3-size quality prints of specific images can be ordered; these cost 2500 lek each and take 2-3 days to prepare. The unmarked entrance can be found behind the yellow and white exchange kiosks on Rruga M. Gjollesha, next to a café, where there’s a gate leading to the courtyard entrance.
Crowning the 113m-high hill towering above the confluence of the Buna and Drini rivers, Shkodra’s impressive top sight is the pride of the locals. Whether it’s a castle or a fortress, citadel can be discussed, fact is that Shkodra’s history started on or about the establishment of a Bronze Age settlement 4000 years ago, followed much later by an Illyrian fortress. Between the first two castle gates you’ll get a glimpse of Shkodra’s so-called Cyclopean walls, consisting of huge, meticulously puzzled-together rocks, dating back to 350BC. 

For more than 2000 years a proper castle was built, and it’s from this period that the famous legend of Rozafa originates – a legend that is found back in various forms across the Balkans. This particular one was first written down by famous local writer Marin Barleti in 1504. The story goes that the three brothers who were constructing the castle arrived to work each day finding the previous day’s work demolished. A wise man was consulted and told them that only a human sacrifice could stop the devil from stopping their work, and the brothers agreed to offer the first of their three daughters to the devil. The third daughter was offered in marriage to a local man, and she secretly offered herself to a priest. The priest gave her a charm that protected her. The brothers were about to build the castle walls, and at that moment a huge flood came from the rivers. As the waters receded they found the walls had been built, and realized the charm protected them.

Shkodra’s top sight is the pride of the locals. Whether it’s a castle or a fortress, Shkodra is situated on the site of a Bronze Age settlement 4000 years ago, followed much later by an Illyrian fortress. Between the first two castle gates you’ll get a glimpse of Shkodra’s so-called Cyclopean walls, consisting of huge, meticulously puzzled-together rocks, dating back to 350BC. For more than 2000 years a proper castle was built, and it’s from this period that the famous legend of Rozafa originates – a legend that is found back in various forms across the Balkans. This particular one was first written down by famous local writer Marin Barleti in 1504. The story goes that the three brothers who were constructing the castle arrived to work each day finding the previous day’s work demolished. A wise man was consulted and told them that only a human sacrifice could stop the devil from stopping their work, and the brothers agreed to offer the first of their three daughters to the devil. The third daughter was offered in marriage to a local man, and she secretly offered herself to a priest. The priest gave her a charm that protected her. The brothers were about to build the castle walls, and at that moment a huge flood came from the rivers. As the waters receded they found the walls had been built, and realized the charm protected them.

**Planning your siege**

**Rozafa Castle**, 3km south of the city centre. Open 08:00 – 22:00. Admission 200 lek (foreigners), 100 lek (Albanian). The road leading up to the castle is not signposted – from the main road out of Shkodra to Tirana, turn into the street diagonally opposite the petrol station and turn left up a narrow bumpy road. On the left again when you see a small stone bridge and then right across this bridge all the way to the parking spaces beneath the main entrance. The road is fine for all cars; you can walk there from the town centre in an hour or two, but it’s a dusty walk past some poor areas and in the summer heat the steep hike is tiring – best get a taxi to drop you off. Adventurous types should bring along a torch to light up the interiors of the buildings and tunnels that can be entered. There are no warnings for steep drops or cistern entrances, so be careful.

Several sights dotted around Shkodra reveal the city’s importance as an ancient trade town; the bridge at Mes is easily reached from Shkodra, and can be easily combined with a visit to the ancient castles of Drishti and Shkodra. East of town, it’s a short boat ride from Moni to the impressive rock temple complex on the island of Gruda. There is a ferry service between Shkodra and the Koman road, situated just behind the massive Vau i Dejes hydropower dam (a sight in itself), the ancient town is now on an island in the lake. Only a boat from the town pier can access the site. The road bridge at Koman guards the Shkodra-Kosovo road, leading up the valley to Prizren, Shkodra was founded in the 8th-8th century BC, and foundations of a Roman fort have been discovered here. Now you can visit the ruins of the 11th century medieval castle, which includes two rings of defensive walls and towers (some sadly submerged in the lake), the remains of a Byzantine church and other early medieval walls. The setting on the steep rocks rising from the lake is especially impressive. To get there by bus, take a ferry from the crossing of Rugova Kenderbeg and Rugova Marina Barleti to Ragam (regular daily departures from 07:30 – 15:00, 30 lek, 30 minutes, return trips from 08:00 – 16:00). At Ragam, a boat will take you across the lake to Sarda island for 200 lek, take a taxi from the main road to Drishti. Groups of people and more can book a guided tour which includes visits to Ragam, Sarda, the Shpella e Pellumbave cave and the viewpoint at Sire 500 lek for a day (including lunch) via the Sarda Association; contact Mr. Artef Lejak at tel. 069 218 51 60.

**Medieval Sarda** Another wonderful daytrip from Shkodra is to the nearby medieval Sarda, 33km east of Shkodra on the Koman road. Situated just behind the massive Vau i Dejes hydropower dam (a sight in itself), the ancient town is now on an island in the lake. Only a boat from the town pier can access the site. The road bridge at Koman guards the Shkodra-Kosovo road, leading up the valley to Prizren, Shkodra was founded in the 8th-8th century BC, and foundations of a Roman fort have been discovered here. Now you can visit the ruins of the 11th century medieval castle, which includes two rings of defensive walls and towers (some sadly submerged in the lake), the remains of a Byzantine church and other early medieval walls. The setting on the steep rocks rising from the lake is especially impressive. To get there by bus, take a ferry from the crossing of Rugova Kenderbeg and Rugova Marina Barleti to Ragam (regular daily departures from 07:30 – 15:00, 30 lek, 30 minutes, return trips from 08:00 – 16:00). At Ragam, a boat will take you across the lake to Sarda island for 200 lek, take a taxi from the main road to Drishti. Groups of people and more can book a guided tour which includes visits to Ragam, Sarda, the Shpella e Pellumbave cave and the viewpoint at Sire 500 lek for a day (including lunch) via the Sarda Association; contact Mr. Artef Lejak at tel. 069 218 51 60.

**Lake Koman Ferry** Possibly the best trip you’ll ever do in Albania is sail the Koman-Fierze ferry. Unfortunately, it’s not made easy for tourists, with ferries catering to people in Fierze town and the other way up the lake, so there’s no way to do an easy return trip from Shkodra. Lake Koman was formed when the rugged Drini valley was dammed in the 1960s to create today’s biggest hydroelectric dam in Albania. The lake behind Vau i Dejes dam contains some 320 million cubic meters of water, and the city of Fierze, the location of a second dam which holds back a lake that goes all the way to Kukes near the Kosovo border. The boat trip passes through 2000-1500m high mountains and through a series of deep gorges and interconnected lakes, with hardly any signs of human activities on the shores – though occasionally the ferry will stop to let off some hearty peasants, who promise to return to their estates later. The wild landscape is somewhat reminiscent of the Norwegian fjords, and is a dramatic highlight of any trip in Albania. The ferry departs from Koman daily at 07:00 and 12:00. Tickets are 500 lek per person and 1300 lek per square metre of car. The ferry from Fierze to Koman departs at 06:00 and returns at 06:30 which means there is no opportunity to return the same day unless you drive across the good but winding mountain roads to Fushë-Aremez and then either back to Shkodra or Tirana, arriving in the late afternoon. There are also private passenger boats making the crossing, departing from Koman at 09:00 and 09:15 (arriving in Fierze at 11:00 and 11:15); the Fierz-Koman trips are at 06:30 and 06:45 (arriving in Koman at respectively 08:30 and 08:45). Tickets are 300 lek. These private boats can also be rented for a longer return trip. To get to Koman by bus, take a ferry from the crossing of Rugova Kenderbeg and Rugova Marina Barleti; departures are at 06:30, 07:00 and 07:30 (all arriving in the ferry), and 12:00 and 13:30. The ride takes 1hr 15mins and costs 300 lek. Furgons go back to Shkodra at 08:00, 09:00 and 09:30.

www.inyourpocket.com
Lake Shkodra ferry

A new passenger boat service between Shkodra and Virpazar in Montenegro started in June 2006. The Xhenis company uses two 60-seat boats (which originally plied the canals of Venice) to sail from the customs office at Shkodra’s Buna bridge to the centre of Virpazar in Montenegro (the boat docks near the new tunnel towards the coast). Groups can book the boats for international trips; for the moment there are no regular services for individual travellers, though you can try asking if there’s a group tour that you can join. The trip takes 2 hours and 10 minutes one way, and doesn’t stop off at any of the lakeside villages; there’s a bar and toilets on board. Tickets are 600 lek (5 euro) per person, double that for a return trip. For more information contact Filip Guraziu in Shkodra (tel. 069 206 78 18, filiguraziu@hotmail.com) or Ilija Aleksic in Montenegro (Juzmi bulevar bb, Podgorica, tel. +381 81 62 46 25, tel. +381 69 02 00 20, kingsco@cg.yu).

Driving from Shkodra across the Buna bridge and to the right towards the lake, the stretch from Shkodra to Shiroke village houses and mount Tarabosh

The massive lake just west of Shkodra, 60% of which is in Montenegro, is well worth a trip. Along the rugged western shore there are a few beaches and coves for swimming in fresh water, and the rustic villages of Shiroke and especially Zogaj still seem stuck in a different time.

Lake Shkodra is in fact a former sea bay that was cut off from the Adriatic when the sea levels dropped, thousands of years ago. The lake is the largest in the Balkans at 43km long and between 370-530 square kilometres, and the lake surface varies between 5 and 10 metres above sea level depending on the season (lowest in winter). As its depth is up to 60 metres, the bottom of the lake is well below sea level, making it in a so-called cryptodepression.

The Moraca river in Montenegro is the main source of water for the lake, flushing the whole lake through about 2-3 times a year. The Buna river near Shiroke is the only outlet, flowing down 43km to the sea. The Buna joins with the Drin river just below Rozafa Castle, a few kilometres from the lake, and curiously in winter when the lake surface drops, this top section of the Buna reverses direction for two to three months, allowing water to flow from the Drin past Shiroke into the lake. This was a source of pollution for the lake, because of the heavy metals leaked by the chromium and other mines at the Drin’s upper reaches. Fortunately, the Drin is improving after the near total collapse of industrial activites in the 1990s, though the KAP aluminium smelter and Podgorica’s rubbish tip along the Moraca in Montenegro still cause pollution. It’s all generally still within EU standards, and as long as you don’t drink from the Drin, swimming along the lake shores and eating fish is fine.

Nature lovers should bring their binoculars – Lake Shkodar is a bird-watchers paradise, with some 240 bird species inhabiting its shores, including some of Europe’s last pelicans. In the water there are 64 types of fish, and on land reptiles, wild boar, rabbits, foxes and even the occasional wolf. The Montenegrin side of the lake is a national park. The eastern shore of the lake is marshy with dense reeds, and it’s difficult to get a glimpse of the lake from the road, which runs well away from the water. The easiest place to enjoy Lake Shkodra is on the steep, rocky western shore, accessible by car, taxi and a very occasional furgon bus.

Biking Lake Shkodra

Cyclists with their own bikes can make a 177km grand tour of the lake. A reasonably detailed map was made in 2005, describing the route from Podgorica via Rijeka Crnojevica, Virpazar, Muriqan, Shkodra, Kopliku and Tuzi, and the sights along it (ask at www.eulimnos.org or the GTZ office in Shkodra for a copy). The route is mostly flat, with only the part on the western bank hilly.

Lake Shkodra ferry

A new passenger boat service between Shkodra and Virpazar in Montenegro started in June 2006. The Xhenis company uses two 60-seat boats (which originally plied the canals of Venice) to sail from the customs office at Shkodra’s Buna bridge to the centre of Virpazar in Montenegro (the boat docks near the new tunnel towards the coast). Groups can book the boats for international trips; for the moment there are no regular services for individual travellers, though you can try asking if there’s a group tour that you can join. The trip takes 2 hours and 10 minutes one way, and doesn’t stop off at any of the lakeside villages; there’s a bar and toilets on board. Tickets are 600 lek (5 euro) per person, double that for a return trip. For more information contact Filip Guraziu in Shkodra (tel. 069 206 78 18, filiguraziu@hotmail.com) or Ilija Aleksic in Montenegro (Juzmi bulevar bb, Podgorica, tel. +381 81 62 46 25, tel. +381 69 02 00 20, kingsco@cg.yu).

Driving from Shkodra across the Buna bridge and to the right towards the lake, the stretch from Shkodra to Shiroke (3km) is the most developed part, with many new constructions going up. The centre of Shiroke is peaceful, with a few restaurants along the harbour quay and men fishing for their supper from the promenade. Once past Shiroke, the newly resurfaced road gets narrow and twisting, following the contours of Mount Tarabosh as it plunges down to the lake. There are some well-known restaurants perched on the shore along this stretch (see Taverna Shkodrina and Panorama in Where to Eat Zogaj, a tranquil fishing village that has apparently changed although it’s mostly scrubland and olive orchards ending in large rocks along the shore, there are a few small bays for swimming – the lake water is a very pleasant 27°C in summer. Six kilometres further down the road you arrive at tiny Zogaj, a tranquil fishing village that has apparently changed little over the past centuries. With about 40 inhabitants (in 60 families and 16 tribes) living off fishing, raising livestock and olive oil production, the village is completely Muslim, and is untouched by modern constructions except for the new harbour building which allows the fishermen to repair their nets in the shade. In the early morning and late afternoon you can see the small boats coming in to land with their catch. The stone houses are up to three stories high, some of them traditional kulla (tower) type houses, which were built for defence. Each has a deep well with a supply of cold fresh water. There are some simple guesthouses here, though none have names or are signposted; simply ask around for dhoma (rooms). The asphalt stops at the village mosque; a track continues on to the Montenegrin border, but unfortunately there’s no crossing here. In the distance you can spot some of the islands in the Montenegrin part of the lake; to get there, you’ll have to backtrack via Muriqan.

Biking Lake Shkodra

Cyclists with their own bikes can make a 177km grand tour of the lake. A reasonably detailed map was made in 2005, describing the route from Podgorica via Rijeka Crnojevica, Virpazar, Muriqan, Shkodra, Kopliku and Tuzi, and the sights along it (ask at www.eulimnos.org or the GTZ office in Shkodra for a copy). The route is mostly flat, with only the part on the western bank hilly.
A short drive or furgon minibus ride west of town is Shkodra’s playground, the beach at Velipoja. Nearby, the Buna Delta nature reservation is great for relaxed walks in the forest and bird-spotting.

**Velipoja beach**

On summer weekends it seems the whole city smacks on sunscreen and flops on the wide sandy beach at Velipoja, 34km west of Shkodra. Just 15 years ago, this was a very simple fishing village with a handful of houses, connected to Shkodra by an awful road. Now, you’re in for a surprise, as hundreds of mostly illegal constructions have popped out of the ground, with some hotel balconies just a metre or two from the next hotel wall. The road is now good, making a left turn at the entrance of the village and following the coast south. Furgons zip up and down to Shkodra all day for about 100 lek.

The beach and its facilities, frankly, are a mess. There’s little central planning, no paved roads apart from the main road, hazardous parking, ad hoc kiosks everywhere, no effective trash collection; foreign donors work with local business owners to tackle the rubbish problem. Unless you don’t mind a bit of anarchy, you’re advised to stay away from the central beach area, but head a few more kilometres down to the road to find pleasant deserted stretches of beach backed by forests.

The hotels and apartments in Velipoja are chock-full of Albanian, Macedonian and Kosovar tourists in summer, who usually block-book rooms for weeks on end, and there’s little chance of finding a room for just a few nights in high season. One of the better options is the Center-Park hotel, which has basic four-bed rooms with balconies overlooking the pines in the garden (tel. 069 251 72 62, 2600 lek per night). The hotel also serves pizza.

**The Buna Delta**

Nature lovers or those just looking for a pleasant walk in some cool forests can head straight from the beach into the Buna Delta reservation, between Velipoja and the Buna River which forms the Montenegrin border here. The Buna is a short 4.4km river that originates from Lake Shkodra and meanders its way to the Adriatic Sea. Near the sea, the river splits into a few arms, forming a marshy low-lying delta area, with a few fishing villages and one large island on the Montenegrin side (Ada Bojana). On the Albanian side, a few old river arms have turned into marshy lakes full of wildlife, surrounded by forests of pine and deciduous trees. The delta is populated by a rich variety of animals, including loggerhead turtles, wild boar, foxes, jackals, spoonbills, pygmy cormorants, stone curlews andlevant sparrowhawks. Arriving early in the morning gives you the most chance of spotting wildlife and the chance to explore the whole area.

To get here, turn right or have the furgon drop you off at the large sign for Hotel Belavista, near the local police station and on your right when near Velipoja. The wooden building down the small road here is opposite the entrance gate to the nature reservation; in summer you pay 50 lek admission per person, and 150 lek for cars. Mind that after wet weather the rutted paths are not suitable for normal cars, and walking (or cycling if you have a bike) is the best option. If the gate and wooden house are unattended, jump over it, or simply walk further down the road to the beach and enter the reservation from there. It’s easy to get around the park as there are only two paths with marshes making shortcuts tricky. There are no facilities, so bring food, water and mosquito repellent.

From the gate, keep heading straight ahead through dry pine forests to finally reach a bird-watching tower overlooking the calm river, with the Ada island across the water. If you follow the road upriver, you’ll come to a small fishing village. Halfway between the gate and the river a turning to the left eventually leads past a large lake with another high observation tower for birdwatching. The track continues through fields to the beach near the mouth of the Buna. The beach here is unfortunately strewn with plastic rubbish that floated down the river or was chucked from ships out at sea. In the 1970s and 80s, locals would come to the beach to see what had washed up from Italy, and plastic bags and bottles were valued and used at home. Nowadays even for the Albanians it’s trash, and if you sit at the shore looking out at sea you won’t notice it too much.

Near where the road emerges there’s another tower for birdwatching. From here you can walk across a sandbar past a lagoon with twittering birds to the tiny former Franc Jozef island (now a forested peninsula), named so because of a Habsburg naval base set up here in 1892.

**Bojana-Buna Landscape Park**

The wetlands along the river Buna (called the Bojana in Montenegro) from its source at Lake Shkodra to the delta, 44km downriver near Velipoja, are a potential attraction to the region that is recognised by local authorities. A programme for sustainable development and employment has been started, involving GTZ, Euronatur and the Ministry of Environment, aiming eventually to create a new landscape park covering all the wetlands along both the Albanian and Montenegrin sides of the Buna, and requiring international cooperation between Shkodra and Ulcinj local governments. For more information, contact Drita Dhoran in Shkodra (tel. 069 223 67 75, dridhora@yahoo.com) or Darko Saveljich in Podgorica (tel. +381 672 45 006, dasav@cg.yu).
Fasten your seatbelt - it’s going to be a bumpy but fun ride. See p.30 for more on the passenger boat service between Shkodra and Vipazar in Montenegro.

Trains
Albanian Railways (Hekurudha Shqiptare, depicting a TGV high speed train on their website www.hsh.com.al) runs two wheezing and clanking trains per day from Shkodra to Tirana and back. It isn’t particularly fast, comfortable or clean but it’s certainly a fun and cheap way to travel. If you’re in a hurry, take the bus. Shkodra’s large train station on Rruga Revolucioni Antikomunist Hungarezë 1956 (Rr. Statcionit te Trenit) on the eastern fringe of town is a cleaner and pleasant place to wait; ticket counters only open before departures and there’s no left luggage office. The railway to Podgorica is currently only used for freight trains, but may see a weekly passenger service starting in July 2006.

Shkodra cycles
One of the most charming aspects of Shkodra life is the widespread use of bicycles. All kinds of people pedal around here - from children going to school, pensioners visiting their families and tourists to foreigners. The one thing lacking is a municipal policy of promoting cycling; the city could do with good bike lanes.

Shkodra train schedule

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<tr>
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<td>11:54</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
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<td>13:18</td>
<td>17:05</td>
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Buses
If you’re not driving, buses are the most convenient way of getting around Albania. Most intercity travel in Albania takes place with privately run buses, and with minibuses called furgons. After a few wild years, market forces have provided travelers with more quality and regular services. In Shkodra there are regular buses to Tirana run by Rozafa Oraktaj, departing at 06:00, 07:00, 08:00, 09:00, 10:00 and 11:00 from outside the round Rruga Shkodara building on Sheshi 5 Heronjine square, near the Rozafa hotel, and dropping passengers off at Tirana’s train station. The departure times from Tirana to Shkodra are 11:30, 12:00, 13:00, 14:00, 15:00, and 16:00. The trip takes 2 hours 15 minutes, perhaps 15 minutes longer if the traffic is bad, and costs 200 lek. These buses are clean with comfortable seats and often air conditioning too. They also run one daily bus to Durrës, departing Shkodra at 07:15, and making the return trip at 13:15; tickets are 300 lek and the trip takes about 3 hours. Furgons are a different story - these aren’t allowed into the city centre and furgons to Tirana depart from the main road, between Rozafa Castle and the city. There are no set departure times – drivers wait for the minibus to fill up and leave. The ride to Tirana also costs 200 lek, you drop off at the station, and is perhaps 10 to 20 minutes quicker than the bus, but be warned that drivers often drive excessively fast and perform interesting overtaking manoeuvres. Furgons to the towns northeast and east of Shkodra depart from the crossing of Rruga Marin Barleti and Rruga Skenderbeg - they are much less frequent, and it’s a good idea to arrive around 06:00 or 07:00 to catch the one you need. Buses to Ulqin and Podgorica in Montenegro are run by two companies. The Samoil travel agency has comely buses driving from outside the Rozafa hotel to the Rozafa Bar in central Ulqin at 09:00 and 15:00 daily, with return trips at 06:00 and 13:00, taking about 1.5 hours. Tickets are 500 lek and can be booked in advance. The morning service allows a connection with the bus to Kotor. Another minibus run by Hoxha does the same trip every day for similar prices, leaving Shkodra at 09:00 and 17:30, and returning from Ulqin at 06:00 and 14:30. On demand, Samoil runs a bus to Podgorica for €9/1100 lek per person in a group or €33/4000 lek for individuals, and €40/4920 lek to/from Podgorica airport.

Balkania Lines runs a daily international bus to Greece from Shkodra at 01:30 to Athens (€25, arrival at 18:00) via Ioannina (€20) and Patra (€23), with stops in Tirana (stopping 4am down the Tirana-Durrës highway at 02:45), Tepeleni and Gjirkaster. The fare from Tirana or Gjirkaster to Athens is €20. Their Tirana office is on Bulevardi Zogu i Zi, near Zerit te Popullit. Open 08:00 – 12:00, 16:00 – 19:00.

Rozafa Oraktaj C-1, Rr. Bujar Bishanaku, tel. 069 252 92 22/069 212 01 61.
Regular daily buses between Shkodra and Tirana, once daily to and from Durres.

Travel terms

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Shkodra In Your Pocket

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<td>12:40</td>
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<td>TIRANA</td>
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<td>16:35</td>
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Durrës Ferry Schedule

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<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12:20</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>14:20</td>
<td>18:10</td>
<td>TIRANE</td>
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Ferries ‘Grecia’ and ‘Venezia’ run by Adria; contact any travel agent for booking information.
* From Durrës on Tue, Wed, Sun. From Trieste on Tue, Thu, Sat. ** From Durrës on Fri, Sun. From Ancona on Mon. *** On Sat.

Public transport
Shkodra doesn’t have much in the way of public transport; just one busline running from Buleartë (the bridge across the Drin on the Tirana road) via the city centre to the Fermentin industrial area in the north of town. Buses go every 15 minutes between 06:05 and 14:00 and then every 20 minutes until 20:00. Tickets are 20 lek, cheaper than walking, and can be bought on board. Useful for travelling from the city centre to the Tirana furgon stand or to the foot of the citadel.

Taxis
Shkodra’s taxis can be found lurking around Sheshi 5 Heronjine square, near the Rozafa hotel, and at the furgon bus stop south of the centre. Forget about taxi metres and standard rates; as a foreigner you’re fair game and should count on paying 100-200 lek for a drive across town; always agree on a price beforehand. A taxi ride to the castle and back (with an hours wait) around 500 lek, a ride to Shkodra around 600 lek. A taxi to Podgorica in Montenegro will cost around €40; if you’re just going to the border at Hani i Hotit, 2000 lek (€16).

Car rental
Although some local travel agents may be able to rustle up a car, Albania’s main car rental agencies are all in Tirana’s city centre or airport. They’ll happily drive a car up to Shkodra for you if you should need one. Renting a car costs from around €45 per day for the cheapest model. Make sure you have the helmetine number, a mobile phone, a good map and nerves of steel. Tirana’s car rental companies are:

**Alb Rr. Sami Frasheri, Pallatet Agimi, tel. (04) 28 81 66/068 22 47 72. Open 08:30 - 18:00.**

**Avis Blv. Dëshmoret e Kombit, Rogner Hotel, tel. (04) 23 50 11, fax 23 50 24, reservations@avisalbania.com, www.avisalbania.com. Avis operates a fleet of brand-new Opel vehicles, from the Corsa to the 4x4 Opel Frontera. Open 08:30 - 18:30, Sun 08:30 - 14:00. Also at Hotel Sheraton (tel. (04) 26 63 89/068 20 55 806, open 08:30 - 18:30, Sun 08:30 - 14:00) and the airport (tel. 068 20 55 807).**

**Europcar Rr. e Durrësit 61, tel. (04) 22 78 88/068 20 93 922, fax 24 61 92, europcar@abissnet.com, www.europcar.com. Open 08:00 - 18:00, Closed Sun.**

**Hertz Sheshi Skenderbej, International Hotel, tel. (04) 25 50 28/068 20 58 775, hertz@albaniaonline.net, www.hertz.com. Open 08:00 - 16:00, Sat 08:00 - 16:00. Closed Sun, Also Rr. Ded Gjo Luli 1, and at the airport (tel. 068 20 58 775, open 08:00 - 19:00, Sat, Sun 08:00 - 16:00).**
From Tirana To Tirana

Other inquiries contact the airlines. Here are the details of the Tirana offices:

**ATHENS (LV)**
- 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 07:45 09:45
- 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 13:45 15:20

Ada Air

Open Monday - Saturday, 08:00 - 19:00, Sun: 08:30 - 18:00.

**BELGRADE (JU)**
- 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 10:00 12:45

Albanian Airlines
Rr. Mine Peza 2, tel. (04)23 51 62, fax 23 51 38, www.albanianairlines.com.al. Albanian national airline. Open 08:00 - 17:00, Sun 09:00 - 16:00.

**BRESCIA (4H)**
- 2 3 4 5 6 7 08:45 10:45

Alitalia

Open 08:30 - 17:00, Sat 08:30 - 13:00. Closed Sun.

**BUDAPEST (MA)**
- 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 05:10 06:30

Austrian Airlines

Open 09:00 - 16:30. Closed Sat, Sun.

**COLogne (4U)**
- 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 10:00 12:40

**FLORENCE (6P)**
- 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 09:00 11:30

**FRANKFURT (LF)**
- 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 08:40 10:40

**ISTANBUL (TK)**
- 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 18:30 21:10

**ISTANBUL (LV)**
- 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 18:45 21:20

**JUDEA (66)**
- 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 10:00 14:00

**LONDON (BA)**
- 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 10:00 14:00

**MILAN (AZ)**
- 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 11:00 13:00

**MONACO (CI)**
- 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 10:00 12:00

**NOWHERE (4H)**
- 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 10:00 12:00

**OSLO (OS)**
- 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 10:50 12:40

**PRISTINA (LV)**
- 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 07:45 09:45

**RIMINI (4H)**
- 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 09:00 10:30

**SOFIA (DU)**
- 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 07:45 09:45

**VERONA (4H)**
- 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 16:40 18:35

**VIENNA (OS)**
- 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 10:00 12:00

**ZURICH (LV)**
- 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 08:00 10:00

**ZURICH (4H)**
- 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 16:30 18:30

Airline codes: 4H - Albatros Airways; 6P - Club Air; AZ - Alitalia; BA - British Airways; DU - Hemus Air; EB - Alpi Eagles; JP - Adria Airways; JU - Jat; LBY - Belavia; LV - Albanian Airlines; MA - Malev; OA - Olympic Airways; OS - Austrian Airlines; SY - Sun Express; TY - Adria Airways; ZZ - Shkodra Airways

Shkodra
In Your Pocket

**Shkodra Train Station**

**Getting Around**

**Travel Agents**

All travel agents can sell plane tickets (from both Tirana and Podgorica airports) and ferry tickets for ships departing from Durres.

**Albanian Travel E-3**, Rr. Marin Barleti, tel./fax 517 04.

Open 09:00 - 14:00, 17:00 - 20:00.

**Balkan Peace Park**

Rr. Marin Barleti, tel. 517 04.


**Eni Travel**

E-1, Rr. Djhetore, tel. 441 41/686 213 60 29.

**Ergys Travel**

D-2, Sheshi 5 Heronjte (Hotel Rozafa), tel. 427 67/098 210 18 09.

**Europe Travel & Tours**

E-1, Rr. Dzhetore, tel. 439 97/068 213 17 65.

**Koplika Travel**

C-1, Rr. Bujar Bashkunan, Tregu Gjolve-gju, tel./fax 503 70, tel. 068 245 72 90, koplikatravel@yahoo.it.

**Preval D-3**, Rr. Don Bosko, tel. 480 64. Also near the exchange market, tel. 459 27 and 068 216 29 86.

**Samsel D-2**, Rr. Vasil Shanto, Hotel Rozafa, tel. 471 57/068 205 93 21, samsel_travel@yahoo.it. Runs the minibus services to Montenegro: two daily buses to Ulqine/Jajce and a direct service to Podgorica on demand. A second outlet is on Rr. Don Bosko, tel. 501 41.

Open 07:30-15:00, 17:00-2000.

**Shkodra Travel C-2**, Rr. Vasil Shanto, tel. 428 97/069 209 12 88.

**Vizion Travel**

E-1, Rr. Dzhetore, tel. 454 54. 2006 - 2007
Albanian is an Indo-European language with a 36-letter alphabet; like the country itself it is one of a kind. There are distant links with Romanian, and many words on loan from Turkish, Greek and Slavic.

An increasing number of Albanians speaks a foreign language: Italian is extremely widespread (thanks to satellite dishes and emigration), English is catching on fast, and many Albanians in the south understand Greek.

Postal & Express Mail rates

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<td>Americas</td>
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Rates for sending an express mail package with documents from Tirana, weighing a maximum of 500g:

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Albanian telephone codes

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International country codes

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Practicalities

--- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | ---
I have... | Kam... | I am... | Jam... | What’s your name? | Si quheni? | Please | Ju lutem | How much does this cost? | Sa kushton?
I don’t speak Albanian | Nuk flas shqip | A ticket, please | Një biletë, ju lutem | How much does this cost? | Sa kushton? |
Art Galleries
AG Gallery E-1, Rr. 13 Djeqtori, tel. 068 231 00 84.
Art Gallery Rozafa C-3, Rr. Daut Borici 1115, tel. 910 49/069 268 84 73, rozafa_gallery@yahoo.com. Open 08:00 - 14:00, 17:00 - 21:00.
Art Studio E-1, Rr. 13 Djeqtori, tel. 069 246 20 97. A small gallery run by Artin Muqaj, selling traditional-style paintings and also organising painting courses, should you want to stick around for a while. Open 09:00 - 15:00, 17:00 - 21:00.
Galleria 3+1 E-2, Rr. Branko Kadila, tel. 068 250 59 89. Ahmet Maleva’s art gallery. Open 08:00 - 12:00, 16:00 - 20:00.
Iris C-4, Rr. Shyrgi Bushati 3, tel. 068 203 38 99. Open 08:00 - 12:00, 16:00 - 20:00.
Studio Art Impression Rr. Branko Kadila, tel. 069 236 24 08. Open 08:00 - 13:00, 17:00 - 21:00.

Flowers
Flower House C-3, Rr. Jorgji Karamitri, tel. 069 221 28 99. Open 08:00 - 20:00.
Flower shop D-2, Rr. 13 Djeqtori, tel. 068 225 50 89. Open 08:00 - 20:00.

Food
Euro Supermarket C-2, Rr. Oso Kuka, tel. 069 221 82 73. One of the few supermarkets in the centre, behind the Radio Shkodra building. Open 08:00 - 21:00.
Pasticarie C-2, Rr. Oso Kuka. Delicious dried fruit, nuts, sweets and various products for diabetes patients and weight watchers.
Prohime te Kelmendit E/F-2, Rr. Branko Kadila, tel. 069 234 39 08. The products from Kelmend shop sells exactly that – natural home-made products from the Kelmend region, which is in the northernmost, wildest tip of Albania around Vushtrri and Selce. Get thick sugary honey (majite), pomegranate syrup (shegu sirup), wine (vere), fig jam (recel fikuj) and plum jam (recel kumbulite) and bottles of potent raki here. Not exactly cheap, but top quality, and they make excellent presents. If the shop is closed when it shouldn’t be, look for the owner in the Hapa te Lehte café across the street. Open 07:30-13:00, 16:00-19:00.

Photography
Foto Jakova D-2, Rr. 13 Djeqtori, tel. 482 27/068 204 43 06. Open 07:00 - 21:00, Closed Sun.
Foto Nenshati E-1, tel. 481 62. Still owned by the family who ran the famous Marubi studio. Open 07:30 - 20:00, Closed Sun.
Studio Hallumi D-2, Rr. 13 Djeqtori, tel. 482 74. Open 07:00 - 21:00, Closed Sun.

Souvenirs
Dritan Ramadani Rr. Bujar Bishanaku, Tregu Gjylbegu, tel. 472 91. Local handicrafts. Open 09:00 - 14:00, 17:00 - 20:00.
Shkodra Souvenir E-1, Rr. 13 Djeqtori, tel. 069 263 00 39. Souvenir shop at the top end of the street. Open 08:00 - 14:00, 16:00 - 21:00.
Souvenir Komiß Rr. Daniel Matila, tel. 069 210 58 33. Adnan Komiss’s art and souvenir shop. Open 08:00 - 14:00, 17:00 - 21:00.
Souvenir Xama D-2, Rr. Marin Barleti, tel. 068 294 15 14. A tiny souvenir shop near the post office selling national costumes, bronze plates, carved eagles and faded postcards. Open 08:00-13:30, 17:00-20:30.
Surnevire C-1, Rr. Oso Kuka. Small souvenir shop next to the historical museum.

Flowers
Second hand shoes

Health
Dentists
Ask for the Klinci Dentare, and smile. See also the Polyclinic for dentists.
Dr. Besnik Rusi Rr. Bashkimi (Mahalla e Çakejve), tel. 423 68.
Dr. Dedin Kola E-3, Rr. Marin Barleti, tel. 068 220 50 51.
Dr. Sami Dibra C-3, Rr. Jorgji Karamitri, tel. 488 88. Open 08:00 - 14:00, 16:00 - 21:00. Closed Sun.
Dr. Shyqi Bashdari E-3, Rr. Marin Barleti, tel. 069 213 23 13.

Star Dents C-2, Rr. 16 Nentori, tel. 068 225 00 00/069 228 78 78. Dr. Agetina and Dr. A. Kastrati.

Hospitals & Clinics
Brijo Clinic Rr. Serreq, tel. 069 288 74 96.
Policlinic (Poliklinika) C-2, Rr. 16 Nentori, tel. 433 47. Dentistry department: tel. 422 31.
Shkodra Hospital J/K-2, Rr. Marsel Kashen, tel. 443 51/427 69.

Opticians
Arjan Begu C-1, Rr. Bujar Bishanaku, Tregu Gjylbegu, tel. 417 57.

Pharmacies
Albarona E-3, Rr. Marin Barleti, tel. 424 85.
Causalli E-3, Rr. Marin Barleti, tel. 069 220 13 54.
Geci D-2, Rr. Marin Barleti, tel. 244 86 60. New, modern pharmacy next to the Millennium cinema. Open 08:00 - 15:00, 17:00 - 20:00. Closed Sun.
Luleta D-2, Rr. 16 Nentori, tel. 068 216 66 79.

Business
Banks
Banca Italo-Albanese D-2, Rr. 13 Djeqtori. The funky building next to the Colosseo hotel with a modern blue glass cube stuck on top of an old building. ATM for local cards only. Open 08:00 - 14:00, 17:00 - 20:00. Closed Sun.
Raffeisen Bank D-2, Sheshi 5 Heronjte e Vigut, tel. 472 91. The Austrian bank has two offices in town (the other on Rr. Vasil Shanto), both with ATMs that accept Maestro and Visa compatible foreign bank cards.

Shkodra Souvenir E-1, Rr. 13 Dhjetori, tel. 069 220 50 89. Open 08:00 - 20:00.

Currency exchange
Apart from using the handful of ProCredit and Raffeisen Bank ATMs dotted around the city centre to get your leks, you can change cash money (euros, dollars and pounds all accepted) at the banks themselves, at private exchange offices or on the street. All exchange offices are concentrated on Rr. M. Qolleshia (D-1/2) near the Al-Zamir mosque, with plenty of freelance changers outside on the street offering similar rates. Changing with these men is perfectly legal, but make sure you know the right exchange rate and count the money carefully nevertheless.

Insurances
Albsig Insurance Society C-2, Rr. Oso Kuka 1, tel./fax 519 43, tel. 069 206 78 18, filipguraziu@hotmail.com, www.albsig.com.al.

Money transfer
The following Western Union agents can transfer money in a flash, at a fee.
Bashkim Haxhia C-2, Rr. 16 Nentori, tel. 424 75.
Inform Shkodra B-3, Rr. Vasil Shanto, tel. 439 32.
Western Union E-1, Rr. 13 Dhjetori, tel. 450 30.

Officials
Adnan Komi’s art and souvenir shop.
Still owned by the family who ran the famous Marubi studio. Open 07:30 - 20:00.

Associations
Albanian Speloeological Association Rr. D. Boriçi, tel. 470 63. Contact: Isa Alibali.
Albanian–Turkish Cultural Association Rr. Llujaj 42, tel. 437 37. Contact: Ferit Unver.
Amateurs of Shkodra Songs C-1, Rr. Oso Kuka 1, tel. 472 91. Local handicrafts. Open 09:00 - 14:00, 17:00 - 20:00.

Shkodra In Your Pocket

2006 - 2007
DIRECTORY

Shkodra consulates
A few countries have consulates in Shkodra - for all other diplomatic shenanigans you'll have to call your man in Tirana.

**Austria**
Vaso Kadia 230, tel./fax 470 14, honorarkonsulat@yahoo.it, gergj.leqeqza@hotmail.com. The Austrian Honorary Consul is Mr. Gergj Leqeqza. **Open 09:00 - 12:00, Wed also 16:00 - 18:00.** Closed Sat, Sun.

**Denmark**
77 35, 26270030, ambt@dadnet.com.al. **Open 09:00 - 13:00, 14:00 - 17:00.** Closed Sat, Sun.

**Egypt**
74 22, tiaamb@tiaamb.um.dk. **Open 09:00 - 13:00.** Closed Mon, Sat, Sun.

**France**
92 20, 0800 10 14, amboctur@dadnet.com.al. **Open 09:00 - 13:00, 14:00 - 17:00.** Closed Sat, Sun.

**Germany**
78 27, 0434 45 05, fax 23 34 97, grembtir@albnet.net, www.tirana.diplo.de. **Open 08:30 - 12:00.** Closed Fri.

**Greece**
73 42, 90 43, grembtir@albnet.net. **Open 08:30 - 16:00.** Closed Sat, Sun.

**Holland**
76 28, 26270030, ambt@dadnet.com.al. **Open 09:00 - 12:00.** Closed Sat, Sun.

**Italy**
22 67, 26270030, ambt@dadnet.com.al. **Open 09:00 - 12:00.** Closed Sat, Sun.

**Norway**
79 30, 26270030, ambt@dadnet.com.al. **Open 09:00 - 12:00.** Closed Sat, Sun.

**Poland**
90 36, 26270030, ambt@dadnet.com.al. **Open 09:00 - 12:00.** Closed Sat, Sun.

**Romania**
91 33, 26270030, ambt@dadnet.com.al. **Open 09:00 - 12:00.** Closed Sat, Sun.

**Russia**
92 20, 0800 10 14, ambt@dadnet.com.al. **Open 09:00 - 13:00, 14:00 - 17:00.** Closed Sat, Sun.

**Sweden**
78 27, 0434 45 05, fax 23 34 97, grembtir@albnet.net, www.tirana.diplo.de. **Open 08:30 - 12:00.** Closed Sat, Sun.

**Turkey**
79 30, 26270030, ambt@dadnet.com.al. **Open 09:00 - 12:00.** Closed Sat, Sun.

**Uruguay**
77 35, 26270030, ambt@dadnet.com.al. **Open 09:00 - 12:00.** Closed Sat, Sun.

**United Kingdom**
28 34, 0761 12 34 56, amboctur@dadnet.com.al. **Open 09:00 - 13:00, 14:00 - 17:00.** Closed Sat, Sun.

**United States**
29 34, 0761 12 34 56, amboctur@dadnet.com.al. **Open 09:00 - 13:00, 14:00 - 17:00.** Closed Sat, Sun.

**Global Environment Facility (GEF)**

**European Children’s Trust (ECT)**
E-2, Rr. Ndre Mjeda, Tirana, tel. (04)27 02 12, fax 23 03 64, ects_shkodra@vodafone.net, www.ects.org. Contact: Kostadin Kostadinov.

**Hapa te Lehte Women’s Center**
F-2, Rr. Branko Kadia 57, tel. 068 203 63 19, cospescu@icc-al.org, www.cospe.it.

**Marco Polo Institute**

**GTZ**

**SCD/InterCooperation**
R. Bashkimi 83, tel. 41 75/069 217 26 58, valbonakarakaci@yahoo.co.uk. Program for local development and decentralization in the Shkodra region. Contact: Valbona Karakaçi or Pascal Arnold (parnold@intercooperation.ch).

**The Door**
Rr. Vasil Shanto, tel. 437 29, thedoor@icc-al.org.

**Peace and Justice Center**
Rr. Hysej 7/1, tel. 430 01, nkoka@lgda-al.org.

**Urban Institute (LGDA – USAID)**

**OSCE**
Rr. Bashkimi 83, tel. 41 75/069 217 26 58, valbonakarakaci@yahoo.co.uk. Contact: Kastriot Faci.

**UDNP**
D-2, Rr. 13 Dhjetori, tel. 068 203 63 82, valshoder@icc-al.org. Projects to sustain the reform of the security forces. Contact: Simon Prendi.
Regional Employment Office A-4, Rr. Zogu i I, near Ndër Mjeda school, tel. 42313.
Shkodra Municipality C/D-3, Rr. 13 Dhjetori 1, tel./fax 437 20, foreignrelat@alnet.net, www.shkodra.gov.al. Shkodra’s mayor is Mr. Arjan Haxhi.
Shkodra Region C/D-3, Rr. 13 Dhjetori, tel./fax 427 41, qarkushkoder@yahoo.com.
Shkodra Region Prefecture C/D-3, Rr. 13 Dhjetori, tel./fax 427 05.

Religious institutions
Muslim community office, tel. 420 81.
Shkodra Archbishopric, tel. 428 01.

Utilities
Agjensia e Ujit te Bazenit Drin-Bune Instituti i Mësimit dhe Orizit. Water supply.
Alb Telecom D-2, Rr. Marin Barleti, tel. 437 71. Fixed phones.
KESH Rr. Ruzhdi Topani, tel. 472 00. Electricity and black-outs.

Tirana Ministries
Minister of State Blv. Dëshmorët e Kombit, tel. (04)23 08 46.
Ministry of Defence Blv. Dëshmorët e Kombit, tel. (04)22 21 03/22 68 65, fax (04)22 84 81.
Ministry of Economy and Privatization Blv. Zhan D’Ark, tel. (04)22 84 42, fax (04)22 26 55.
Ministry of Education and Science Rr. e Durrësit 23, tel. (04)22 63 07, fax (04)23 20 02.
Ministry of Environment Rr. Durrësit, tel. (04)27 06 07, fax (04)27 06 27.
Ministry of Finance Blv. Dëshmorët e Kombit, tel. (04)22 84 94/22 84 37, fax (04)22 84 05, secretary.minister@minfin.gov.al.
Ministry of Foreign Affairs Blv. Zhan D’Ark 6, tel. 36 21 70/36 20 55, fax (04)23 58 99, davoy@abissnet.net.
Ministry of Health Blv. Bajram Curri, across from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, tel. 36 29 37, fax 36 25 54.
Ministry of Industry and Energy Blv. Dëshmorët e Kombit, tel. (04)22 76 17, fax (04)23 40 52.
Ministry of Justice Blv. Zogu i, tel. (04)23 27 04, fax (04)22 31 27.
Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs Rr. Kavajës, tel. (04)22 34 29, cecom@interalb.net.
Ministry of Public Order Blv. Dëshmorët e Kombit, tel. (04)22 68 01, fax 36 36 07.
Ministry of Transport and Public Works Rr. A. Topani, tel. (04)22 57 42, multir@albmaniaonline.net.
Prime Minister’s Office Blv. Dëshmorët e Kombit, tel. (04)25 65 61, ext. 440/25 04 74, fax (04)23 48 18.

Street register
This street register lists all the streets (Rruga, or Rr.) and squares (Sheshi) in central Shkodra. During the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, the locals went around town removing all the street names, causing great confusion among the Russians who got completely lost in the maze of nameless streets. Good news for revolutionaries (and bad news for foreigners): Shkodra hardly has any signs, let alone generally acknowledged street names to begin with. Some streets are known under several names, and we’ve tried to keep the confusion to a minimum by listing some of the old names here too. Don’t expect any of the locals to recognise any of these street names or even where they are on the map – Albanian geography works in a completely different way, and you’ll probably be directed to “opposite Gazmendi’s café in the street where the police station used to be.”

The green line on the map is the city bus route; the red line is the bus route to Shiroka and Zogaj.

11 Janari D-2/3 M. Luli A-2, B-1
City bus route
Shiroke/Zogaj bus route
Photo removed to make this download version of Shkodra In Your Pocket lighter; refer to a print version, available locally, for all photos.
Regarding the political status of Kosovo this is an interesting development.

Employment per sector, 2004

Foreign direct investments

Data from INSTAT, Albania’s statistical office, show that Greece and Italy are by far the most important investors in Albania. According to World Bank figures, Italian companies tend to invest in the centre of the country and near the coast line, in the near proximity of Italy. These companies are mainly small and medium-sized enterprises; textile and footwear industries and the agro-food industry. The main advantage for these companies is the wage level in Albania, which is about one tenth of that in Italy. Greek investments tend to concentrate in the south, around the cities of Saranda, Gjirokaster and Vlore. These investments are almost all in the trad-

Infrastructure

companies are active in attracting more foreign investors to Albania, and investment subsidies are available at a range of EU embassies. The larger companies have united themselves in associations such as the American Chamber of Commerce.

One thing is clear at the moment: a lot of work needs to be done. The positive point is that the present Albanian government named the upgrade of infrastructure as one of its priorities, and the evidence along the roads seems to prove that they mean it.

Current investment programmes in infra-

structure are aimed to improve networks. The north-south and an east-west road corridors are

the European Union, and by loans of the World Bank.

Whether one agrees with this statement or this will mean that products and services have

in an article in Foreign Affairs, Prime Min-

ister Berisha states that the present government is making work of energy, and there is certainly hope. Although...

so the future looks bright – although for the remain problematic. On the longer term, the Albanian government’s policy is directed to the energy resources in neighbouring Kosovo. Infra-

structure Minister Basha: “Kosovo is regarded as an important regional energy hub, which

is in a very bad state and makes a hefty detour.

Whether one agrees with this statement or this will mean that products and services have

In periods of drought, this means there are power cuts during daytime. The bad state of the network of transmission lines in Albania is the second prob-

Although considerable progress has been made in most sectors of the economy, poverty is widespread in the country. The ... problems are most severe. High levels of unemployment are an important cause of the poverty situation in these regions.

Although there is an oil field in the southern part of Albania, no production has yet started. The company, KESH, is facing difficulties supplying the country with the electricity needed. Albania is totally dependent on hydro-power for generating electricity. In periods of drought, this means there are power cuts during daytime. The bad state of the network of transmission lines in Albania is the second prob-

The Albania Business Guide is the first independent investors’ handbook to this promising country.

Including articles written by leading experts and interviews with key players in Albania’s burgeoning economy, the Albania Business Guide offers foreign potential investors insight into the workings of Albania, achievements reached, reforms in progress, promises made, and exposes the investment opportunities that are available in a variety of economic sectors.

The Albania Business Guide is published by the team that brought you Tirana In Your Pocket, in cooperation with Tirana’s Corporate Training and Enterprise Management Institute, Utrecht University in the Netherlands, Tirana Municipality’s Unit for Economic Development and GTZ.

The Albania Business Guide is for sale in Tirana’s leading hotels and bookshops. Visit www.SEEbusinessguides.com or contact albania@SEEbusinessguides.com for more information.