

CH>RITY
CH>LLENGE



TRIP NOTES

**BELIEVE
ACHIEVE
INSPIRE**

**TREK THE ACCURSED ALBANIAN
ALPS
ALBANIA**

Fri 15 Sep - Fri 22 Sep 2023





In aid of your choice of charity

15 Sep - 22 Sep 2023

8 DAYS | ALBANIA & MONTENEGRO | TOUGH

Albania is a country with unspoiled landscapes and a traditional way of life. This little visited corner of Europe offers both astonishing beauty and wonderful hospitality. The spectacular Accursed Mountains are virtually impenetrable apart from a series of high passes that link remote communities to the outside world.

Following some ancient paths, you will hike in the south west of Montenegro and encounter some breath-taking landscapes with views of mount Taljanka and mount Volušnica, as well as the majestic Karanfili peaks.

From the remote village of Thethi in the heart of the Albanian Alps, you'll head over the spectacular Valbona Pass and down into the Valbona valley. Your final challenge will be to conquer Zla Kolata, Montenegro's highest mountain (2,534m) before you can finally celebrate your achievements with a boat trip on Lake Koman.

- Traverse lush green valleys, wildflower meadows and craggy passes in Albania and Montenegro
- Hike to the remote valley of Theth in the heart of the Albanian Alps
- Take in the spectacular scenery of the Accursed Mountain Ranges
- Cross the jagged heights of the Valbona Pass
- Encounter a traditional way of life in remote villages

YOUR CHALLENGE DAY BY DAY

DAY 1 Fri 15 Sep

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International flight to Tirana; drive to Shkodër

After meeting your fellow challengers at the airport, a short flight takes you to Tirana, Albania, where you will meet the local challenge team and then drive directly to Shkodër, the oldest and largest town of Northern Albania. Overnight in a hotel close to the centre of town, with your first group dinner in the lively pedestrian area. (D)

Accommodation: Hotel

DAY 2 Sat 16 Sep

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The highlands of Kelmend; from Vermosh to Lëpushë (approx. 6 hrs)

This morning, your trek begins after a short transfer to Vermosh, the most northern village of Albania. Winding your way on a forest trail eventually leads to the high meadows of Zabeli, before reaching the Peak of Grebenit (1,840m) from where there are great views of Mount Trojan (2,194m) and the jagged silhouette of the Accursed Mountains. After a picnic lunch, the hike continues through a beech forest until you reach the Pass of Berdolec, marking the entrance of Lëpushë village and your overnight stop. There should be time to explore this beautiful alpine village in the late afternoon before dinner at your guesthouse. (B,L,D)

Accommodation: Guesthouse

DAY 3 Sun 17 Sep

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Into Grebaje Valley via the Taljanka Peak (approx. 7 hrs)

Leaving behind the last houses of the village, the trail climbs through the meadow of Dobku to a ridge leading to the peak of Taljanka and into Montenegro. At Volusnica, you'll find the perfect spot to have a picnic looking out over the Grebaje Valley and towering peaks of the Karanfil massif. After descending to the bottom of the valley, a short transfer takes you to the shores of Lake Plav and to your hotel. (B,L,D)

Accommodation: Hotel

DAY 4 Mon 18 Sep

-

On foot from Montenegro to Albania, "Peja" Pass (approx. 6-8 hrs)

A short transfer after breakfast to the village of Vuthaj, sees the start of a long hike to reach the Valley of Theth in the heart of the Albanian Alps. Your luggage will be loaded on to horses who will accompany you on the trail. Climbing slowly out of the valley of Ropojana, the trail ascends on a steep path after the alpine lake of Gjeshtar until you reach the rocky plateau of Runica. Here the spectacular peaks of the Karanfil Mountains as well as the Albanian Alps tower above you. At Peja Pass (1,730m) you'll stop for lunch with views over the Valley of Theth, before starting your way down and back into Albania. The trail winds beside the rocky dome of Harapi Peak (2,216m) which dominates the end of the valley and leads you to Theth, your overnight stop. (B,L,D)

Accommodation: Guesthouse

DAY 5 Tue 19 Sep

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The Valbona Pass (approx. 8 hrs)

Loading your luggage on to the horses again, you'll leave the Valley of Theth behind and climb towards Valbona Pass to reach the next valley, the Valbona valley. The scenery changes many times from rocky mountain paths to green pastures, winding through beech woods and grassy meadows to scree on the higher sections. Once at the pass, on a clear day, the highest peaks of the Albanian Alps can be seen such as Jezerca, 2,694m and Radohimës, 2,570m. At one point you can look out over the Valbona valley on one side and the Theth valley on the other. From here the path winds downhill towards Valbona and a forest trail leads to the village of Rrogam at the bottom of the valley. (B,L,D)

Accommodation: Guesthouse

DAY 6 Wed 20 Sep

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Cerem Circuit (approx. 7 hrs)

After a transfer from Valbona to the remote village of Cerem at 1,220m, the trek heads off through beech forests opening now and again into flower meadows. The forest path ascends increasingly until, leaving the shade, it leads onto the high summer pastures. A tiny seasonal community live here at Stani Sqiapices, grazing their livestock during the warmer months. The climb continues ending more steeply in a rocky gully to reach the border with Montenegro at the Bori Pass at 1,850m. At the pass, enjoy a lunch stop with far reaching and spectacular views to the Karanfili Mountain Range. Following the break, a series of switchbacks through shrubland and pine trees climbs further to contour around the hillside below another small and friendly summer settlement. Trekking across the ridgeline provides an expansive panoramic view of Plav in the distance before descending over easy ground onto a vast grassy mountain slope revealing miles of alpine splendor back into Albania. The long descent to Cerem runs through ancient forests. Your challenge ends at a rustic hut with the Albanian flag flying high above. A 4WD track from here allows a transfer to return you to Valbona to celebrate your achievement. (B,L,D)

Accommodation: Guesthouse

DAY 7 Thu 21 Sep

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Shala Canyon

Today is relaxing and well-earned and a short transfer will take you to the docks of Fierza, from where a spectacular boat ride through the canyon of Lake Koman will follow. During the ride, you'll reach the Canyon of Shala, an amazing secluded haven of pure nature, where you'll have the opportunity to swim and have lunch. Later on, after reaching the docks of Koman, you'll continue your transfer towards Tirana, for your celebration dinner. (B,L,D)

Accommodation: Hotel

DAY 8 Fri 22 Sep

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Transfer to airport; flight to London

This morning it is time to say goodbye to Albania as well as new found friends and trekking partners. A transfer will take you back to Tirana airport for your flight back to the UK. (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.

SELF FUNDER

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Pay a registration fee of £295.00 when you book
Then a balance of £1029.00 (10 weeks before your challenge)
Raise as much as you can for your charity.

MINIMUM SPONSORSHIP

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Registration fee of £295.00 when you book
Raise a minimum of £2100.00 for your charity.

FLEXI

-

Registration fee of £295.00 when you book
Then £295.00 towards challenge costs (10 weeks before your challenge)
Raise a minimum of £1495.00 for your charity.

You will be invoiced for the air tax and fuel element contribution for your international flights, capped at £75.00, which is due 10 weeks before departure.

WHAT'S INCLUDED

Before you go

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- 12.5% off Cotswold Outdoor, Snow + Rock, and Runners Need
- Sponsorship forms
- Support materials (itinerary, kit list, visa information, travel tips, responsible travel policy and guidance)
- Warm up exercise routines
- Risk assessment and emergency management planning
- Public liability insurance
- Fundraising advice
- 16 and 20 week trek/bike training schedule
- Access to training weekends (optional and at additional expense)
- Access to your own password protected account including support materials and training schedules
- Fitness training notes

On your challenge

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

WHAT'S NOT INCLUDED

Before you go

On your challenge

- - Any covid tests required for entry to any countries or places of interest on your challenge itinerary
 - Visa (if required)
 - Travel to and from the UK airport of departure
 - Vaccinations (please check Trip Notes for requirements)
- - Contribution towards air taxes and fuel element (please see the section below on "Air Tax and Fuel Element Contribution")
 - 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 23/06/2023), and the remaining 20% within 4 weeks of completing the challenge (by 20/10/2023). 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.

Air tax and fuel element contribution

The air taxes, and fuel element, that make up part of the flight costs can fluctuate significantly before a challenge takes place. As such, we exclude part of these taxes from the initial cost of the challenge and we will invoice you for it 10 weeks before departure. This applies to all participants on all payment options. For the challenge you are booked on this payment will be capped at £75 and we will absorb any amount above that. Please be sure to factor this cost into your budgeting for the challenge.

Typical group size

The typical group size is 14 - 30 participants

Small group supplement

The costs and sponsorship levels on our website are based on a minimum of 14 participants. We can run this trip with 10-13 people, but there will be a small group supplement of £75. This is payable by your charity if you book under the Minimum Sponsorship or Flexi options, and by yourself if you choose the Self Funder option. We will notify you 12 weeks before departure if this is necessary.

Optional extras

Extensions at end of trip*
Single room supplements*
Travel insurance
Business class upgrades*
(*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 <http://www.campbellirvinedirect.com/charitychallenge>.

Level of difficulty

This trek is graded as tough. This is a challenge for someone who who has some experience with regular trekking and who wants to take that to the next level.

You can tell your supporters that on your Trek the Accursed Albanian Alps Challenge you will be:

- Trekking for around 5-8 hours per day.
- Reaching the summit of Zla Kollata, Montenegro's highest mountain, 2,534m
- Traversing the Valbona Pass

Typical day

You will wake early in time for breakfast and prepare your rucksack for the day ahead. Hiking will start around 0830hrs. The number of hours spent hiking will depend on the size and ability of the group. There will be plenty of refreshment stops, and visits to places of natural beauty and interest. In the evening you will have dinner at your hotel or guesthouse.

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:

- Most of the walks are on well-defined footpaths, mountain trails and some dirt tracks. There may be some steep ascents and descents and you should be confident dealing with heights.
- The weather conditions in the mountains can be changeable. Make sure you carry an additional warm layer, waterproof jacket.
- Ensure that you keep yourself hydrated by drinking lots of fluids.

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. The daytime temperatures during the challenges should be between 25C – 28C, falling at night to 12C – 15C. Higher up, the conditions may be cooler and wet and rainy weather cannot be ruled out at any time of the year in the mountains.

Terrain

Most of the walks are on well-defined footpaths, mountain trails and some dirt tracks. The terrain can be very rocky and slippery in parts with some gravel slopes.

Training

The ideal training for this challenge is, naturally, hill walking. However, if you do not have the luxury of living near the hills, then the stairs at home (or an office block) are a great place to start. Most training should be part of an ongoing lifestyle, but if this is not the case then you should begin training 2-4 months prior to the challenge and gradually build up as suggested. Remember to use the walking boots that you will be wearing on the challenge in order to get them worn in, and take the daysack that you will be using during the challenge.

There is no substitute for walking in the hills so try if possible to get out on a weekend and train in an area with steep hills. You should progress to training with your boots on from week 4 at the latest, but preferably from week 1. The more you exercise before the expedition, the more you will get out of it. Also see your Charity Challenge [Fitness Training](#) notes

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). During the challenge your bags will be transported by vehicle as well as pack horse. You will not have to carry your main pack.

Whilst 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

Each group is intended to be 14 people minimum in order to run and a maximum of approx. 30 people. We will be able to run this challenge for 10 to 13 people by charging a small group supplement of £75 which will be added to your final balance invoice (self funders) or charged to your charity (minimum sponsorship or flexi).

Clothing & equipment

Good quality, durable kit could mean the difference between a fantastic challenge experience and an uncomfortable one. For this challenge, waterproof, well-worn in boots will be indispensable, particularly coupled with some really good quality walking socks. You don't need a clean pair every day, but enough to make sure you have dry socks each morning. The benefits of a comfortable day sack cannot be underestimated, so make sure that you train with this. Other essentials are high quality gore-tex waterproof and windproof jackets and trousers, and technical/wicking t-shirts rather than cotton shirts. Walking poles are also recommended, as a preventative as well as for anyone with any pre-existing leg injuries or niggles. 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.

Accommodation & toilets

Accommodation

On this challenge you will spend 3 nights in hotels and 4 nights in guesthouses.

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. Whilst in the guesthouses there will be 3-4 people in each room and each room has 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

Toilets

These range from basic during the trek to normal western standards in the accommodation. Remember to bring some toilet paper with you as it may be difficult to find during your trekking 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 very difficult to cater for, especially during the trekking section of this challenge. If you have a vegan or gluten free diet, please contact Charity Challenge prior to booking to discuss.

Money

Currency: The national currency is the Albanian Lek. For up to date currency exchange, go to www.xe.com. Euros are also widely used throughout Albania.

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. Euros are widely used throughout the country. 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 walking ability. 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. If we find somebody is unable to walk at all, then we can transport him or her from one location to the next with the help of our staff. Throughout the challenge, back-up support will be close by.

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 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.

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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