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Albanian Architecture: A Hidden Gem

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But the former Communist state has some of the best architecture in Europe.

The nation's vast array of architecture reflects its long and proud history. Invaded by the Romans and held by the Byzantines until the 7th Century invasion by Bulgaria, parts of it passed hands on to Serbia and in 1271, Albania was an independent kingdom.

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Albania, like most of Eastern Europe, fell to Communism under the brutal rule of Enver Hoxha and Ramiz Alia until 1991.

All the different influences on the country have left an impression on the nation.



The historic towns of Berat and Gjirokastra are designated as World Heritage Sites by UNESCO.

Berat, which has several stunning hills in the background, is representative of the religious mix of Albania: you will find churches from the 1300s bustling with mosques from the 1400s.

The town has just 60,000 residents and is full of picturesque white homes and Berat Castle, dating back to the 5th Century and possessing a majestic medieval citadel.



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The ancient towns of Butrint and Durrës both possess a theatre and an amphitheatre from Roman times.

Carved into mountainous rock, Durrës's amphitheatre has been threatened by recent housing developments, though the Municipal Government led by Vangjush Dako is planning to remove these houses. It also contains many beautiful mosaics, although some are in need for restoration work.

Butrint, known as Buthrotum in Roman times, close to the Greek border in the south-east also is home to a Basilica, dating back to the 5th Century, the



early Christian building the largest church in the country and the entire region.

In the north west, the town of Shkodër is home to the Buşatlı Mehmet Pasha Mosque also known as The Lead Mosque.



It is based on a typical Istanbul mosque reflecting Albania's Ottoman era. This is fairly rare as most Albanian mosques are designed in Arabic style.

Many mosques were destroyed under Communist rule due to Hoxha's policy of state atheism. The Lead Mosque was able to survive due to its cultural significance, but was still closed between 1967 and 1990.

All the stones used in construction are almost the same size, making it look spectacular.





Lots of new buildings were constructed throughout the Communist era. Massive new town squares were re-designed, not too dissimilar to those found throughout nations on the other side of the Iron Curtain. This includes the capital city, Tirana's main plaza: Skanderbeg Square.

With the National Historical Museum close by, the square used to contain statues of Hoxha and Joseph Stalin. The former was removed and the later was replaced by the Skanderbeg Monument in 1968. A 36 feet long bronze statue, inaugurated on the 500th anniversary of his death.

Designed by Odhise Paskali, Andrea Mano and Janaq Paço the statue towers over the square and is an apt reminder of the man who perhaps embodies Albania's patriotic and warriorlike spirit better than anyone else, leading a 25-year long rebellion against Ottoman rule.

In the rebellion, he returned to Christianity after converting to Islam and fighting for the Ottomans. He raised a red flag with a black double headed eagle, still to this day the Albanian flag.

An addition to the wide array of architecture, Albania is a diverse nation with both mountains and beaches. There's also museums exhibiting artefacts from throughout the nation's long history.

All this makes Albania a holiday destination to consider.

Read our [Top Destinations 2017 guide to Albania here](#).

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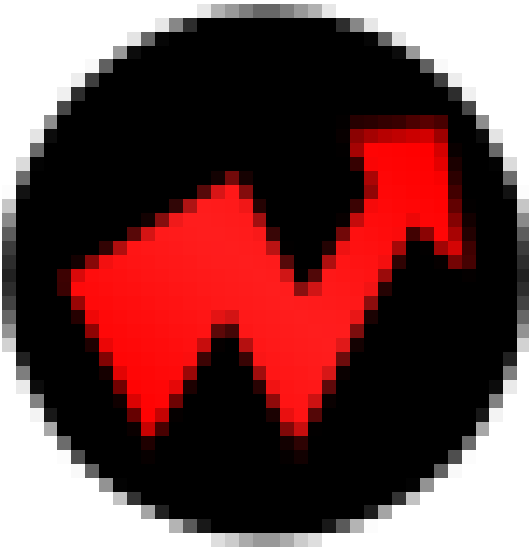
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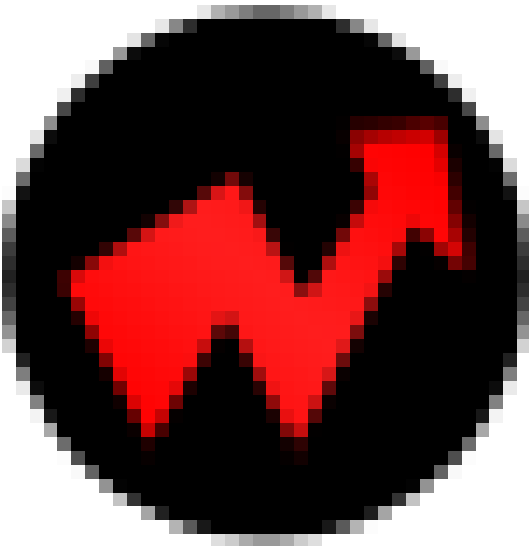


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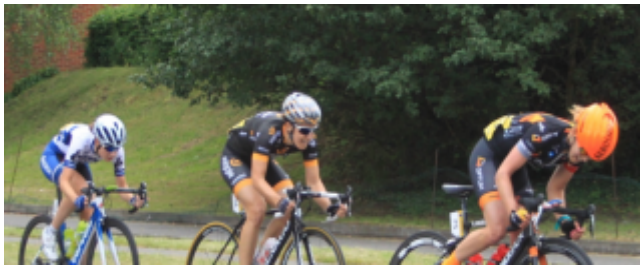
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