Equus Journeys
HORSEBACK TRAVEL & EQUESTRIAN TRADITIONS SINCE 1972

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# Ancient Mountain Trails

**ALBANIA**

On this **trail ride** in the mountains of Albania, follow medieval caravan pathways and plunge into the fascinating Albanian culture and architecture. After days spent riding through mountains in the south of the country, you stay with local families that will welcome you into their homes with a warm smile. This is the ideal **horseback holiday** if you are looking to combine beautiful scenery and the great outdoors, with cultural encounters, and great riding opportunities.

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| **Trail Riding** | **8 days (6 riding)** | **From £1,061** | |

*Ride hardy and sure-footed local horses on this horseback holiday*

*Discover the mountains of Albania in the saddle*

*Enjoy a mountainous, but active trail ride in Albania*

**ITINERARY**

## Highlights

- A pacey ride in spite of the mountainous nature of the terrain.
- Ride hardy Tarpan x Arabian horses. They are small, but brave and sure-footed.
- Discover the culture and heritage of the country, in the heart of the Balkans.
- Experience the friendly welcome of the locals, and stay with local families in the evenings.
- Enjoy the delicious local gastronomy.

## Day 1 — 1 : ARRIVE IN TIRANA - GJIROKASTRA

Your flight to Tirana should ideally land in the morning, and in any case no later than 14:30 to allow time for the transfer and a visit of Gjirokstra with your guides. From the airport the transfer will be by mini-van or off-road car and will take around 3-4 hours (250km).

Quick tip: you can also fly to Corfu and catch the ferry to Saranda, where you will be picked-up. The ferry times can be unpredictable due to local conditions and we advise you arrive a day early.

Your hotel is a short walk from the historical centre of Gjirokastra: you will have the opportunity to visit the town and old Bazaar before dinner. Riders can also visit Enver Hoxha's house, Gjirokastra castle, the church of the Old Bazaar, the mosque of the Baazar and Skenduli house: this is a good glimpse of the traditional life as it is in Gjirokastra!

Dinner will be served at a traditional restaurant, accompanied by your guides. This is a good time to discuss your riding abilities and learn more about the trip before the start of your riding adventure in the morning.

## Day 2 — 2 : Gjirokastra - Santa Triada - Karjan - 4-5 hrs riding

After breakfast at the hotel, you will head to the stables (30 min drive) meet your horse for the week. The first leg of your trail ride takes you through the Albanian countryside, combining rolling hills and valleys, with the occasional stream and River Drino, the “Tree of Life” river. It is the most important water basin in the area and part of ancient pagan beliefs. On your way you will come across the ruins of Santa Triada castle, rebuilt between 1809-1810, standing as a strategic point to control all the caravan itineraries. Stop for picnic lunch just near the village of Erind. After approximately 4-5 hours riding you will reach the traditional medieval village of Karjan. Take a moment to enjoy the churches and old roman bridge, before having a lovely traditional dinner a local family house where you will spend the night. Your guides will head back to Gjirokaster for the evening - it is up to you to make sure the horses are fed and watered in the evening, and again in the morning.

## Day 3 — 3 : Cajupi - Labova - Nderan - 6 hours riding

After breakfast you ride further north to the village of Labova and the valley of Cajupi. Your trail follows the ancient merchant stone road of Zhapa with its beautiful panoramas, taking in the fantastic views over the hills and valleys. Take a break in Labova, famous for its wonderful Church that you will have the opportunity to visit. The next leg of your ride will take you through the mountains: discover its vegetation including mountain tea, oregano, wild rose and other endemic plants like digitalis or 'Dig–Dag' as it is known locally. You follow the mountain path to the valley of Cajupi where you halt for a picnic under the trees. After a nice gallop through Cajupi valley, the trail follows the medieval Caravan pathway with its famous bandit hideout 'Hija e Mallkuar' or 'The Cursed Shadow'. Today's final destination is the village of Nderan, placed in the heart of Zagoria region. You will stay with a Vllah linguistic minority family for two nights. You can learn about the local traditions and lifestyle, and even accompany the family during the milking process and dinner preparation, if you wish.

## Day 4 — 4 : LLiar - Hoshteva - Koncka - Nivan - 5-6 hours riding

Wake up in the countryside, with the perspective of a lovely traditional breakfast waiting for you. You will need the fuel to face today's varied terrain combining hard cliffs, rivers, woods and rolling hills. You will continue riding to the most important horse pathway of the XVII and XVIII century that used to connect the biggest commercial centres in Southern Albania. You will stop for a short break at the water spring of Lliar, before you tackle a challenging downhill route. Your afternoon ride will be punctuated by Byzantine churches and monasteries. You spend the night at the farmer's house again.

## Day 5 — 5 : Pogoni - Hllomo - Polican - 4-5 hours riding

After a tasty country breakfast you ride through a mountain valley, perfectly suited for gallops, passing small remote farms, wild cliffs and many historical monuments off the beaten track. It is like travelling back in time: you will be passing many Byzantine cult monuments, ancient ruins and mythical natural wonders. In the afternoon, after 6 hours of riding, you will reach the centre of the Pogon region and the mountain village of Polican, populated by a Greek minority - you are less than 10 km from the Greek border. In this village you have the chance to explore monuments dated back to the medieval period. Later in the evening your will enjoy local gastronomic delights with Greek flavours.

## Day 6 — 6 : Polican - Lobohova - 5 hours riding

This morning, the trail leads you through demanding but beautiful mountain scenery. Lunch will be at the Church of Labova of the Cross - the oldest church in Albania! Your guide will tell you more about its history. Later in the afternoon you ride to Libohova, a small town nestled at the foot of the Bureto Mountain. The archaeological evidence indicates a very ancient settlement, that reached its zenith in the 17th-century when it became an important commercial crossroads. Overnight in a local family house with delicious local food.

## Day 7 — 7 : Antigonea National Park - Suha - Gjirokastra - 3-4 hours riding

This morning will begin with breakfast in the garden whilst enjoying wonderful views over the valley. Before you begin the ride, enjoy a guided walk through the town. You then set out on horseback through rolling hills, forests and fortified villages to reach the Antigonea National Park. After a relaxing break to enjoy the Park, a short ride brings you back to the stables.

The entire afternoon will be at your leisure, providing time to make preparations for your departure, explore local museums, or indulge in some souvenir shopping. Your farewell dinner will take place in a small restaurant in the old Bazaar. Later in the evening you can have a drink in a popular bar before heading back to your hotel for the night.

## Day 8 — 8 : Gjirokastra - Departure from Tirana

After breakfast at the hotel you will be transferred back to the airport of Tirana. Your flight should depart in the afternoon.

If flying out of Corfu please add an extra day to ensure you have time to make the ferry crossing.

**DATES & PRICES**

| DEPARTURE | RETURN | PRICE WITHOUT FLIGHTS | STATUS |
|---|---|---|---|
| 11/05/2024 | 18/05/2024 | £1,061 | Full |
| 25/05/2024 | 01/06/2024 | £1,061 | Full |
| 08/06/2024 | 15/06/2024 | £1,061 | Full |
| 22/06/2024 | 29/06/2024 | £1,061 | Full |
| 06/07/2024 | 13/07/2024 | £1,061 | Guaranteed departure |
| 03/08/2024 | 10/08/2024 | £1,061 | Full |
| 31/08/2024 | 07/09/2024 | £1,061 | Full |
| 14/09/2024 | 21/09/2024 | £1,061 | Full |
| 28/09/2024 | 05/10/2024 | £1,061 | Full |
| 26/10/2024 | 02/11/2024 | £1,061 | Guaranteed departure |
| 02/11/2024 | 09/11/2024 | £1,061 | Open |
| 09/11/2024 | 16/11/2024 | £1,061 | Open |
| 16/11/2024 | 23/11/2024 | £1,061 | Guaranteed departure |
| 23/11/2024 | 30/11/2024 | £1,061 | Open |

## Price details

• Flights are not included but they can be booked upon request. We can look into the best flight options for you upon request.

• Rates are per person and based on sharing a room (up to 4 beds) in the homes of local hosts.

• Groups are made up of 3-12 riders, with an English-speaking guide.

• Please note: the ride will also confirm for 2 riders on payment of a supplement of c. €158/£140 per person. Once the group has reached 3 people, we will remove this supplement from your invoice and refund you if you have already paid it.

• Return transfers are not included and will be invoiced:

> Tirana airport to Gjirokastra: €90/£80/$100 return per person, 225 km, 3-4 hours. Flights that fit the normal transfer's schedule should be planned to arrive no later than 14:30 pm and departures not earlier than 12:00 noon.
If your flights do not match these transfers, a private transfer can be organised from Tirana airport:
- 1 rider: €140/£120 one way
- 2 riders: €70/£65 one way
- 3+ riders: €55/£50 one way
We cannot organise transfers from the city centre. There is a bus every hour starting from the centre of Tirana (behind the opera palace) to the airport, or you can take a taxi.
> Saranda Port to Gjirokastra: €50/$45/$60 return per person, 64km, 1 hour. Transfers departing from Saranda no later than 15:00. If flying in and out of Corfu, please allow one extra day as ferry schedules can be unpredictable due to local conditions.

• Younger riders are welcome on the trail, as long as they have reasonable levels of fitness and sufficient riding abilities.

• It is not possible to guarantee single rooms during the trail. However, you can guarantee a single room for your first and last nights, spent in hotels, for a €25.00 supplement per night, payable locally.

• The euro is widely accepted in Albania, but please do not bring large sums of money as your holiday is fully inclusive.
Please Note
The itinerary may be modified at anytime for security reasons, meteorological or events beyond our control such as blocked roads, rivers in flood, drought, strikes and local holidays. Equus Journeys, our local partners and their local guides will always strive to find the best solution and will alter the itinerary as needed.

The names of the hotels and accommodation are given for information only and depending on availability, they may be modified without notice and replaced by another of a similar standard.

## Price includes

### SUPPORT TEAM

1 English-speaking horse guide

### LOGISTICS

1 horse equipped with saddle and bridle per rider
1 support vehicle

### ACCOMMODATION

Room in private home on D2, 3, 4, 5 and 6
Room in a standard hotel on D1 and D7

### MEALS

Full board from dinner on day 1 to breakfast on day 8

## Price doesn't include

### TRANSPORT

Return airport transfers, invoiced before you go - see above for details
International flights

### EXTRAS

Tips to the local team
Entry fees to the museums in Gjirokastra
Park, museum and other site entry fees - we recommend bringing some small change as donations to the local churches you will visit during the trail
Visa (if necessary) and personal purchase
Small group supplement - see above for the details

### INSURANCE

Cancellation and travel insurance are not included in the above listed price. Please note that insurance is mandatory. We recommend taking out an insurance policy as soon as your trip is booked to cover you in case of cancellation

## Optional

### ACCOMMODATION

Single room supplement - only applicable on the first and last nights.

**EQUESTRIAN INFO**

## Horses

The horses are a local breed of Tarpan and Arabian horses. They are small but robust, and perfectly suited to the rocky terrain. There are 23 horses in total, well used to long trail rides and the rocky grounds: steady, brave and sure-footed, they make ideal equine companions.

## Guide & local team

Ilir, Aurel and Kristina are specialised in mountainous trail rides. Their objective is to offer a trail combining culture, history, nature, and always in the respect of the horses. They love their country and its history. All trails are accompanied by a lead guide and a back up guide. They speak English, Italian and Greek.

## Minimum riding ability

## MINIMUM RIDING ABILITY

You need to be at least an intermediate rider, capable of riding a sensible horse at all paces in the outdoors and over demanding terrain. A previous experience of a long trail ride is an advantage but not mandatory.

Rider weight limit: 90 kilos, 14st1lbs. This is a strict limit as the horses are small and the terrain is demanding.

## PACE

The pace is varied to include trots, canters and possible gallops in the valleys. Some of the riding is across varied terrain so you need to be secure in the saddle. There are a few steep climbs and you must be able to balance yourself well in the saddle and have a good head for heights. The horses are sure-footed, make sure to trust their judgement!

## TACKING ABILITY AND PARTICIPATION

You will be asked to help look after the horses in the morning, at lunch time and dinner time. Please note that the horses stay in paddocks near your guesthouses while the guides go back to the stables for the night, which means you will be asked to feed the horses in the evening and morning.

You can help groom and tack up although this is not mandatory.

## TRIP CONDITIONS AND REQUESTED EXPERIENCE

You should have previous experience riding outdoors on trails and be confident riding in open spaces. You need to be fit enough for this trail. On some occasions you will be asked to dismount and lead your horse on foot over steep hills and rocky terrain. Some paths are close to the cliffs, please be advised of this should you be known to suffer from vertigo.

The terrain is quite rugged and stony - the horses are well trained, sure-footed and quite used to navigating terrain that would be tricky for most European/Western horses.

## EQUESTRIAN EQUIPMENT

English saddles and bridles.

Personal saddlebags are welcome if riders would like to bring their own. Small saddlebags are provided by the ride but just for food and water.

Helmets are mandatory and you should bring your own.

# TRAVEL INFO

## COMFORT

You will stay in modest homestay accommodation with locals, except for the first and last nights that are spent in hotels. This is a fantastic way to discover the local culture and learn about the country.

Hotel (first and last night): double our triple bedrooms, private WC and showers. Wifi.
Guesthouses: double bedrooms (sometimes up to 3 or 4 beds), shared bathrooms. Your hosts don't necessarily speak English but a little bit of raki and sign language go a long way!

Very limited internet access throughout the ride. A sim card can be purchased in Gjirokaster that will give you internet access, although reception is limited in the mountains.

## MEALS

The local gastronomy is delicious and varied. During the ride, you will enjoy freshly prepared meals that will give you a sample of the Albanian gastronomy.

Hearty country breakfast with local dairy products, honey, pancakes; pies and cakes, eggs, milk, tea and coffee.
Picnic lunches. In the morning you prepare your own lunch according to your taste (bread, cheese, vegetables, eggs...). On some days you will bring your picnic in the saddlebags and on another it will be brought to you by the back up vehicle. On some occasions you may have your lunch at a local small restaurant/cafe.

Dinner is a hot meal prepared by your hosts (veal, pork, chicken, goat or fish), with local wines and raki.

Vegetarian meals and allergies can be accommodated, please contact us with your requirements.

## CLIMATE

This ride takes place in southern Albania which is around 5 degrees warmer than the rest of the country. You will experience different types of weather on the trail; from cooler mountainous air to a warmer climate down on the coast.

The best time to visit Albania is the months of April, May, June and September, with lovely warm weather. July and August are dry and temperatures can be extremely hot, from 25 to 45°C! In October, November and March, there is a chance of rain and temperatures average 10-15°C, with April starting to get warmer.

## TIPS

Tips are left to your discretion and are not mandatory. We recommend around €40/£35 per rider for the week, to be divided between the team.
The local currency is the Lek, but Euro is widely accepted. Don't bring too much money as this trip is fully inclusive.

## PACKING LIST

Head
- Helmets are mandatory and you must bring your own helmet to ensure a correct fit. There are many lightweight options available nowadays.
- Sunglasses - with a cord attached so they don't fly off when riding
- Buff or bandana

Upper body
- Long sleeved shirts provide protection from the sun or branches and are an extra layer
- T-shirts
- Lightweight fleece or jumper
- Warm fleece or jumper (and a spare in case one gets wet)
- Warm and waterproof jacket - it can rain outside July and August and the evenings can be cooler.

Legs
- 2 Lightweight, comfortable riding trousers or jodhpurs - we recommend riding in them at home before taking them on holiday to ensure they don't rub
- Casual trousers for the evenings, such as jeans or tracksuit bottoms
- Bathing suit and towel

Hands and Feet
- Comfortable riding boots. We recommend good hiking boots with half chaps. There might be some walking over steep trails so we don't recommend taking your favourite long leather boots in case they get damaged, and normal riding boots with a smooth sole can be slippery when walking on foot.
- Trainers or equivalent light shoes for the evenings
- Several pairs of socks
- Gloves - your hands are particularly exposed to the sun, cold or rain whilst riding. Waterproof gloves can be particularly useful

Our Recommendations
- Backpacks cannot be worn whilst riding. We recommend a small bumbag or a coat with pockets so that you can carry small items with you during the day (passport, camera, sunscreen, lipbalm etc)
- We recommend travelling in your riding boots and carrying your hat and some riding clothes in your hand luggage - then if your luggage goes astray you are still able to ride!

Other useful items
- Camera and high capacity memory card.
- Bumbag for carrying your camera and small items whilst riding
- Headtorch or small torch for moving around camp at night - bring spare batteries and bulbs
- Water bottle (2 litres or 2 x 1 litre) - plastic bottles are not provided but the team will provide water for you to refill your bottles every day.
- Swiss army knife (or equivalent)
- Small plastic bags for rubbish
- Ear plugs (for light sleepers)

In your hold luggage
- Take any liquids, such as shampoo, moisturiser, deodorant unless they are less than 100ml and all bottles can fit in a small, clear, plastic ziplock bag.

We recommend biodegradable washing products where possible.

In your hand luggage
- Any valuables, such as your camera, ipod, ipad etc.

Medical kit
- Any medication you regularly take
- Sunscreen and lip balm - should be high factor
- Insect repellent, preferably containing deet
- Blister plasters in case of any rubs
- Antiseptic cream, plasters, aspirin, anti-histamine, insect-bite salve etc...
- Spare prescription glasses/contact lenses
- Eye drops
- Imodium or similar anti-diarrhoea medication
- Antiseptic wipes
- Handwash gel

Our Recommendations
- Take a second, smaller bag to pack things you may need during the day such as a book or suncream then you can easily access it during the long lunch break
- We recommend travelling in your riding boots and carrying your hat and some riding clothes in your hand luggage - then if your luggage goes astray you are still able to ride!
- You should also bring a copy of your passport/insurance in case you lose your documents. You can also save a copy into your mobile phone.
- You can bring pictures of your family and small gifts for your host family if you like.

## SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

1. **Travel light.** It's a little known fact, but the lighter you pack, the better for the environment as heavy bags will produce higher emissions (when flying a plane or driving a car!).
2. **Reduce plastic waste.** Take your favorite reusable bottle with you. Avoid single-use bags, cups, or straws.
3. **Preserve nature.** Always take your rubbish with you during the ride and recycle them. Leave all the flowers or plants as you found them, and never get too close when observing wildlife. Make sure to use eco-friendly products such as body wash or laundry detergent (if camping) to protect both your skin and the environment.
4. **Choose your experiences carefully.** Respect animal life by not participating in any activities that abuse wild animals (shows, elephant rides, etc.).
5. **Support local populations.** Buy local handicrafts, be respectful of customs, and learn about the culture of local communities.
6. **Share!** Raise awareness among your family and friends about sustainable tourism.

For more information please see this page .