

General Information on Albania

Passports - 10 year passports, with at least 6 months before expiry, are necessary for all travellers entering the country. Visas are no longer required for EU citizens. Certain other nationalities can obtain visa at point of entry. If you are not a UK or EU passport holder please check with us before travelling.

Airport entry procedure - on arrival at Tirana Mother Theresa [currently the only passenger airport operating] on entering the arrivals hall proceed to passport desk marked foreigners'. State the purpose of visit is tourist, after passport control, baggage reclaim is immediately in front of you, luggage trolleys are available but you will require 50 lek coin to release chain. Decline the services of a porter, as your driver will be waiting immediately outside the doors into arrivals hall.

Airport departure procedure - Check in desks open approx 1 hour 30 mins before departure time. After check in go through departure tax desk, 10 euros, \$15 or 1500 lek per person is payable by Albanian citizens only. In the departure lounge there are some good souvenir and gift shops, cafe bar and a duty free shop. Duty free range is limited but cheap, especially cigarettes and alcohol. Please remember that UK citizens are only allowed to bring into the UK 200 cigarettes and 1 litre spirits from Albania. Items carried in hand baggage are subject to the same strict controls as at UK airports.

Customs - Luggage and hand baggage is x-rayed at entry and departure. Random searches take place but rarely for tourists. There are no hard and fast rules on what may be brought in except for normal restrictions on firearms, weapons, drugs etc. Expensive electronic goods may attract a duty charge. There is no limit on the amount of foreign currency that you bring in for personal use, but anymore than 10000 euros or \$ should be declared. One tip for travellers buying duty free goods on the outward journey from UK, do not buy in London. Budapest and Milan are cheaper. There is little point in buying cigarettes on the outward journey as they are much cheaper in Albanian shops.

Money and exchange - The local currency is the leke [lek]. Lek notes are issued in one, two & five hundred denominations plus one and five thousand. Coins are 10, 20, 50 and 100 lek. The lek is not a convertible currency and therefore cannot be exchanged outside of Albania. Do not bring any significant quantity home, it is useless money here. Exchange rates [as at 30.10.2009] are 99 lek to US\$, 130 lek to €, or 145 lek to £. Change money at the many bureaux de change in town. The exchanges will convert \$, € or £, but I recommend euros or pounds for the best rates. There are unofficial money changers on street corners near large hotels, they can be recognised by the large wads of cash in their hands. They are legal and you will get the official rate from them. If you use them check the money carefully before walking away. Please note that it is not possible to obtain lek from banks or bureaux de change before arriving in Albania.

Credit cards and Travellers cheques - These methods of payment or exchange are not widely accepted. Only the large International Hotels in Tirana and Durres readily accept payment by credit card.

Travellers Cheques can be cashed at the Bank of Albania in Skanderbeg Square, but there may be a long queue. There are some cash points in Tirana and other major towns that accept UK debit or credit cards but the charges levied by your bank may be very high.

Albania Time:

Albania is one hour ahead of UK at all times of year.

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General Information

by Derek Crane Travel



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Personal safety and security - Albania is as safe [or unsafe] as any European country. The normal rules of common sense apply. Do not pull out large sums of money. Do not leave valuables unattended. It is safe to walk anywhere at anytime but you will feel safer if there are 2 or more of you. The people, of all age groups, are friendly, helpful and respectful particularly towards visitors. For nearly 50 years it was illegal for them to invite foreigners into their homes. They will now often do so and it is safe to enter. Please, as a mark of respect, remove shoes when entering a private house.

Health and medical care - Although Albania is, arguably, the poorest country in Europe it does have adequate health care and facilities. In fact it has one qualified doctor per 860 head of population. In the cities and larger towns there are English speaking doctors and nurses. If you need to consult a doctor this can be arranged via your rep. or hotel. First medical aid is free for visitors but charges will be made for subsequent treatment, if required. There are accident and emergency units in all large towns. It is recommended that you obtain travel insurance, to include medical cover before you start your journey. There are no vaccination requirements nor none recommended by the WHO. There are chemists [Farmacia] in all towns who stock most 'over the counter' drugs or remedies. Contraceptives are not readily available. If you regularly use any particular medicine, personal hygiene products or pain killers then you should bring sufficient with you. As in most countries do not drink tap water.

Clothes etc. - Your choice of clothing should take account of the climate. Even in summer a breeze will often pick up in the evening requiring a jumper or light jacket. Flat soled shoes should be worn at all times because many footpaths and roads are bumpy and cracked. Ladies will find trousers to be preferable during the day. When on day trips out of the city good quality walking shoes are a must. Please note bikinis and swimming trunks should only be worn on the beach or poolside. It is illegal for women to be nude or topless in public and men should only be topless on beach or poolside. Sunglasses and sun screen are essential if you are fair skinned. A small first aid kit, tissues and wet wipes are worth bringing.

Tipping - Albanians do not normally expect to receive a tip, but there are a few exceptions. For carrying luggage to/from your room 100 lek or € 1 is about right. If you receive good service in a cafe or restaurant then a small amount can be left at your discretion [it is a good way of getting rid of small change]. If you are happy with the service at the hotel then a tip of €2 or €3 is OK, give it to the person who impressed you. Most taxis do not have meters and I am convinced that the driver includes his tip in the fare. Therefore I never tip taxis unless the driver has been extra helpful.

Getting around - When you venture out on your own, other than for a walk, it is best to go by taxi. Taxis are everywhere and normally yellow Mercedes. There are some illegal one's which it is best to avoid as they may not be licensed or insured. As a rough guide if the taxi has yellow number plates with red letters then it is OK. If the driver speaks English, doubtful, negotiate fare before getting in. Or ask the hotel or rep. to arrange for you. Generally they charge 50 cents per km with a minimum charge of €2. There are also numerous minibuses but they are best left for the locals. They are very cheap but tend to go anywhere and stop for anyone, so a 10 minute journey could take half an hour.

Photography - It is perfectly OK to take pictures or video in most places. Avoid taking photos of military personnel or establishments. Do not take photos at the airport because it is used occasionally for military flights. The people do not mind being photographed but normal courtesy applies. In museums and churches please ask before taking pictures, they more often than not say it is OK. Infrastructure - As a direct result of neglect under communism the infrastructure went into severe decline. Since 1997 rebuilding is underway. Road rebuilding has started and some new highways are already in use. Similarly redevelopment of towns and cities is in full swing. It is still early days and journey times are slow. It can often take 2-3 hours to travel 100 kms, but you get the opportunity to see the scenery.

Smoking - From May 26th 2007 a ban on smoking came into effect. The ban is similar to the UK and includes all enclosed public buildings and work places which includes hotels and fully enclosed bars & restaurants. The penalty for ignoring the ban can be fixed penalty fine of 40 euros but is rarely issued to foreign visitors, in fact many establishments totally ignore it and allow smoking.

Derek Crane Travel specialise in package and tailor made holidays to Albania. If you need any specific information regarding your special requirements or needs, please contact us by telephone on +44 [0] 1280 703107 or email CDerecrane@aol.com.

All of the information contained within this leaflet is, to the best of our knowledge, correct as at 30.10.2009