



TRIP NOTES

BELIEVE ACHIEVE INSPIRE

**CYCLE ALBANIA
ALBANIA**

Fri 30 Sep - Fri 07 Oct 2022





In aid of The Openwork Foundation

30 Sep - 07 Oct 2022



8 DAYS | ALBANIA | CHALLENGING

Transport yourself back in time on this challenge in Albania. Don't be surprised to see people riding donkeys, old aged ladies in black carrying heavy loads of wood and shepherds walking undisturbed with their flocks of sheep as you pass through the countryside.

You will cycle along the beautiful shores of Lake Ohrid, together with soaring mountain peaks and high pastures to the sparkling vistas over the Albanian Riviera. Riding on mostly paved roads with little traffic, some steep and twisting climbs will test you, but the stunning views and swift descents will be your reward.

The climax of the trip will be to pedal up the challenging switchbacks of the Llogora Pass, gaining 1000m, on the slopes of Çika massif standing right above the white beaches of the Ionian Sea. Not only will you challenge yourself, but you will experience the hospitality of the friendly Albanian people.

- Amazing vistas and challenging rides along the stunning Albanian Riviera
- Remote rollercoaster cycling along the Gramoz mountains bordering Greece
- Conquer the heights of the 22km Llogora Pass, between blue seas and mountains
- Pass through pretty, rural villages alongside snow-capped mountains, from high plateaus to golden sandy beaches
- Glimpse traditional rural lifestyles unchanged for generations

YOUR CHALLENGE DAY BY DAY

DAY 1 Fri 30 Sep

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Depart London and fly to Tirana

It's time to say goodbye to friends and family before boarding your flight to Tirana. After a short flight you will be met and transferred to your hotel. If time allows, you will have a short tour around seeing highlights such as Skanderbeg Square, the Et'hem Bey Mosque, and 'Blloku', the once restricted residential district of the communist elite. (D)

Accommodation: Hotel

DAY 2 Sat 01 Oct

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Drive to Lake Ohrid; cycle to Korça (bus transfer 125km; cycle approx. 45km/5 hrs)

This morning you will drive through the valley of Shkumbin and Thana Pass until you reach the shores of Lake Ohrid where the cycling challenge begins. After checking and fitting the bikes, the warm up ride alongside the lake soon ends as you head through the hills to the Korça plateau. Known for its relaxed atmosphere, Korça houses the oldest brewery of Albania! (B,L,D)

Accommodation: Hotel

DAY 3 Sun 02 Oct

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Cycle to Gërmenj (cycle approx. 75km/7-8 hrs)

After breakfast the ride today passes through apple fields and along a roller coaster road beside the Gramoz Mountains. In the afternoon, you'll reach the Barmash Pass which opens to stunning views towards the Gërmenj woods that lie ahead. The final push for today winds through the pine and fir forests until reaching your accommodation. (B,L,D)

Accommodation: Hotel

DAY 4 Mon 03 Oct

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Into the Vjosa Valley (cycle approx. 80km/8hrs; bus transfer 1 hr)

Today starts by cycling across a remote and beautiful plateau and on through a forest of fir until you reach views across the rocky north face of Mount Nemerçka. From here the route descends from Lekovik into the green valley of Vjosa, known as Europe's last wide river despite threats of the construction of hydropower dams. The day's cycling ends on reaching the thermal springs of Benja located next to an ancient Ottoman stone bridge. There may be time to relax and take in the springs. After lunch, you'll transfer by bus to the historic town of Gjirokaster with time to visit the Argjiro fortress on top of the hill and enjoy the sunset over the Lunxheria mountains. (B,L,D)

Accommodation: Hotel

DAY 5 Tue 04 Oct

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Cycle to Butrinti (bus transfer 30km; cycle approx. 70km/8 hrs)

A short transfer by bus this morning takes you to the Muzina Pass where the bikes will be waiting for the cycle downhill towards the coast. The vegetation changes as you get closer to the Mediterranean Sea and after cycling along the vast Butrinti Lagoon, you'll get the first views over the Ionic coast and to Corfu. On reaching the Vivari Channel you will stop for lunch and to visit the UNESCO archaeological park of Butrint. After this cultural stop, you'll continue to the town of Saranda, where you stop for the night. (B,L,D)

Accommodation: Hotel

DAY 6 Wed 05 Oct

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Cycle along the Albanian Riviera (cycle approx. 60km/6-7 hrs)

Your day starts with a short but steep climb out of Saranda and, as you head inland, the road winds through olive groves and on to the village of St Vasil. From here the next section of your journey goes along the spectacular stretch of coast known as the Albanian Riviera. The road stays high above the sea, passing a succession of small villages, olive and citrus terraces until you reach the Bay of Palermo. From here, the final section of the ride takes you to Himara by the sea, your overnight stop. (B,L,D)

Accommodation: Hotel

DAY 7 Thu 06 Oct

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Cycle along the Albanian Riviera (cycle approx. 60km/6-7 hrs)

Leaving Himara behind, the first test of the day is the climb of the Visha Pass, followed by another panoramic section above the coast. After passing through Dhermi, the long and regular switchbacks of the Llogora Pass above the Ionian coast and besides the Cika Mountains make for a spectacular and challenging ride. After a well-deserved rest and lunch, the reward for a tough morning is a long downhill ride towards the bay of Vlora marking the end of your challenge. You'll leave your bikes behind and a bus transfer takes you to the old UNESCO city of Berat to celebrate the end of the day. (B,L,D)

Accommodation: Hotel

DAY 8 Fri 07 Oct

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International departure to UK

Expect to feel proud of your achievements and emotional as you transfer to the airport for your international flight back to London. (B)

NB

B = Breakfast; L = Lunch; D = Dinner

The itinerary is there as a guide and may change due to unusual weather patterns, wildlife movements, the strength of the group, and so on. We will do our very best to keep to the set itinerary; however, we cannot be held responsible for any last minute changes that might occur. In all such circumstances, your expedition leader will have the final say.

HOW TO FUND YOUR CHALLENGE

This page provides you details of the costs of your challenge.
The costs below are per person.

MINIMUM SPONSORSHIP

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Registration fee of £350.00 when you book
Raise a minimum of £2445.00 for your charity.

FLEXI

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Registration fee of £350.00 when you book
Then £350.00 towards challenge costs
(10 weeks before your challenge)
Raise a minimum of £1850.00 for your charity.

WHAT'S INCLUDED

Before you go

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- Sponsorship forms
- Members only benefits and discounts at a wide range of clothing and equipment suppliers including Outdoorhire, Cotswold Outdoor, Runners Needs, Snow + Rock, Water to Go, The Altitude Centre, Sporttape and Nomad & MASTA.
- Support materials (itinerary, kit list, visa information, travel tips, responsible travel policy and guidance)
- Warm up exercise routines
- Access to your own password protected account including support materials and training schedules
- Risk assessment and emergency management planning
- Fundraising advice
- Fitness training notes
- 16 and 20 week trek/bike training schedule
- Access to training weekends (optional and at additional expense)
- Public liability insurance

On your challenge

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- An English speaking first aid trained challenge leader and full local support team
- A donation to a community project in one of the countries in which we operate
- A contribution towards funding the reduction of carbon emissions through Climate Care's portfolio of award winning projects
- Drinking water on challenge days
- International flights to and from the UK (including all known UK air taxes, and fuel surcharges, at the time of costing)
- Three meals a day (unless otherwise stated in the itinerary)
- A Charity Challenge T-Shirt
- Accommodation during the challenge (usually in twin share)
- UK-based 24-hour emergency support line
- Internal transfers (unless otherwise stated in the itinerary)
- Entrance fees to national parks or other places of interest visited on the itinerary
- Full back-up support including first-aid qualified staff and first-aid supplies
- Equipment as per the challenge activity
- Bike

WHAT'S NOT INCLUDED

Before you go

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On your challenge

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- Visa (if required)
- Any covid tests required for entry to any countries or places of interest on your challenge itinerary
- Travel to and from the UK airport of departure
- Vaccinations (please check Trip Notes for requirements)
- Helmet
- Tips
- Departure Tax (if applicable)

THE DETAILS

Fundraising deadlines

You will need to send your sponsorship money to the charity as you raise it. At least 80% of the minimum sponsorship required must be sent to the charity 12 weeks before departure (by 08/07/2022), and the remaining 20% within 4 weeks of completing the challenge (by 04/11/2022). If you have raised the necessary funds, the charity will then pay the balance of your challenge costs. The charity benefits by keeping the remaining sponsorship money and every pound over and above that you raise.

Prices include all known air taxes

We include ALL known air taxes (including fuel) at the time of costing. Many companies do not include air taxes at all, and clients are therefore hit with a surcharge of three or four hundreds of pounds just before departure. Our aim is to provide you with transparent pricing and clear instructions as to what is included in our prices and if applicable what isn't.

Typical group size

The typical group size is 15 - 30 participants

Optional extras

Business class upgrades*
Extensions at end of trip*
Single room supplements*
Travel insurance
(*subject to availability)

Travel insurance

Your safety when travelling with Charity Challenge is our main concern, which is why it is a booking condition that you have a suitable travel insurance policy, which covers you for the adventurous nature of your challenge, the activities you are undertaking, and the altitudes. We have chosen to partner with specialist travel insurance providers Campbell Irvine, who offer cover for an extensive number of adventurous activities. Cover is available directly from Campbell Irvine for most European residents and includes cover for emergency medical and repatriation and for your cancellation or curtailment of the challenge. Full details including costs may be found at <https://www.campbellirvine.com/charitychallenge>.

Level of difficulty

Challenging: A “challenging” trip will test someone who is relatively fit, confident on a bike and has a spirit of adventure. A “challenging” cycling trip will involve undulating terrain, uneven ground and, at times, steady inclines.

You can tell your supporters that on your Cycle Albania Challenge you will be:

- Cycling for around 6-8 hours per day, covering approximately 400kms over 6 days
- Riding over high passes, through winding olive groves and the roller coaster road beside the Gramoz mountains
- Taking on the switchbacks of the Llogara Pass, a 22km uphill cycle!

Typical day

You will wake early, have breakfast and pack your daypack for the day. Cycling days will last between 5-8 hours, including breaks and snacks. You should arrive at your accommodation each day in time to relax before having dinner.

Safety

Charity Challenge considers the safety of all of our participants and staff to be a top priority, and as such we have set up Challenge Safe, an advanced and thorough safety management system. Challenge Safe formalises our ethos when it comes to safety, and brings together the procedures and risk management strategies that we use to audit all aspects of our challenges, from vehicles to accommodation to the challenge activity itself. Your welfare is absolutely paramount.

In terms of your Albania challenge, there are a couple of important points that you should be aware of:

- You will take on some steep descents on tough terrain, which will require a lot of concentration
- At times, the cycling route is exposed and on sunny days the temperatures can be quite high. You should make sure you wear sun cream and keep hydrated. A cap with a peak may be useful (so it can be worn under a helmet).
- Your challenge will see you cycling on back-country tracks to sections of busier roads. Your leader will brief you fully before each day.

Responsible Tourism

At Charity Challenge we are committed to sustainable and responsible tourism, and work closely with bodies such as the International Porter Protection Group and Climate Care to ensure that our challenges benefit the local environments and communities in which they take place. We ensure that all rubbish is disposed of responsibly, and following local guidelines on cultural and environmental protection and respect, we aim to limit our impact on the natural environment. In addition to taking these practical steps to ensure that our challenges are sustainable, we also make a contribution each year to a number of local community projects, so as to give something back directly to the communities that we visit. Since 2000 we have donated almost £200,000 to such projects, supporting a range of initiatives, including schooling for children in Africa, shelter for street children in Brazil, and Orang-utan conservation in Indonesia. We recommend that any gifts brought over for children are given to the UK challenge leader and distributed where needed by them and our local Ground Agent. If you wish to do more, you should consider buying drinks, postcards and souvenirs from the local vendors. For many, it is their sole source of income. For more information, please visit our Responsible Tourism pages, where you will be able to view a list of the projects that we currently support.

Flights

You will be flying from London to Tirana and returning via the same route. Your flight tickets will be e-mailed to you before departure.

If you choose to book your own flights you must confirm with the Charity Challenge office before paying otherwise you may be liable for your included group flights (please contact flights@charitychallenge.com for further assistance). Your flight info can also be found in your Account Area under 'Flights' once they have been confirmed.

Visa

You need a valid passport to fly from London to Tirana. For UK passport holders, you don't need a visa for trips of 90 days or less. Your passport must be valid for a full six months from your date of entry into Albania. Non UK passport holders should consult their nearest Albanian embassy regarding visa requirements.

Vaccinations & Medicines

For up to date vaccination information please check the Travel Health Pro page:

https://travelhealthpro.org.uk/country/2/albania#Vaccine_recommendations

The Charity Challenge team are not medical experts and we would encourage you to visit your doctor or travel nurse to discuss vaccination requirements. Your doctor may ask questions about the specific locations that you are visiting, and as such it may be useful to take a copy of your itinerary with you.

Medication

- Carry medicines (including those bought over the counter) in their correctly labelled original packaging, as issued by the pharmacist. These should be carried in your hand luggage.
- Consider packing a spare supply of medication in the hold luggage in case of loss of hand luggage
- A letter from the prescriber detailing the medicines with the generic names for the medications can be helpful for border control checks, and in case medicines have to be replaced or medical help is required
- Carry a note from the prescribing physician on letterhead stationery for controlled substances and injection medications
- Take out an appropriate level of travel health insurance including repatriation and specific cover for any pre-existing illnesses

N.B. Some medications are banned abroad so please check. You can find further information at

<https://travelhealthpro.org.uk/factsheet/43/medicines-abroad>

Climate & Terrain

Climate

Albania has a Mediterranean climate with hot, dry summers and cool, wet winters. To avoid the heat of the summer, we run this cycling holiday in May and early October – either side of the hot summer months. Rain is a possibility either side of the hot summer months, but the pleasant daytime temperatures make it the best time to cycle in Albania. The

daytime temperatures during the challenges should be between 20C – 26C, falling at night to 10C – 15C. Away from the coast and in the hills, it will be around 2-3 degrees lower than this.

Terrain

Most of the cycling is on tarmac roads but some sections of the road may be in a poor condition. The terrain is undulating with some long, but gradual climbs and fast descents. Throughout the route we try to use quiet roads where possible, but on occasions we may need to pass by busy sections to reach the quieter roads. A support vehicle accompanies the rides throughout the trip so if there are sections that you are struggling with, the vehicle will stop and assist.

Training

To help build your fitness and stamina, we offer superb training weekends across various locations in the UK, from Saturday morning to Sunday afternoon. These training weekends help you become physically prepared for the challenge. Our experienced instructors and leaders will also talk you through your clothing and equipment, health and wellbeing, trekking skills and teamwork. The weekends are great ways for you to get out into the mountains of the UK, while also meeting other Charity Challengers and sharing your experiences. To read more about our training weekends, including dates and prices, check out the information in your online account area. (Please note: these training weekends are not cycling weekends.)

Challenge Training

If you would like to get a feel for our challenges ahead of your departure, why not consider booking on a 1 or 2 day UK Challenge?

We have a variety of challenges, covering all levels of difficulty, taking place in stunning National Parks across the UK that are led by highly qualified and experienced expedition and mountain leaders. These challenges will give you the perfect opportunity to monitor fitness levels, test out your kit, meet people in the great outdoors, share fundraising stories and gain valuable advice and support for the challenge ahead. We encourage participants to make use of our highly knowledgeable leaders and ask them any questions you may have about clothing and equipment, expedition health and wellbeing, trekking skills, walking techniques and teamwork!

We are offering all participants **50% off** the registration fee when you book on one of the UK challenges listed via the link below. Just use the code **TRAINING** when booking. T&C's – you must have an active booking on a challenge to avail of this offer. Discount cannot be used in conjunction with any other offer. Find out more [here](#)

Insurance

Your safety when travelling with Charity Challenges is our main concern which is why it is a booking condition that you have a suitable travel insurance policy that will cover you for the adventurous nature of your challenge. We have chosen to partner with specialist travel insurance providers Campbell Irvine, who offer cover for an extensive number of adventurous activities. Cover is available directly from Campbell Irvine for most European residents and includes cover for emergency medical and repatriation and for your cancellation or curtailment of the challenge. Full details including costs may be found by clicking [here](#).

For more travel insurance questions, please refer to our main [FAQs](#) page or for any specific queries, please contact us at bookings@charitychallenge.com.

Luggage allowance & valuables

Try to keep luggage to an absolute minimum – details of what to pack are provided in your kit list. Your rucksack/holdall (suitcases are not appropriate) must not exceed the maximum weight limit of the airline you are flying with (usually 20kg, however do check this with the airline or contact our flights team if in doubt).

Each day when you begin to ride, your personal kit will be transported to the next hotel/guesthouse. You will only need to have a handle bar bag or bum bag with you during the day and you will be able to access your day pack at rest stops.

While we will do everything to provide adequate safety for the group and security for your possessions, the general rule is that if you don't need it, don't bring it. This includes jewellery, necklaces, rings and even watches. Your passport and money should be kept on you at all times.

Leadership

There will be an English-speaking challenge leader who will be responsible for the logistics and co-ordination of your challenge. There will also be numerous local support guides and staff to assist them. The challenge leader will be ultimately responsible for the running of the itinerary and the safety of your group.

Group size

The typical group size is 15 - 30 participants

Clothing & equipment

Good quality, durable kit could mean the difference between a fantastic challenge experience and an uncomfortable one. For your cycle challenge, padded cycling shorts and comfortable footwear are essential, and helmets are compulsory throughout. Training with your cycling shorts is definitely advised! You can bring equipment like clip-in pedals or a gel seat, if desired, in order to adapt your bike in country, and we would also recommend technical/wicking t-shirts rather than cotton shirts. A full kit list for this challenge can be found [here](#) and once you book you will have access to kit discounts with our partners Cotswold Outdoor, Cycle Surgery, Snow and Rock, and Runners Need.

What are the bikes like?

The bikes are good quality 24 gear specialised Crosstrail or Ariel hybrid bikes with front suspension. All bikes have a water bottle holder included as well as the facility to fit your own pedals or saddle if you wish to bring them. A support vehicle accompanies the rides throughout the trip. Please let us know your height at the time of booking so that we can pre-book the appropriate bike for your challenge in advance. Please make sure you bring your own helmet!

What if I can't keep up?

The event is not run as a race and there is always a large discrepancy in people's cycling abilities. This is allowed for. As much as possible, we will try and ensure that the group does not spread out too much, however there will be a staff member and support vehicle at the back of the group at all times to ensure that you are not left behind and can take things at your own pace. All crew will carry radios and communication between guides and drivers. If we find somebody is unable to cycle at all, then we can transport them from one location to the next.

Accommodation & toilets

Accommodation

On this cycle challenge, the hotels offer a good level of service often with other amenities such as a restaurant, bar, garden or swimming pool. Generally rooms will be comfortable with en-suite facilities. If you are travelling with a friend or partner who you wish to share with, please ensure that you note this where appropriate when booking or email challenges@charitychallenge.com

Single rooms can be arranged for a supplement but please note that this may not be possible on the 3rd night of the challenge due to limited space at the guesthouse.

Toilets

These range from basic during the cycling route to normal western standards in the accommodation. Remember to bring some toilet paper with you as it may be difficult to find during your cycling day.

Food & drink

The food will be very filling and nutritious. Breakfast will consist of eggs, ham, cheese, jam or honey and tea/coffee. Lunches are picnics with meat, cheese, fresh vegetables and fruit, chocolate or cookies. Dinner will be three courses: soup followed by a main course and dessert. Plenty of drinking water will be available to keep you hydrated. You may want to bring some extra snacks, such as cereal bars, nutrigains, dried fruits etc. You can buy extra food or alcohol at the hotels/guesthouses if you wish.

Whilst we can cater for vegetarians, with a limited choice, it may be more difficult to cater for special diets. The local team are very good at trying to accommodate different dietary requirements but a vegan and gluten free diet will be difficult to cater for. It may be necessary to supplement your diet with food products that you are used to eating as well as snacks from home. Please let Charity Challenge know prior to departure if you have any specific dietary requirements or allergies.

Money

Currency: The national currency is the Albanian Lek. For up to date currency exchange, go to www.xe.com.

Cash: There are ATMs available at Tirana airport and in the larger towns. For travel around the country it is a good idea to carry cash.

Credit cards: ATMs are generally OK. Visa, MasterCard and American Express are the most widely accepted and may be used at cash points. In smaller towns, banks do not necessarily have cash points. Credit cards can be used to purchase goods and services in some shops, hotel and restaurants in Albania.

Spending money: You will not need a large amount of money during this trip. Albanian Lek can't be exchanged outside the country, so exchange them or spend them before you leave. Although the Euro is widely accepted; you'll get a better deal for things in general if you use Lek. Approximately £100 should be sufficient but please take more if you plan to extend your stay or shop a lot!

Tips: Tipping is personal and at your sole discretion. You should only tip if you feel that you have received good service. We recommend approx. EUR40 per person and this should be given to the challenge leader at the end of the challenge who will distribute it amongst the local support team. In bars and restaurants tips are very common and are about 10% of the total bill.

Phone & Wi-fi

Most of the accommodation you are in will have limited Wi-Fi which you will be able to use, but please do not rely upon this. You will have phone signal in almost all places on the challenge. Please remember that Albania is NOT in the EU so the EU Roaming Regulations do not apply and you will be charged when using your mobile data.

Emergencies

The event is not run as a race and there is always a large discrepancy in people's cycling abilities. This is allowed for. There will be a staff member at the back of the group at all times to ensure that you are not left behind and can take things at your own pace. In the event of an emergency, all guides and leaders are maintaining contact via radio, and the backup vehicle will not be far away. If somebody is unable to cycle at all, then the guides will arrange evacuation to a vehicle.

Pre-Existing Medical Conditions

We do not professionally vet your medical details. Please assess for yourself whether you are fit and able to take on the challenge. Please review the detailed Trip Notes and itinerary to get a better idea of what is involved. Please speak to your doctor or specialist if you have any concerns about taking part. If you suffer from a severe allergy, you are required to contact us to discuss any requirements. If you think that there are things we can do to make the challenge more accessible/comfortable for you, it is your responsibility to let us know, and we will then let you know if we can accommodate your request. Whilst we will do our best to put in place appropriate measures we cannot guarantee that this will be possible.

Medical Support

First Aid qualified staff will be provided with the medical details that you give on your booking form but please note that they are on the challenge to support with medical matters related to the challenge environment and terrain itself, i.e. heat/cold, high altitude and so on. They will deal with any incidents and accidents (cuts, sprains, breaks and so on).

They are not intended to continue any ongoing specialist medical care that you receive in the UK for pre-existing medical conditions, and should not be assumed to have any professional experience of your specific medical condition.

If you have any specific needs around pre-existing medical conditions, you should discuss with your family doctor or specialist in advance and can discuss any advice given by them with the challenge leader or doctor.

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Any more questions?

Contact us:

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www.charitychallenge.com

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twitter.com/charitychall

