

HEARTCYCLE BICYCLE TOURING CLUB SOUTHERN ALBANIA 2022

- Dates:** Arrival Sept 26, 2022. Tour Tirana Sept 27. Riding Sept 28 – Oct 6. Transfer & departure October 7, 2022.
- Leader:** Lisa Evans (Coordinator). The tour company will provide an experienced riding guide and vehicle driver/support person.
- Rating:** Advanced (Intermediate with optional e-bike) 300 miles with ~20,000 feet climbing over 8 days of riding. 1 rest day.
- Riders:** 20 (includes HeartCycle Coordinator)
- Price:** \$1600 (Double Occupancy). Single supplement is additional \$200, although on 2-3 nights, you will need to double up. Deposit \$500 at registration. Balance due 6/26/2022. No HC souvenir included.
- Cancellation:** [Standard cancellation policy](#). *Trip insurance is advised.*

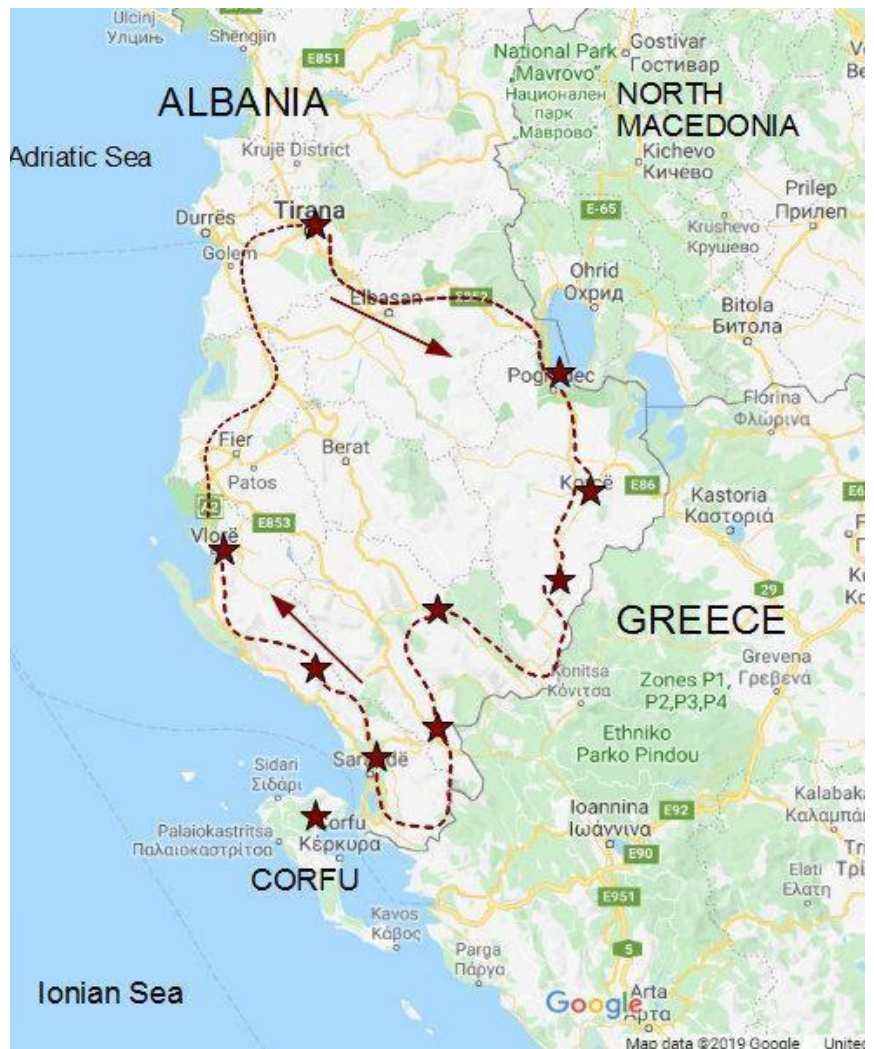


OVERVIEW

In 2019, Tina Vessels and a few HeartCycle friends bike toured in Albania. So unique, historic, and interesting, Tina volunteered to coordinate a HeartCycle trip there in 2020 (and then 2021). Working with Cycle Albania, the local tour operator, they enhanced the tour based on her experience and added more off-bike touring. Lisa has taken over the coordinator role, because Tina is not able to go in 2022.

Emerging in the early 1990s from nearly 50 years of Communist rule, this wild and picturesque land of scenic beauty still feels suspended in time. Although gaining popularity with European travelers, unlike its neighbors—Croatia to the north and Greece to the south—Albania remains largely untouched by mass tourism and Americans. Albania's endless coastline offers long stretches of white sand beaches, clear spring waters, and charming Mediterranean villages.

This 11-day/11-night tour will take us through unspoiled forests, UNESCO World Heritage sites, archeological sites, lakes, valleys, and high craggy mountains. In the historic towns, you will feel the traces of cultures long past. This tour is rated advanced due to several days of substantial climbing (Days 4, 9, and 10). Daily distance averages 37 miles on hybrid bikes (included and highly recommended) with front suspension, low gearing and 28mm tires. This tour is e-bike friendly (available at an extra cost of 170€,) which allows intermediate riders the opportunity to come along. SAG support is limited, but available, so please be prepared to ride the majority of the route. Overall, the



roads are paved but substantial sections have rough pavement. Services are limited along the way, and we will be dependent on the guides for support and communication. We will regroup at 2-3 stops per day, which gives us time for coffee, soft drinks, snacks, and walking around the small villages.

Albania is still a developing country that lacks our first-world infrastructure. You may encounter some occasional power outages, limited trash pickup, or lukewarm and unusual showers; however, this is the beauty of visiting now, before it becomes developed (and crowded). The internet is almost always available at hotels as Europeans and Canadians have already discovered Albania.

INCLUDED:

- 11 nights of lodging
- All meals (except: arrival night in Tirana, 9/26/2021; lunch on 9/27 and lunch/dinner on 10/3)
- 8 riding days + 1 day touring Tirana + 1 day to rest and tour Gjirokaster
- Local guides, at least one who speaks fluent English, a support vehicle for luggage and basic support, and the HeartCycle coordinator
- Hybrid bicycle (Giant Hybrid Roam with front suspension). E-bikes are available for an additional **170 euros**. Disposable type water bottle and panniers (to carry jackets, etc.)
- All museum and other entrance fees
- Snacks and one beverage on the road
- Tips for the local city tour guides are included
- Transportation at the end of the tour (10/7) back to the Tirana airport (about a 2.5-hour drive)
- Daily ride sheet. We expect to provide GPS files for Garmin (but they really are not needed).

NOT INCLUDED:

- Transportation from Tirana airport to our lodging at the start of the tour (9/26). Expect to pay around 20 Euros per taxi, which holds up to 3 people.
- E-bikes or Single Supplement (see above)
- Four meals as outlined in the section above
- Drinks with meals
- Bike helmet, shoes, and gear (Bring your pedals if you'd like.)
- Tips for our cycling tour guide and van driver/support person

HOTELS AND MEALS

We will stay in a variety of accommodations ranging from local hotels in prime locations to log cabins on a remote mountain trout farm. For approximately 2-3 nights, those with single supplements will need to share rooms. Albanian gastronomy is excellent, fresh, organic, and delicious. We will feast on gorgeous Mediterranean dishes in a variety of Albania's finest restaurants. Gluten-free and vegan friendly options are often available. Alcohol and soft drinks are extra (except where soft drinks are provided at sag stops). Happy hour is usually 5:00-5:30, and dinner at 6:30-7:00 p.m.

WEATHER

Albania is directly east of Italy and has a Mediterranean climate. Bring rain gear as showers are always possible.

TRAVEL LOGISTICS

Tirana International Airport (Mother Teresa Airport - TIA) is about 11 miles from Tirana city center.

If you would like to arrive early or stay late, accommodations can be arranged through Cycle Albania.

ITINERARY

Distances and climbing are approximate. Small changes in the itinerary may occur.

Day 0: Monday, September 26. Arrive in Tirana on your own; take a taxi to the lodging (Hotel Austria). Dinner is on your own, but we will try to coordinate going together. We will gather briefly at 8pm to go over our plan to tour Tirana the next day.



Tirana with Djati Mountains

Day 1: Tuesday, Sept 27.

Touring Tirana. We'll take a guided tour through the vibrant capital of Albania, where statues of the old communist leaders have been relegated to the back of the museum. We'll visit the National Historical Museum, the fruit and vegetable market and the nuclear bunker of Enver Hoxha. This bunker is now a unique Albanian history museum inside a preserved communist era nuclear pit bunker. Lunch is not included. The group dinner and orientation for our bicycle tour will be at 5:00 pm this evening. You will get panniers and a set of maps with details about each riding day.

Day 2: Wednesday, Sept 28. Tirana-Pogradec. 25 miles, 600 ft. climbing. We start the morning with a 2-hour transfer to the northern side of Lake Ohrid, one of the oldest lakes in the world. With its 212 known endemic species of flora and fauna, it is one of the largest biological reserves in Europe. We will unload and fit the bicycles and start cycling along the scenic shore of Lake Ohrid towards Pogradec. After reaching our hotel in the town of Tushemisht, just east of Pogradec, lunch will be at a waterfront restaurant in Drilon national park. After checking in at our hotel, we will continue cycling in the afternoon, crossing into Macedonia to visit the monastery of St Naum, a UNESCO World Heritage site.



Day 3: Thursday, Sept 29. Pogradec-Korçë. 32 miles, 1,400 ft. climbing.

We climb the high plateau bounded by mountains following a gorge that continues through colorful patchwork of individual farms. The day ends with a short walking tour of Korçë, the Paris of Albania.

Day 4: Friday, Sept 30. Korçë-Sotirë. 44 miles, 3,840 ft. climbing

We leave behind the agricultural plateau of Korçë, climbing steadily into the border mountains through a landscape of barren rock interspersed with wild flowers. Numerous cols and valleys lie ahead. We will climb the Grammoz Mountains over the Barmash Pass at 3,800 feet elevation. We will stop for lunch in the town of Ersekë, the highest city in Albania at about 3,450 feet. Our overnight is one of the wooded bungalows; relax by the fish ponds with a glass of special red wine made from locally grown grapes.

Day 5: Saturday, Oct 1. Sotirë-Bënjë. 41 miles, 2,200 ft. climbing.

We climb out from Sotirë to a high pine forest plateau surrounded by soaring peaks before reaching the source of the River Vjosa and descending through its spectacular gorge to Leskovik. The 10.5-mile-long descent to Çarshovë is both a pleasure and a thrill to cycle and is one of the most scenic rides of the tour (shown in first photo). We follow the corniche route high above the river to Përmet, famed for its cuisine and strong raki. After arriving at our guesthouse for lunch, in the village of Bënjë, we will continue cycling for another 2.5 mi to the thermal pools of Langarica and its canyon. A 16th century ancient Ottoman bridge marks the spot and the end of the road. If you feel adventurous and want to swim alone in one of the more secluded pools, built every spring by the locals, hike upriver through one of the most magnificent canyons in Europe.



Day 6: Sunday, Oct 2. Bënjë-Gjirokastrë. 43 miles, 1,400 ft. climbing.

We continue along the valley towards Këlcyrë, the distant sharks tooth peaks, which guard a farther gorge. Ride between them to the confluence of the Drinos,

following yet another gorge. This opens out into a wide plain with the town of Gjirokastër (city of 1,000 steps) high above on the right. Gjirokastër, a 'museum' town, is perhaps the most beautiful city in Albania.



Day 7: Monday, Oct 3. Rest day in Gjirokastër.

We'll take a guided tour to explore the charming cobbled alleyways between the white-walled buildings and the fascinating traditional houses of Skenduli and Zekateve, then visit the city of Gjirokaster nestled on the cliff, with its amazing views. Lunch & dinner are on your own.

Day 8: Tuesday, Oct 4. Gjirokastër-Sarandë. 43 miles, 1,700 ft. climbing. We start the day with a brief transfer to start our cycling at the top of Muzina Pass towards Sarandë, the gateway to southern Albania on the Ionian coast, sandwiched between the high mountains and the sea. A short ride on a rustic ferry brings us to the UNESCO World Heritage site of Butrint, one of the country's most important archaeological treasures, where the influences of various ancient people are clearly visible. After a guided tour in Butrint, we will make our way along the coast heading north with the island of Corfu in view.

Day 9: Wednesday, Oct 5. Sarandë-Himarë. 32 miles, 3,500 ft. climbing.

Today will be a rollercoaster ride. We leave as the early morning mist is burnt off by the sun, climbing steeply out of Sarandë to a rocky plateau. Then it's over cols into bays and around headlands, always with the stunning mountain scenery to the right and coastal views to the left, before descending to the long beach and bay of Himarë, where there's plenty of time for a swim in the clear blue waters of the Albanian Riviera. Along the way, we will pay a visit to Porto Palermo Castle, a Venetian castle



shrouded in historical mystery.

Day 10: Thursday, Oct 6. Himarë-Vlorë. 40 miles, 5,200 ft. climbing.

Today's ride is not only the most challenging but also the most spectacular. You will gradually climb from sea level up to 3,300 feet through forests, gorges, and hairpin bends. After lunch in the

beautiful national park of Llogara, we will descend towards Vlorë for an afternoon's relaxation by the Ionian coast. In 48 BC during the Roman Civil War, Julius Caesar landed with his legions at the nearby beach of Palase. He soon crossed the mountains over at Llogara Pass in a place later named as Caesar's Pass to chase his adversary Pompey. For centuries, this



spectacular mountain range has almost completely isolated this part of the coast from the rest of the country. That's why the local inhabitants had easier connections by sea with Corfu and Greece than by land with inland Albania.

Day 11: Friday, Oct 7. Transfer and Departure.

From Vlorë, in the morning, we take a 2.5-hour transport back to Tirana (airport) and the end of our HeartCycle tour. Lodging is not included this evening. Please do not book a flight reservation that departs before 5pm.

A separate transfer will be offered to those staying another night in Tirana or continuing on to other adventures.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Please contact Lisa Evans if you have any questions, concerns or special requests. Lceski@comcast.net (970) 237-1773