

WILD ALBANIA with Hanny Allston

An exploratory tour of the Albanian & Kosovo mountains

QUICK FACTS

Tour Duration: 9 nights & 10 days

Departs: Tirana Mother-Theresa Airport @ on Monday 1st July 2019

Returns: Tirana Mother-Theresa Airport @ on Wednesday 10th July 2019

Maximum Group Size: 8 guests

Accommodation: Small family-run Albanian guesthouses & mountain lodgings

Meals: All breakfasts, dinners & lunches included

Transport: All on-ground transport & luggage transfers

RUN DETAILS

Minimum Run Duration: 10km/75min

Maximum Run Duration: 29km/5hrs

Technical Difficulty: Moderate (trail & mountain experience required). Trails vary from smooth to steep & rocky alpine terrain

Steepness: Flat to very steep mountain slopes.

** Our tours are a holiday involving trail running. Our guides will craft each days' runs to meet your individual needs and en route will frequently stop to soak up the ambience and to take plenty of photos. Therefore, running distances noted in this itinerary can vary to differentiate between guest abilities and make your Find Your Feet Tour a rich experience.*

TOUR HIGHLIGHTS

- Explore the most remote regions of the Albanian Accursed Mountains
- Enjoy alpine runs immersed spectacular mountain scenery in Albania & Kosovo
- Rest in authentic family-run Albanian guesthouses with home-style whilst surrounded by the mountain landscape
- Enjoy the novelty of luggage transfer by pack-mules and horses
- Enjoy fresh Albanian cuisine in the company of your new trail running friends
- Return home ready to perform wilder after learning the art of being wilder and playing wilder from Hanny Allston

ITINERARY

DAY 1 – Arrive in Albania & check-in to airport hotel

Make your way to Tirana airport and check-in to our airport lodgings located within the airport precinct. Enjoy a good rest & the night official day of the tour is tomorrow.

DAY 2 - Welcome to Albania, drive to Vermosh

We begin the day with an early morning buffet breakfast and a chance to unite with your fellow trail running companions. We will discuss the plan ahead and then head

into the airport precinct to meet our driver and start a transfer to Vermosh, the northern-most Albanian village. Overnight at guesthouse and tasty homemade meal.

- *Transfer: Rinas – Vermosh: 205 km/approx. 4 hours*
- *Dinner/ Guesthouse in Vermosh*
- *Overnight: Guesthouse in Vermosh*

DAY 3 - The spectacular ridge of Berizhdol

After a hearty breakfast, you leave on foot towards Lepushe village and arrive at Bordolec Pass and through beech woods and fresh springs, reach the vast open pastures of Koprisht, for than continuing further to engage in one of the most panoramic ridge walks of Kelmendi region: The Ridge of Berizhdol. While you run on soft grassy terrain, you are surrounded by the mighty views of the northwestern faces of the Massive of “Bjeshket e Namuna” (The Accursed Mountains) and the alpine pastures of Dobkut. At the end of the ridge you will follow a forest trail that will bring you to the bottom of the valley. Free time in late afternoon to explore the village – why not buy a pot of blueberry jam or sip some herbal “Raki” at the local bio shop, followed by dinner and overnight at a local guesthouse.

Run: start at 1040m uphill to 1980m downhill to 1100m / Distance: 21km

- *Lunch: Picnic*
- *Dinner: Guesthouse in Lëpushë*
- *Overnight: Guesthouse in Vuthaj*

DAY 4 - The Valley of Gërbaja and Vuthaj

Today you leave Lëpushë on foot and run on a fine beech forest trail till reaching to the narrow alpine valley of Gërbaja, surrounded by sheer slopes and jagged peaks. From here we run to Vuthaj where you can stop for a short visit, before reaching your guesthouse, where your luggage has been transported by vehicle.

Run: start at 1100m uphill to 1837m downhill to 1050m / Distance: approx. 19 km

- *Overnight: Guesthouse in Vuthaj*
- *Dinner: Guesthouse*

DAY 5 - Majestic run from Vuthaj to Thethi

You will load out luggage on horses and start a long run to reach the valley of Thethi - the heart of the Albanian Alps. You climb slowly following the valley of Ropojana and then steeper after the alpine lake of Gjeshtar, till reaching the elevated rocky plateau of Runica. The trail is sided by the spectacular massive of Langoj-Karanfil peaks on the right and Jezerca – the highest summit of the Albanian Alps on the left, and at times one might feel like it has landed on the moon. At Peja Pass you stop for lunch, and gaze at the beautiful valley of Theth before starting your way down. The trail winds beside the rocky dome of Harapit Peak, which dominates the valley end. The last section, through the upper neighborhood of Okol, will lead to the guesthouse that is located at the centre of the village, where you will have rest, dinner and stay overnight.

Run: start at 1020m uphill to 1700m downhill to 750m / Linear: 21 km

Optional inclusion to this day:

Thethi – the heart of the Albanian Alps. Its impressive landscape and ancient mountain culture inspired several writers; the best known of them is Edith Durham’s “High Albania”. Passing by the Catholic Church, you will visit the Blood Feud Toyour and discuss about the ‘Kanun’ of Dukagjin – the century old oral regulatory code of the

mountains. You continue running to the Thethi waterfall and along walls and terraces dating from the late bronze, run till the natural pools of Nderlysa and then further to the narrow valley of Kapreja.

Run: start at 750m undulating downhill to 500m / Distance: 8km

- *Lunch: Picnic Lunch*
- *Overnight: Guesthouse in Thethi*
- *Dinner: Home-cooked meal with a local family*

DAY 6 – Valbona Pass

Today you will load your luggage on horses and leave the Valley of Theth and start climbing towards the Pass of Valbona to reach the next valley, Valbona. The path is perhaps the most known trail of the Alps, and it remains the only direct connection with the valley of Valbona. The trail winds through beech woods and further to grassy meadows for than continuing on firm ground and scree on the higher sections.

At the pass on a clear day, you can enjoy great views of the highest peaks of the Alps like Jezerca, Radohima and many others. From there the path winds downhill towards the springs of Valbona and a forest trail will lead to the village of Rrogam (900m) located at the bottom of the valley. You will continue a few kilometers further on the gravel of the dry riverbed till reaching your Guesthouse where you will rest after the long running day.

Run: start at 750m uphill to 1759m downhill to 1000m / Distance: 18 km

- *Overnight: Guesthouse in Valbona*
- *Dinner: Home-cooked meal with a local family*

Day 7 – The Epic and Remote “Lugu i Persllopit” Trail

After breakfast you start to run on an epic trail known as ‘Lugu i Persllopit’ – it remains a hidden gem in the already remote net of trails of the area. The trail starts to zigzag right outside the gate of the house and ascends through pine forest to reach an open rocky terrace that will provide spectacular vistas on the entire valley and on the northern dome of Jezerca. It is difficult to leave from this panoramic ‘mighty throne’ of karst, but we promise that the follow up will unfold landscape of great magnitude and satisfaction.

Pristine forest trails and a succession of cols will bring us to the pass, located at 2030m of elevation where you will stop for a picnic lunch, surrounded by imposing jagged peaks of grey limestone. From here the trail enters in Montenegro and morphs into a mountain run of moderate difficulty, on the side of the rocky dome of Zla Kolata (Kollata e Keqe) – Montenegro’s highest summit. At the Pass of Bori, you re-enter Albania and decent through woods and meadow clearings till reaching the remote village of Çerem, where you will rest after a long and rewarding trail running day.

Run: start at 750m uphill to 950m downhill to 790m / Distance: 19 km

- *Lunch: Picnic Lunch*
- *Dinner: Home-cooked meal with a local family*
- *Overnight: Guesthouse in Cerem*

DAY 8 – The Alp of Doberdol

You leave on foot towards the bottom valley of Valbona and start a short scenic transfer (about 30-40minutes) that through a green gorge, will bring the group to the beginning of the trail in the beautiful hamlet of Çerem – an off the beaten track destination of rare beauty. You continue on foot on undulated terrain in beautiful alpine scenery, leaving Çerem and the Kollata Mountains behind. The luggage is loaded on horse, and you make your way first on forest path and grassy clearings, then on gravel

road till you reach the Montenegrin border. You then continue on Montenegro territory for a while till you reach the ruins of the old military border post. Further on you make a break at the hamlet of Balqin that is used by the shepherds during the summer season. Several springs and creeks on the way are safe to fill the bottles with fresh water. In the last leg of the run, you enter the valley of Gash and reach Doberdol located in the middle of vast alpine pastures. In the afternoon you can relax in this pristine location, with an optional run to the alpine lakes above. Overnight in mountain hut.

Run: start at 1350m uphill to 1920 downhill to 1740m / Distance: 16 km

- *Lunch: Picnic Lunch*
- *Overnight: Mountain Hut in Doberdol*
- *Dinner: Traditional meal*

DAY 9 - Kosovo

You leave the alp of Doberdol and start climbing slowly to the ridge in front of us that marks the border between Albania, Montenegro and Kosovo. At the ridge the views are stunning, you can admire the Gjeravica (the highest peak of Kosovo), Kollata (the highest peak of Montenegro) and Jezerca massive. An additional climb will lead to the peak of "3 Borders", before starting to descend slowly through beautiful alpine meadows and small glacier lakes till reaching a dense fir forest that will lead to the Zalli I Rupes field, where the run ends. Here our driver will be waiting for us and will transfer us towards the town of Gjakova, but first with a stop in the layout valley to visit the St. Nicolas Monastery of Decan – Kosovo's monument highlight. Transfer will continue to the city of Kruja, where a panoramic view will be waiting for you.

Run: start at 1740m uphill to 1920 downhill to 1000m / Distance: 16 km

- *Lunch: Picnic Lunch*
- *Overnight: Hotel in Kruje*
- *Dinner: Traditional meal*

Day 10:

A short explore in the city and departure to Tirana Airport that marks the end of our tour ☹️ Onward or departures home can be made from late afternoon.

COST: \$3350 (incl. GST)

Tour inclusions: Airport hotel on arrival; 8 nights in traditional Albanian family-run accommodation & mountain lodgings; all on-ground transport; luggage transfer by vehicle & mule; expert coaching, guiding and mentoring by Hanny Allston and Graham Hammond; all breakfasts, lunches & dinners; discounts to premium brands at Find Your Feet.

Tour exclusions: Airfares; travel insurance; snacks and beverages.

Please note, this trip is strictly limited to 8 guests and will book quickly.