

# A visit to Tirana and KRUJA

## 3 April 2009

### Visit Schedule - Tirana

In the afternoon (around 15:00 o'clock) the group will start from Tirana, Sheraton Hotel, by bus.

- You will have the opportunity to see immediately as you go out from Sheraton Hotel the "Mother Teresa" statue near the Tirana Polytechnic University. The square is named Nene Teresa.
- On the left side you can see the Fine Academy of Arts and then on the right there is the Archeological Museum.
- Once you leave the square, the bus will go through the main boulevard "Deshmoret e Kombit" (Martyrs to the Nation) which was built in 1930 and it work of well-known Italian architects.
- On the right you can see the Palace of Congresses (named like this because it was build during communism by Enver Hoxha with the attention only to hold the annual great national congresses of the Labor Party. Now this building is used to organize concerts, exhibitions, and other big events). On the left you can see the building of the Presidency, where the office of the President of the Republic of Albania is located.
- Going through the boulevard, two other very important buildings will appear on both sides, on the right the Council of Ministers that hosts the Prime Minister's Office, and on the left the People's Assembly.
- As you pass these two buildings, the International Cultural Centre shows on the right (now undergoing reconstruction). Popularly referred to as "the Pyramid", it was built in 1985 after the death of the dictator, E. Hoxha, and was designed to be used as a museum for the dictator's personal items, books, clothes etc. Nowadays it has been used as a hall to organize trade fairs or other exhibitions. On the left there is a newly built business center, called Twin Towers.
- Bridge over Lana River.
- As you pass the river, on the left side there is "Parku Rinia" (the Youth Park) and on the right "Dajti Hotel" (now closed) - built as a 5 star hotel in Hoxha's time.
- We continue with "National Gallery of Art" - currently an important point of modern Albanian culture
- And here we have reached ... the city center.



- The centre of Tirana was the project of two well-known Italian architects of the Mussolini period (from the times of King Zogu I, around 1920s - 1930s). Their work includes the Ministry buildings and the Townhall.
- The antique mosque of "Et'hem Beu" built since 1800s, remained and was protected even by the dictator as a "monument of culture". Behind the mosque stands the Clock Tower, 35 meters high, also built in 1800s. The clock was damaged during World War II, but was restored to full function in July 1946.
- Skenderbeu (Scanderbeg) Square, is the center of the city and the biggest square in Albania. It has taken its name by the monument of Scanderbeg, work of well-known Albanian artists, raised in 1968 to commemorate the 500th anniversary of the death of the national hero.
- The Palace of Culture, where the National Theatre of Opera and Ballet and the National Library are located, was completed in 1963 on the site of the former Trade of Tirana building.
- The National Historic Museum is the biggest museum in Albania and has accumulated the most important treasures and steps of the Albanian history. The ornamental mosaic on its facade is called "The Albanians" and is a socialist-realist work.
- In 1988, a monument of the former communist dictator was also placed in the square, but it was toppled on 20 February 1991, by students and the people of Tirana.
- The Bank of Albania is one of the most beautiful buildings built during the Monarchy of Albania.
- You will leave Tirana through the Durrresi Street that is one of the oldest streets of Tirana. It used to be with villas that were destroyed during communism regime. Just a few of them have remained. Two of these villas are the Embassy of Vatican and the former Embassy of Yugoslavia.



Tirana is the capital of Albania and the most important political, economic and cultural centre of the country. It is located in a very favorable position, right in the centre of the country, at an altitude of 113 meters above the sea level. To the west, the Adriatic Sea and the largest and most popular beach in Albania, the Durres beach, are only 32 km away, while to the East, the Dajti Mountain, 1612m high, is only 26 km away. Tirana is a relatively young city. One of the most important dates in the history of Tirana is 11 February 1920, when the Congress of Lushnja proclaimed it the capital of Albania.

## Visit Schedule - Kruja

- On the road to the city of Kruja, as you start climbing, you see endless olive trees by both sides.
- Arrival in the city center (around 16:00)
- Visit in the castle (at 16:15)- one of the main medieval castles, panoramic view
- Visit in the Museum (at 17:00) - to know about a very important piece of the Albanian medieval history, see the old weapons and other staff.
- Visit in the old Bazaar (can't be done since now the old Bazaar in under reconstruction process)- here you can find some ancient typical Albanian items, clothes, wooden boxes, carpets, argent items etc.
- Live the city (at 18:30 o'clock)



## Short history

The historic town of Kruja is located 32 km northwest of Tirana. It rises 560 meters above sea level, on the slopes of Sari-Salltiku mountain and provides to the visitors the great view of majestic landscape and a rich collection of historical and cultural objects.



The most important attraction is the castle of Kruja, which was built during the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries and has an elliptical shape with a total area of 2,25 hectares. The surrounding walls are reinforced by nine towers, which served as an observation and signaling post during times of war. Within the walls of the castle there can still be found the remains of a few houses.

Kruja is the place where the Albanian national hero Gjergj Kastrioti known as Skanderbeg fought against Ottomans for 25 years. Kruja under the direction of Skanderbeg defeated the Turkish army lead by the Sultan Mutate II and Mehmet etc. for a quarter of a century. As the British military strategist Wolfe has said Skanderbeg surpassed "all the captains, both ancient and modern, in his ability to lead a small defensive army".

You come into Kruja (pronounced: Kru-yah) passing through age-old olive trees and lime-kilns, with limestone outcrops offering the barest grazing to a few sheep and goats. In the medieval times there was a tradition that each couple before the day of the marriage to plant olive trees on the landscape around the castle. That's why by visiting today the city you can find lots of olive trees around.



"Kruj" means "Spring" and of course there is no shortage of fresh water and air at these cool heights. From the castle you can have a great view of the Albanian landscape up to the Adriatic sea.

## Places to visit:

- The Restored Castle and Citadel
- The Skenderbeg Museum built in the middle of the Castle.
- The Old restored Bazaar near the castle.
- The jewel eighteen-century architecture Bektashi tekke "Dollma" (West of the castle), a shrine of the Bektashi movement, one of the fourth main religions of Albania after the Catholics, the Orthodox, and Muslims.



Views from inside the museum





Views from the old bazaar



Ethnographic museum