

INVENTORY OF THE AVAILABLE MATERIALS RELIGIOUS MONUMENTS GUIDE

Introduction

Dear visitor,

In this brochure we are introducing a selection of some of the many religious monuments that are found in the Albanian territory. These last ones might become part of your scheduled visits during your stay in Albania. Along with their complexity, architectonics, historic, and cultural values those will acknowledge and closely see the faith tradition in Albania and also really feel the religious excellent harmony and coexistence that exists for centuries among Albanians.

We invite you to visit these sites during your stay and why not also become part of some of the pilgrimages described in this brochure. We hope your visits in these religious sites enrich your experience in Albania.



ORTHODOX RELIGION SITES

The most interesting ones:

1-Saint Mary'S Monastery Church in Ardenice. One of the largest monasteries with an ancient history not only in the region of Myzeqe but in the entire country. It is situated along Lushnje-Fier national road near Kolonja village. It dominantly raises on the hills of Ardenica with a altitude of 237 m above sea level where the view of a vast, pleasant and astonoshing field spreads. The values this temple holds make it one of the most touristic and study attraction sites.

It is believed that the foundations of this monastery are placed in 1282 with the initiative of emperor Andronik II, a Bizantyne Paleologist who built it after the victory over Angevins in Berat. 'The crowning wedding ceremony of our national hero Gjergj Katrioti who married Andronika Arianiti took place in Ardenica's Monastery Church.



The wedding ceremony took place on the midday of April 21st 1451 guided by Felix bishop of Kanina and was attended by Albanian princes, ambassadors of Naples, Venice, Ragusa'. (A. Lorenconi)

The temple is decorated with magnificent frescoes by painters Kostandin and Athanas Zografi in 1744. A significant spot in the artistic decoration of the temple is the wooden and polychromed in gold iconostasis which contains two lines of small and big icons realized in 1744 by the well-known 18th century painter Kostandin Shpataraku. In one of the sections of its cycle in the Saint Gjon Vladimiri's icon it is painted with a royal crown and carrying a specter the 14th century Albanian prince Karl Topia who is referred as the King of Albania by the painter. This religious cult site also offers several graffiti written in Greek that date back in 1477.

2. St Mary's Church in Apollonia.

It is one of the most beautiful and most visited religious monuments of the 14th century in our country and it is situated in the Apollonia's Archeological Park surroundings.



3. St Mary's Church in Labovë e Kryqit.

It is found in the village of the same name in the south of the country near the small town of Libohova. It is also one of the most beautiful Orthodox churches of the country. The ancient church resembles the Hagia Sophie church in Istanbul. The church used to have a Holy Cross fragment which was believed to have been part of the cross where Jesus Christ's body was crucified. Unfortunately, the cross disappeared and it is believed it was stolen after the 90s.



4. St Mary's Monastery in the island of Zvernec.

It is situated in the small island near the village of Zvernec, Narta lagoon 14 km from Vlora. The island itself is covered in dense Mediterranean vegetation which makes the island very attractive. A wooden bridge links the island with the land. St. Mary's Dormition Monastery is one of the most attracting Orthodox religious sites in our country. It is a typical Byzantine monument of the 5th century known for its unique style. At the cemetery near the Monastery rests the tomb of Marigo Pozios, a well-known activist of the Albania's Independence Awakening who is also known as the woman who sewed the first national flag of Albania.



in November 28th 1912, the national independence day. The monastery had an exceptional library that got burned during the years of the fight against religion. The island of Zvernec itself was adapted into an area for the persecuted during the communist regime. On the other side of the island it is found the St Triadha's church where monks once served there. A honoring pilgrimage is organized at St Mary's Monastery every 15th of August.

5. St Mary's Church in Elbasan. Situated within the old castle ruins in Elbasan it is built around 600 years ago and it has been originally operating since 1556. It was completely burned down in 1819 and reconstructed between 1826-1833. The church has a centered cupola and auditorium. The cupola's unique paintings are realized in 1859 and the church's iconostasis polychromed in gold is considered one of the most beautiful in the country is realized by approximately 40 paint masters from Dibra who worked for 10 years. The tomb of Kostandin Kristoforidhi considered 'the father' of the Albanian language rests by the church.



Other churches found in Elbasan region;

St John's Vladimir Monastery. It is situated 4 km near the city of Elbasan and relates to St John Vladimiri's cult.



St Nicholas' Church in Shelcan. It is found in Shpat area in Elbasan.

St Paraskevi's Church in Valesh.

It is also found in Shpat region in Elbasan. The church is built in 16th century and contains Onufri's frescoes realized in 1554.



Interesting churches in Myzeqe area:
 St Cosmas' Monastery Church in Kolkondas.

St George's Church in Libofshe.

St Nicholas' Church in Kurjan.

St George's Church in Strume.

St Paraskevi's Church in Hoxhare.

St Nicholas' Church in Vanaj, Fier.

St Mary's Church in Bishqethem.

St Nicholas' Church in Krutje.

St Nicholas's Church in Toshkez.

St Theodore's Church in Kadipashaj.

St Athanasius' Church in Karavasta e Re.





The Basilica of Ballsh.



'St Mary's Dormination Monastery in Tranoshisht, St Nicholas' Monastery Mesopotam, 'St Mary's Dormination' Church in Zervat (Dropull).

In the south of Albania to be mentioned;

Churches in Voskopoje. Long time ago it has been a crucial cultural centre for the Balkans region and today it is an attractive mountainous village where many churches survived:



St Paraskevi's Church, St Prodhromis' Monastery Church, St Nicholas' Basilica, St Michael's Basilica (1722), St Athanasius' Basilica (1724), St Elijah's Basilica (1751), St Mary's Church (XVIII century).

Churches in Vithkuq such as; **St Peter's, St Cosma Damiano** or known as **Qimiteri (cemetery)** as in its basement rest the clerics' and **St Paul's** ossary who served there. **In Shipse** not far from Voskopojait is found the 400 years old church of **St George's**.



The Holy Resurrection Church in Mborje. In the area of Prespa lake St Mary's Church is the most interesting church situated in the small island of Malingrad near Ligenas.

St Mary's Church in Cerke is 5 km from the small town of Leskovik on a hill that faces the small town of Konice in Greece. It is said that 13 churches have been built in Cerke. St Mary's church which is granted the status monument of culture was built in 1473 and it is the oldest in Leskovik region.

Marmiroi's church is positioned in the south of Vlora bay near the medieval centre of Jeriko (today Orikum). The building sketching plan is similar to the cross and with a cupola on top. It was built with stones and bricks. Only a few frescoes' fragments are preserved today. It is one of the most ancient churches in Albania built in 13th century.

Churches in Berat

The 2416 years old city of Berat preserves a set of Christian monuments of the Byzantine and post-Byzantine era. These are among the most visited sites during your sightseeing tour in this city which is also part of UNESCO.

St Michael's Church is a monument of culture since 1984, St Theodore's Church, St Mary of Blachernae Church is a monument of culture since 1948, St Costandine's and Helen's Church, St Theodore's Church, the St Mary's

Dormination Cathedral in which it is shown famous 16th century Albanian iconographer Onufri's icons' museum. Among the main touristic sites in the city of Berat is the St Spiridon's Monastery (Gorice), and St Thomas' Church (Gorice).



Churches in the Ionian Sea region (Albanian Riviera)

Mesodhia Church in Vuno, St Mary's Monastery Church in Kakome

Churches in the Ionian Sea region (Albanian Riviera)

Mesodhia Church in Vuno, St Mary's Monastery Church in Kakome, St Spyridon's Church in Vuno, Hypapante Church in Dhermi, St Mary's Monastery Church in Kakome, St Mary's Monastery Church in Krorez.

Other churches by the seashore are the Hypapante's and St Theodore's Church in Dhermi, St Sergius' and St Bacchus' Church in Himare, monument of culture since 1963, All Saints' Church in Himare monument of culture since 1970, Cassyopia's Church in Himare, St Dimetrius' Monastery Church in Qeparo, etc.

In Tirana it is to be mentioned the Eastern Orthodox Church.

Every year on August 15th it is organized a honouring pilgrimage at St Mary's Church in Zicisht (Devoll). Many people who have moved from the village participate at St Mary's pilgrimage. In the same region, every 1st of July in the village of Hocisht Devoll it is organized a honouring pilgrimage to the saint doctors Damian and Kozma.



CATHOLIC RELIGION SITES

1.The Holy Rosary Church is found in Arra e Madhe neighbourhood in Shkoder. It is also known as the Arra e Madhe Church. It was given the name Holy Rosary and blessed in 1892. It served as a shelter for the residents of Shkodra during the Montenegrin bombings in 1912-1913. It was the last religious site closed by the atheist campaign in 1968 until reopened in 1991. During 1998-1999 it served as a home shelter for Kosovars during the Kosovo crisis. In the old church there are buried Father Zef Pellumbi (one of the survivors of the communist prisons known for his writings especially his masterpiece *Rrno per vetem me kallxue*), Father Gjolaj, Father Gjecaj, Father Makaj. The Holy Rosary Church facade is used by the National Tourism Agency as a reference symbol in the Albania's tourism religious map.

2-St Stephen's Cathedral Church (Shkoder). Also known as the Great Church considering that it is one of the largest churches in the Balkans. Its construction permission was issued by the sultan in 1851 and the church started the construction seven years after due to the lack of funds. The first placed stone of the church was blessed by bishop Ivan Topic, and in its opening ceremony it was archbishop Luigj Çurçia. After 1967 the church was turned into a gym and in 1973 it was held the Congress of the Albanian Women Union until its reopening as a church in 1991. In his historical visit in April 25th 1993 pope John Paul II himself held the wafer at St Stephen's church.



The Holy Rosary Church



St Stephen's Cathedral Church
(Shkoder)

3-St Anthony of Padua's(Shna Ndou) Church in Laç. It is situated 3 km from the town of Laç on a colorful rock and it was built in 1557. It is normally visited twice a week on Tuesdays and Saturdays where two or three wafers are daily bestowed. The site was demolished in 1967 during the atheism campaign and its reconstruction was performed in 1991 by the Bologna friars assistance. A road was built in 1993 that linked to the town of



Laç in 1993 and its front square was inaugurated in 1994. The church organizes the largest participation pilgrimage in the country in honour of Anthony of Padua (Shna Ndou) where people of various religious faiths participate in the event. The annual main pilgrimage begins 13 Tuesdays prior to the 13th of June. On June 12 it is performed the midnight wafer where approximately 100000 people participate. The pilgrimage counts around 900000 people on the 13th of June considered the biggest religious event in the country.

4- Friars' Church (Gjuhadol) Shkoder.

The church is dedicated to St Francis of Assis. The project plan of the church was granted by the French architect Anselmi Gorlet. It started building in 1878 and was inaugurated after 27 years in 1905. The communists hid and stored weapons inside the church and politically framed,



imprisoned, and executed many clerics. The remains of the greatest Albanian poet Father At Gjergj Fishta rest inside the church. Its body was exhumed and thrown into the river by the communists and only a few remains of his body are recovered and rest inside the church.

5- The Rubik Monastery Church. It is situated on a rocky hill above the small town of Rubik. It is considered one of the oldest Byzantine style of the 12-13 century churches in our country. It is believed that its construction was finalized in 1227 and served as a Benedict and Franciscan. It is distinguished by its Byzantine frescoes and also the Fan river valley is seen from the church. Other interesting sites are: Shirgj's Church, 20 km from the city of Shkoder, St Prenda's Church in Balldren, Lezhe, St Eufemia's Church in Kallmet, St Ndou's Church in Kepi i Rodonit, St Rrok's Church in Shiroke, Convent of Trashan, St Mark's Church in Mal te Dejes, St Ndou's Church in Tirana, The Catholic Church 'The Heart of Christ' in Tirana.



The Bektashi Religion

Bektashi is one of the four traditional religions in Albania. It is based upon the criteria of tolerance and respects all other monotheist religions. Its founder is Haxhi Bektash Veliu of Persian origin born in the city of Nishapur in 1209-1210. The Turkish parliament unanimously banned tekkes in Turkey in 1925. At that time the World Grandfather Sali Niazi Dede (of Albanian origin from Starje, Kolonje) after consulting with the Albanian representative in Istanbul decided to establish the Holy Bektashi World Residency in Albania. After the III Bektashi congress in Korça 1929 it was established the World Bektashi Grandfathers' Residency in Albania. In the years 1930-1941 the head of the Bektashi Grandfathers' Salih Niazi Dede provided Bektashi religion in Albania new historical dimension and enriched and promoted day after day until nowadays the Bektashi tradition of Haxhi Bektash Veliu.

Among the main celebration dates:

Ashura – 10 days of Matem (which recall the Battle of Karbala) every year in the month of Muharram.

Nowruz celebration on March 22 of every year celebrates the birthday of the Great Ali as one of the most distinguished members of Ehli Bejti family.

The Bektashi pilgrimages are organized annually and despite their religious practice as part of the religious tourism it needs to be mentioned the natural areas these activities involve such as, Mount Tomorri pilgrimage between 20-25 August, in memory of Abaz Ali's Karbala. The pilgrimage is organized in the same National Park territory.

In Frasher, Permet on September 5th it is organized the pilgrimage at the famous historic monument tekke of Father Alushi. In August it is organized the pilgrimage of Sari Salltik in the historical town of Kruje. The pilgrimage remembers the first mission for the spread of Bektashi Order in Albania. Outside Albania every 16th of August Bektashi believers gather in Hajji Bektash (Turkey) and every 10th of August in Detroit, Michigan, USA where it is celebrated Father

Rexheb's birthday at the Albanian Bektashi tekke opened in 1954.

The order's tradition demands a head for conducting and organizing a World Grandfather from its beginning until today. Today the Holy Residency in Tirana is lead by its Sanctity Father Edmond Brahimaj.

In Albania there are six subordinate Holy Residency offices: Kruje, Elbasan, Korçe, Skrapar, Vlore, and Gjirokaster. The Holy Residency maintains straight affiliations with the Bektashi communities in USA, Canada, Australia, Germany, Netherlands, Great Britain, Turkey, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Azerbaijan, Macedonia, Kosovo, Montenegro, Bulgaria, Romania, Greece, Hungary, etc. After 1990s there are built around 200 Bektashi sites. Most of these cult sites are noticed their architectonic and historical values and are also built in special natural resources resulting in significant attraction for tourists. The related religious ceremonies are: Ashura (10 days of Matem), 22nd of March Sultan's Nowruz, Fiter Bayram, Eid al-Adha (Sacrifice Feast) and other related feasts of each residency inside and outside the country.

Among the most attracting tekkes there are:

1. Melan's tekke. It is 2 km southeast of Nepravishte village near Libohove and the site exists since 1869. The tekke is built on the ruins of the ancient Illyrian castle with a surface of 34 hectares. Its picturesque position adds valuable beauty to the tekke and it is reconstructed after 1990.

2. Sari Salltik's tekke. It is situated in a dominant position on top of Kruja mountain or also known as Sari Salltik mountain east of the town of Kruja. It is founded in the mid XIII century and relates to the first Bektashi missionary arrived in Albania and the Balkans, Hajji Bektash Veliu coeval (Bektashi order co-founder of XIII century) arrived and settled in Kruje at the cave known by people as Sari Salltik. A massive pilgrimage is organized between August-September where religion believers from Kruja, Albania, and the world participate. Endless water from the well comes out from the rock and the stone stairs on the right lead to the cave. At the cave's entrance it is built a Bektashi tradition cupola



Melan's tekke



Sari Salltik's tekke

Turbe (tomb). On top of the rock it is built the new two store tekke (2003). In memory of the first missionary Sari Salltik it is placed a bronze portrait statue. The view from the tekke is fantastic and it can be reached by walking from the town of Kruje.

3.Abas Ali's Turbe (tomb). It is placed in Çuke of Tomorr 2417 metres above the sea level in Skrapar region. It dates back since XV century but historical data claim that it has been an ancient religious site. In the year 1600 Father Hajji Horasani built Abas Aliu's tomb in Çuke of Tomorr. Since then until today it is organized an annual pilgrimage ceremony every 20-25 of August. In 2008 it was built a surrounding wall and two characteristic porticos by the Institute of Monuments of Culture providing an exceptional architectonic view. Considering its height location and climate conditions the site is visited only in Spring and Autumn.

4.Turhan's tekke. Situated at the village with the same name not far from the town of Tepelena. It dates back since 1900s but it is believed to have been built in XV century during the mythical character of that time Demir Han. The tekke was burnt in 1914 by Greeks and it is at the entrance of the village, rectangular shaped, characteristic bows, built in carved Bektashi symbols and stones and remains ruined until today.

5. Starje's tekke. It is found in the village of Starje not far from the town Erseke. It is distinguished for its important role during the Albanian National Renaissance. An important character at that time was Dervish Hasan Zyko Kamaberi who lived during the rule of Ali Pashe Tepelena. Hasan Zyko Kamberi's turbe (tomb) is declared Monument of Culture (1973).

Main interesting tekkes for visitors are: Father Xhemali's tekke in Elbasan, The Great Tekke of Elbasan, Qesaraka's tekke, Kuzum Baba's tekke in Vlore, Halevian's tekke in Tirane, Barrikada street, opened since XVII century.

Ionisht- holy place of the Bektashi order, 5 km from Bilisht.



SUNNİ İSLAM RELIGIOUS SITES

1. Et'hem Bey Mosque in Tirana. It is the symbol mosque of the capital. It is found in the centre of Tirana and its construction was started by Molla Bey in 1790 and finalized in 1823 by his son E'them Bey. It resembles the mosques in Instambul and it is distinguished for its cupola, floor paintings and frescoes of Istanbul. The inner lightening during the praying is provided by five windows on each side.



2. The Lead Mosque in Shkoder. One of the most intersting mosques of our country considering it is the only one that combines Arabic and Ottoman style. It is distinguished as such as its cupola is covered in lead. It was built by Bushatlinj in 1773 and it is near Rozafa castle.

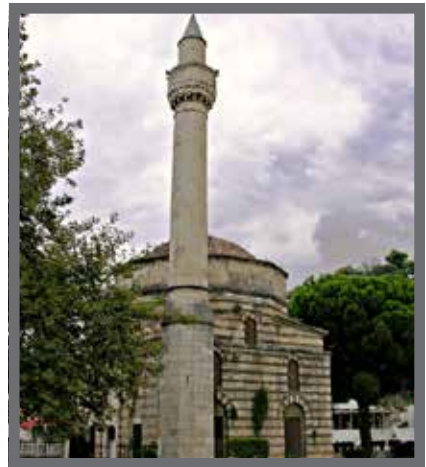


3. Iljaz Bey Mirahori Mosque in Korçe. It belongs to the year 1484 (the oldest monument in the city) and it situated near the reconstructed city bazaar. It is referred to Iljaz Bay Mirahori, originally from Panariti, Korçe. The mosque's facade is pointed by the National Tourism Agency as a guide reference in the Albania's tourism map.



4.The Muradie Mosquein Vlore.

It is one of the most visited sites by tourists in Vlore. It is situated in the city centre near the Flag Square and the Monument of Independence. It is built in 1542 and it is the last remaining work of the well known architect Mimar Sinan, or the Great Sinan of Albanian origin (Tepelene). The mosque is distinguished by its wall, bricks, stone building composition and minaret. It has a cupola and the prayer room is lightened by windows.



5. Islamic Compound of Xharmahalle and Gjin Aleksis Mosque in Rusan (Delvine). The complex which is considered the oldest Islamic compound in the country is found 1 km east of the town of Delvine. A part of the compound used to be the madrasah, a special hammam, the abulation fountain and ‘the king’ mosque built in 1682. Today only the remaining walls picture the vast complex it had been, while Gjin Aleksis mosque is placed in Rusan village 3 km from Delvina. Its leader has been Gjin Aleksis, a converted muslim. The mosque has been declared monument of culture since 1963.



Other attracting sites: Peqin's Mosque, Kubeliya's Mosque in Kavaje, The Great Mosque in Durres, Fatih's Mosque in Durres, Naziresha's Mosque in Elbasan, The King's Mosque in Elbasan, Single's Mosque, Lead and King in Berat, Borsh's castle Mosque, Allajbegi's Mosque near Vojnike in Diber, etc.



ational poet, Father Gjergj!

When an orator, speaking of your works, stands astonished, surprised, thus are many, are great and mighty, as it is hard to define which to talk about....

Future Albanian History writers will judge your political life based on 'The Highland Lute' your monumental masterpiece.


Be sure, Great poet that the Albanian aside with 'The Highland Lute' will always be supercilious like the Greeks with 'Iliad' and Persians with 'Shahnamen', as you have made to the civilized world known the sensible psychic and characteristics of the Albanian people....

With you, Father Gjergj, the Albanian nation is proud and glorified in front of other people, thus today the whole Albanian people bows at you, the intellectual youth cries Your loss and with the tears on their cheeks conveys in pain and sorrow in the afterlife" he said.

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