

ALBANIA

Three Cities: Tirana, Durres, and Kruje

Presentation by Paul Pacter

www.PaulVisits.com



Flag of Albania: Double-headed eagle

- In Albanian, the name of the country is Shqipëria.
- Which means "land of the eagles".

Albania Facts – 1

- **Area:** 11,100 square miles (about the size of Maryland).
- **Population:** 2,400,000 (2023 census). Declining annually since 1989 (emigration).
- **Median age:** 33.
- **Literacy:** 98% (men and women same).

Albania Facts – 2

- **Capital:** Tirana.
- **Language:** Albanian.
- **National Holiday:** Nov 28 – celebrate independence from Ottoman Empire Nov 28, 1912.
- **Drive:** Right.
- **Visa needed by Americans?** No.

Albania Facts – 3

- **Government:** Parliamentary constitutional republic.
- **National government has all powers** except those expressly given to localities.
- **Unicameral Parliament ("Assembly"):** 140 elected members.
- **President:** Bajram Begaj (since 2022). Elected by Assembly. 5-year term. Largely ceremonial.
- **Prime Minister:** Nominated by Assembly majority party. Appointed by President.

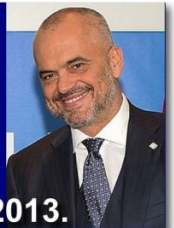


Edi Rama Socialist Prime Minister of Albania since 2013

- Mayor of Tirana 2000-2011.
- Leader of Opposition 2005-2013.

Policies:

- End corruption in court system.
- Less government spending.
- Public safety.
- Stop drug trafficking: Nearly a third of GDP in 2017.



Albania Facts – 4

- **Ethnic groups:** Sensitive issue. Government says 97% are Albanian. Minorities (Greeks, Macedonians, Serbs etc) say they are about 15%.
- **Religion:**
 - Muslim: 59%.
 - Roman Catholic: 10%.
 - Orthodox: 7%.
 - Others or none: 26%.

1967-1990: All religion is outlawed. All 2,169 churches and mosques closed!

Albania Facts – 5

- **Economy:** #1 is Agriculture – employs 41% of population. Fruit, vegetables, dairy, meat.
- **Currency:** Lek 94 = US\$1. *Euro widely accepted*
- **Unemployment:**
 - Overall 14%.
 - Youth (17-24): 40%.



Albania Facts – 6

- **EU Membership:** No, but is a candidate since 2014.
- **NATO membership:** Yes since 2009.
- **Location:** Balkan Peninsula.
- **Albania's largest trading partners:** Italy, Greece, China, Spain, Kosovo, and the United States.

Albania History - 1

- 167 BC to 395 AD: Roman.
- 395 to 1100s: Byzantine (eastern Roman). Christianity.
- 1200s-1400s: Independent kingdom. Christianity.
- 1480-1912: Ruled by Ottoman Empire. Islam.

Albania History - 2

- 1912 Independence from the Ottoman Empire. Became Principality of Albania.
- 1925 Albanian Republic (1st republic).
- 1928 Albanian Kingdom.
- 1939 Italy invaded Albania. King of Italy rules until 1945.

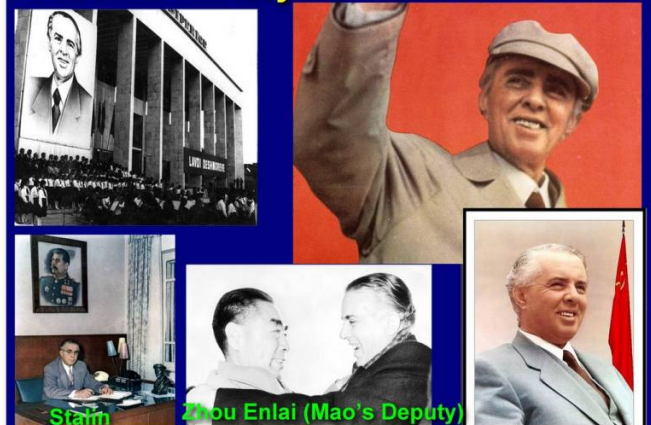
Albania History - 3

- 1946 People's Republic of Albania (2nd republic). Aligned with Soviet Union. Monarchy annulled.
- 1946 to 1985 Enver Hoxha led Albania as Communist Party First Secretary and head of state. At times also foreign minister and defense minister.

Albania History - 4 Enver Hoxha



Albania History - 5 Enver Hoxha



Fall of Communism. Dec 11, 1990 Hoxha statue toppled in Tirana's main square.



The Guardian story about Hoxha June 28, 2019:

"He had most of his close associates from the early years shot, and also had thousands of real and imagined political enemies among the rest of the population executed, imprisoned or exiled."

"There is still no proper monument in Tirana to Hoxha's victims."

Albania History - 7

Enver Hoxha - Positives:

- Rebuilt economy in ruins after WW2.
- Raised literacy from 5% to 98%.
- Agricultural self sufficiency.
- Electricity to every rural district.

Enver Hoxha Negatives:

- Brutal dictator.
- Forced labor camps and slaughter of non-communists.
- Poverty and other failures of socialist economic policies.

Albania History - Stamps

I have not collected stamps for over half a century, but it is still true: You can learn a lot of history just from stamps...



Albanian Stamps



1945

1939 Italy invades Albania.



1945

King Victor Emmanuel III proclaims himself King of Albania.



Hoxha 1949

January 1946 Communists take control of Albania.



Hoxha 1951

Enver Hoxha 1st Secretary (head of state).



Hoxha 1951

Until his death 1985.

Celebration of Communism



1957

"People's Republic of Albania".



1963

Just "Albania" (Shqipëria).



1967

(Shqipëria).



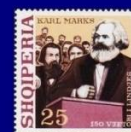
1968

60th birthday of Enver Hoxha.



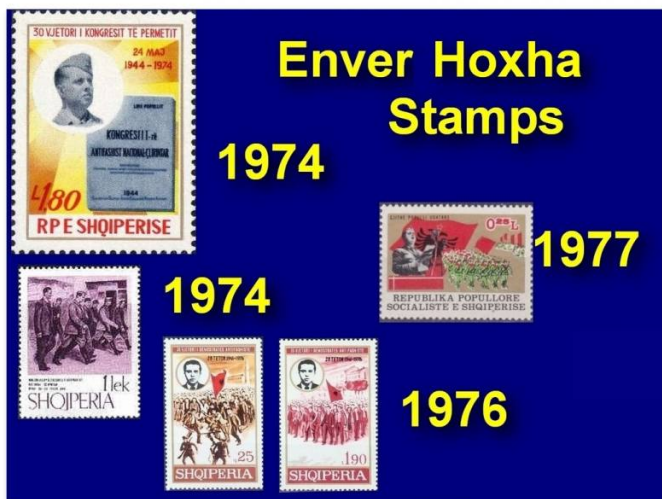
1969

Mao Zedong



1969

Karl Marx



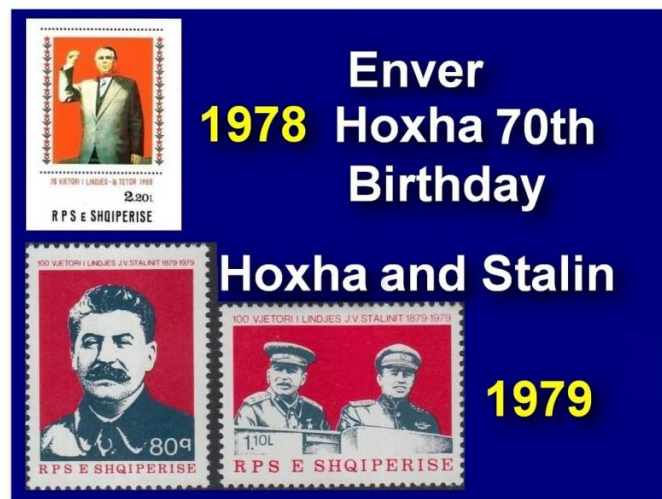
Enver Hoxha Stamps

1974

1977

1974

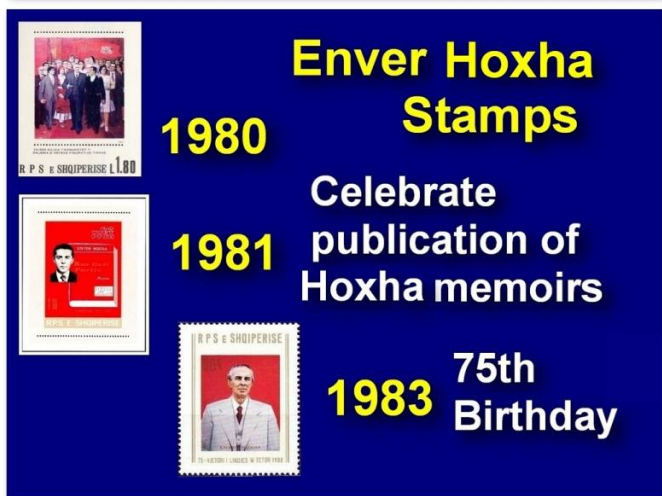
1976



Enver Hoxha 70th Birthday

Hoxha and Stalin

1979



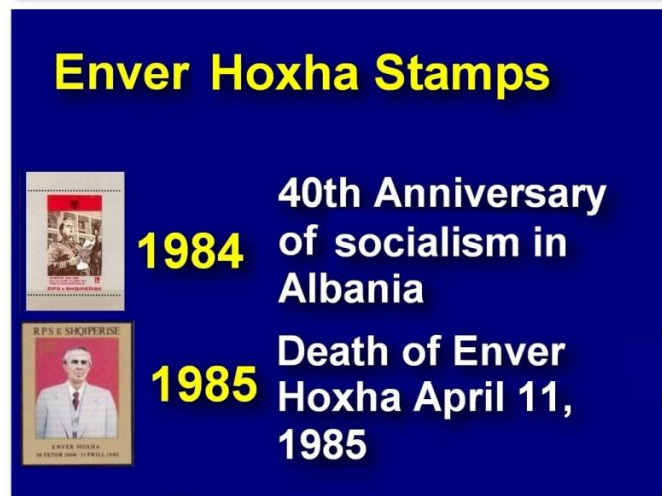
Enver Hoxha Stamps

1980

1981

Celebrate publication of Hoxha memoirs

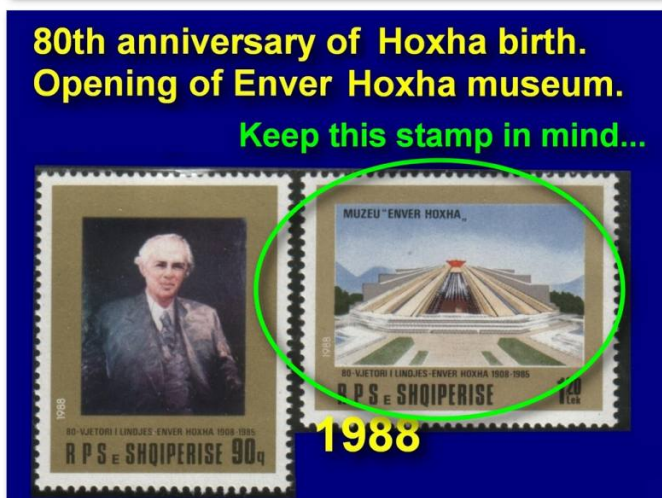
1983 75th Birthday



Enver Hoxha Stamps

1984 40th Anniversary of socialism in Albania

1985 Death of Enver Hoxha April 11, 1985



80th anniversary of Hoxha birth. Opening of Enver Hoxha museum.

Keep this stamp in mind...

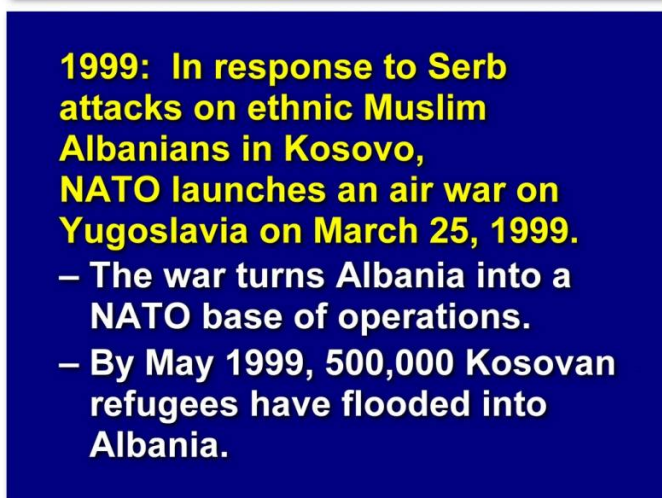
1988



A few recent Albanian stamps

1997

2000



1999: In response to Serb attacks on ethnic Muslim Albanians in Kosovo, NATO launches an air war on Yugoslavia on March 25, 1999.

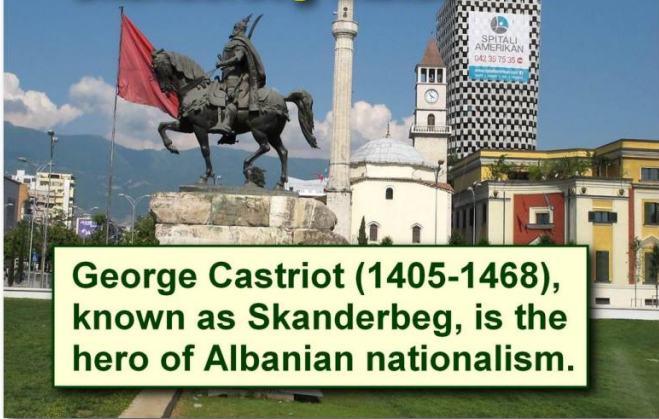
- The war turns Albania into a NATO base of operations.
- By May 1999, 500,000 Kosovan refugees have flooded into Albania.



Skanderbeg Square - Tirana

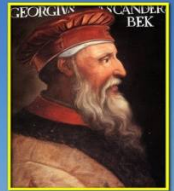
After being closed to foreigners for much of the 20th century, Albania opened its doors to visitors in 1991. Over 7 million arrivals in 2022.

Skanderbeg Statue



George Castriot (1405-1468), known as Skanderbeg, is the hero of Albanian nationalism.

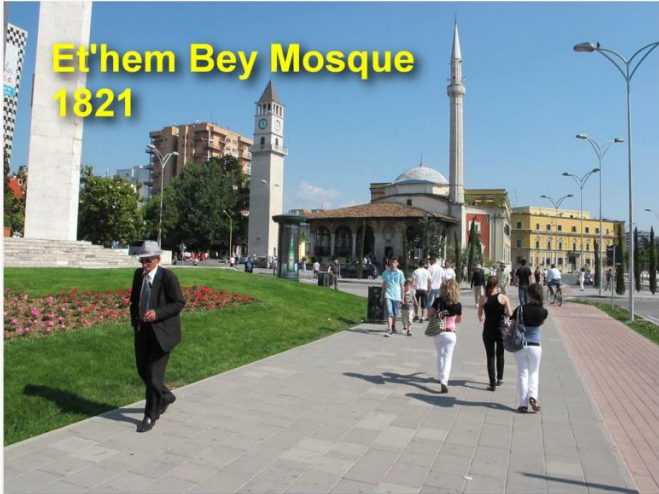
Gjergj Kastrioti Skënderbeu (Skanderbeg)



Military commander for the Ottoman empire 1423-1443. But after leaving Ottoman service, he led a rebellion against the Ottoman Empire in Albania and Macedonia. On documents, Skanderbeg always signed himself as "Lord of Albania."

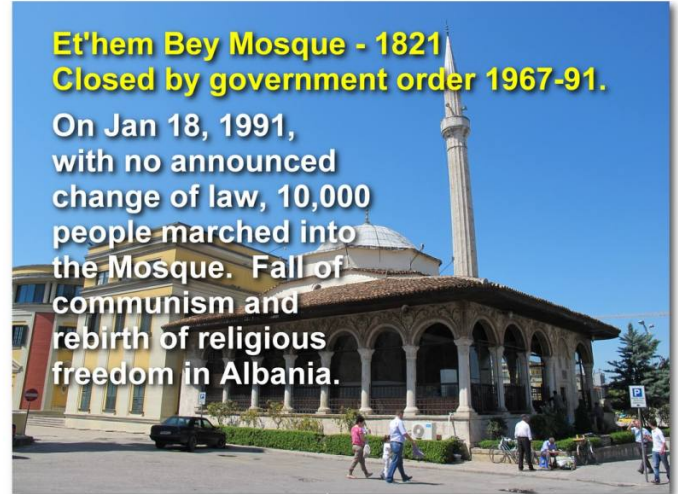
Albania finally got independence from Ottoman Empire in 1912. Islam remained as dominant religion.

Et'hem Bey Mosque 1821



Et'hem Bey Mosque - 1821 Closed by government order 1967-91.

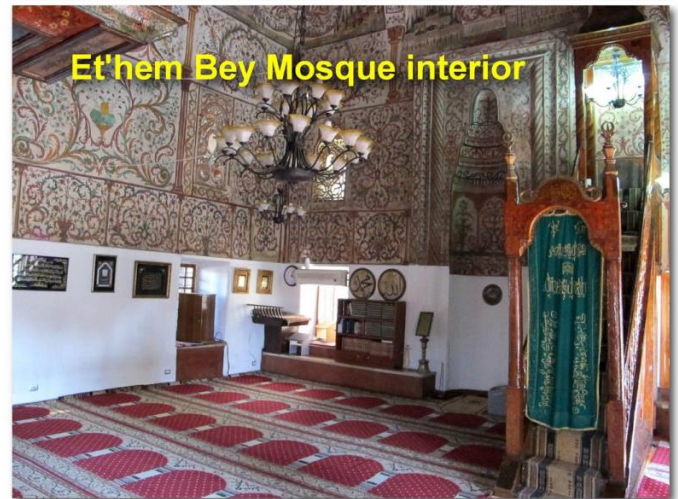
On Jan 18, 1991, with no announced change of law, 10,000 people marched into the Mosque. Fall of communism and rebirth of religious freedom in Albania.



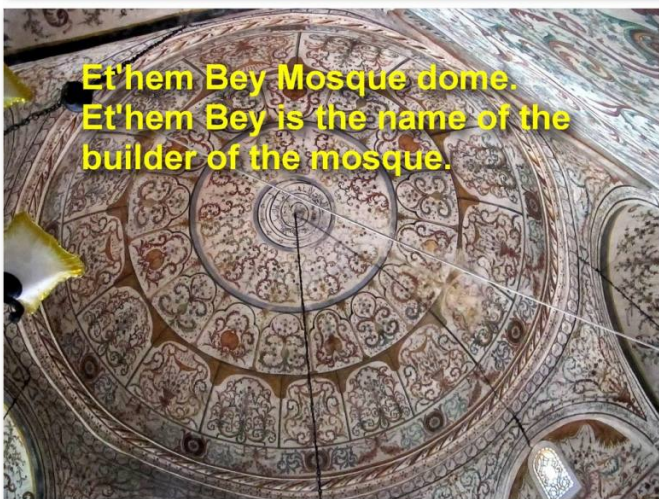
Et'hem Bey Mosque interior Visitors are welcome.



Et'hem Bey Mosque interior



Et'hem Bey Mosque dome. Et'hem Bey is the name of the builder of the mosque.



Prime Minister's Office

Prime Minister is appointed by the President. Prime Minister is head of government (like a chief operating officer).





**Prime Minister's Office
1941**



**Tirana
City Hall**

Gov't. Ministry

Skanderbeg Sq.



**Ministry of Transportation
and Infrastructure**

Free 2-hour daily English walking tour of
Tirana. No res. Meet at Opera House
steps. tiranafreetour.com
Guides work for tips.



Council of Ministers Offices



**National Theatre of Opera and
Ballet - 1953 (aka Palace of
Culture)**

On Skanderbeg Square



**Opera House
today**

**Palace of
Culture early
1970s - Enver
Hoxha rally**



**National Museum of History - 1981
On Skanderbeg Square**

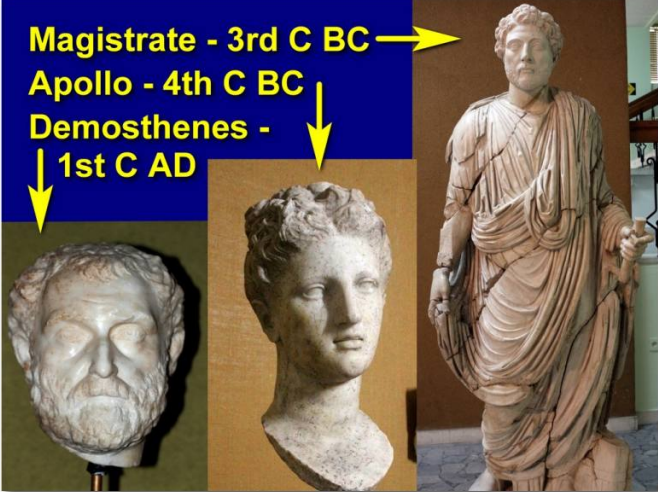


**National Museum of History
Exhibit Halls:**

- Antiquity.
- Middle Ages.
- Renaissance.
- Independence.
- Iconography.
- National Liberation
- Antifascist War.
- Communist Terror.
- Mother Teresa.

**Note: Photos are from the Internet
due to restrictions.**

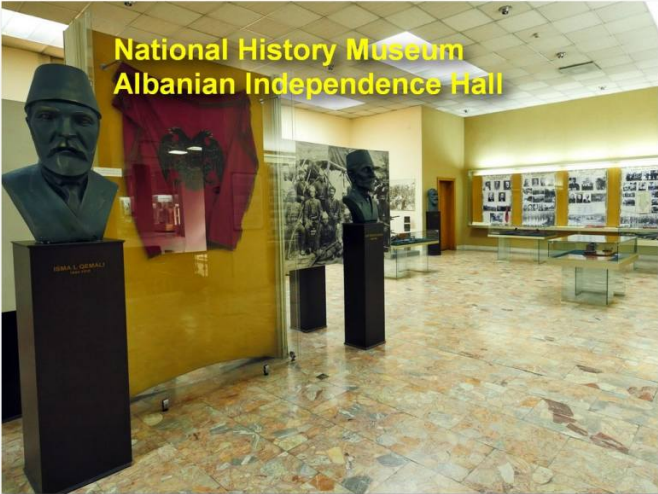
Magistrate - 3rd C BC →
 Apollo - 4th C BC ↓
 Demosthenes -
 ↓ 1st C AD



Epitaph of Glavenica - 1373 aka Shroud of Glavenica



National History Museum Albanian Independence Hall



Albania Parliament Building



- 140 MPs elected by the people.
- Parliament elects the President.
Secret vote. 60% vote required.
- President appoints Prime Minister.

My recommended hotel in Tirana



Rogner Hotel Tirana Close to most sights



Former Hoxha home now renovated



But the government is
still unsure what to do
with it.

A few minutes ago we looked at this
1988 stamp of the Hoxha Museum...
Opening of Enver Hoxha museum.



1988

...well, with the fall of Communism and the democratization of Albania, the Hoxha Museum has been abandoned!



The Hoxha Pyramid is in sad condition today.



Symbolic: Most Albanians today reject the Communist era.

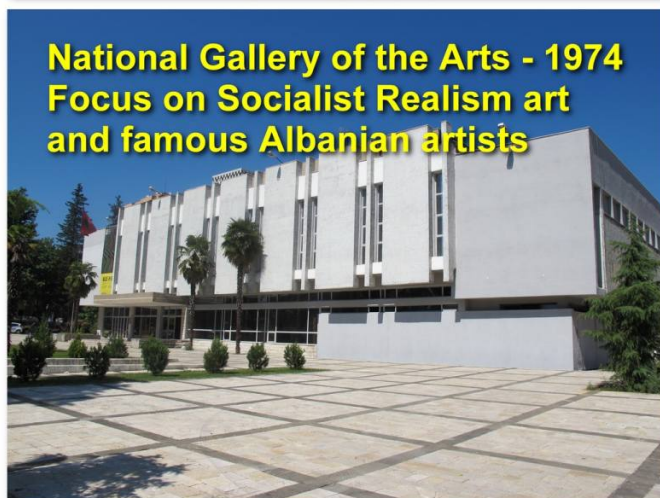
Will be renovated into an I.T. education center.

The Lana River runs through the centre of Tirana



Free 2-hour English city tours daily at 9, 10, 2, 5, 6. No res. Just show up at Opera House steps. Guides work for tips. tiranafreetour.com

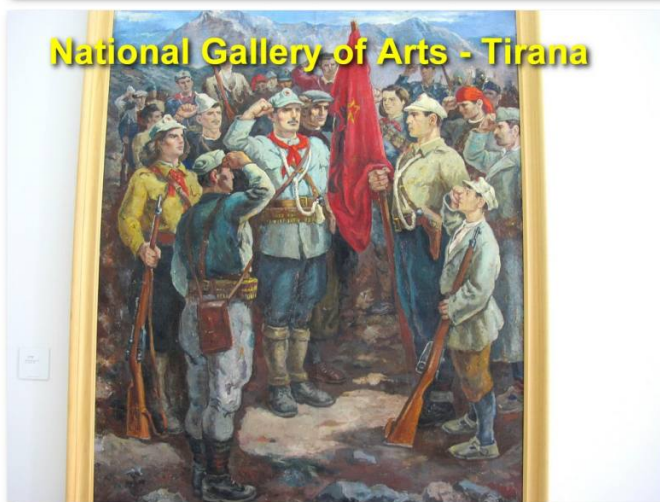
**National Gallery of the Arts - 1974
Focus on Socialist Realism art and famous Albanian artists**



**National Gallery of Arts
Skanderbeg**



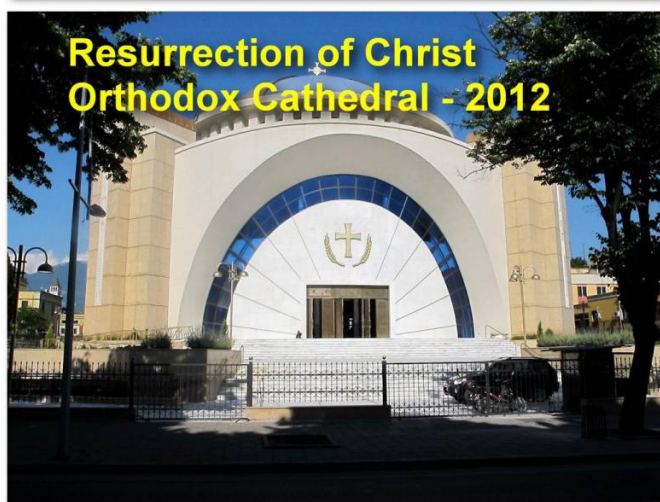
National Gallery of Arts - Tirana



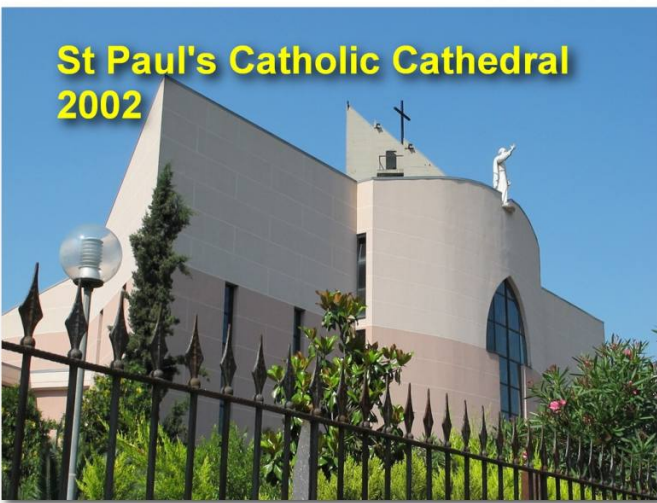
**National Gallery of Arts
Soviet era
sculptures**



**Resurrection of Christ
Orthodox Cathedral - 2012**



**St Paul's Catholic Cathedral
2002**



New Great Mosque of Tirana
Nearing completion. Capacity 4,500.
Next to Parliament.
Funded by Turkey to gain influence and promote Islam in Albania.
Many Albanian Muslims unhappy with the outside influence.



Office and Shopping Complex



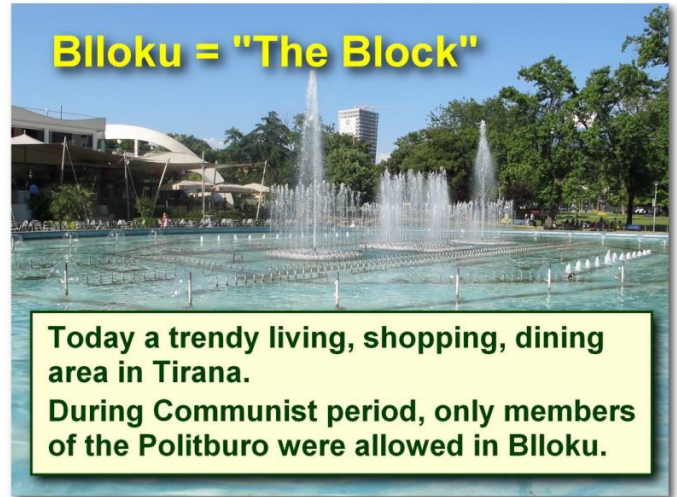
Tirana International Hotel



Newsstand - Notice the Security



Blloku = "The Block"



Today a trendy living, shopping, dining area in Tirana.
During Communist period, only members of the Politburo were allowed in Blloku.

Blloku Park

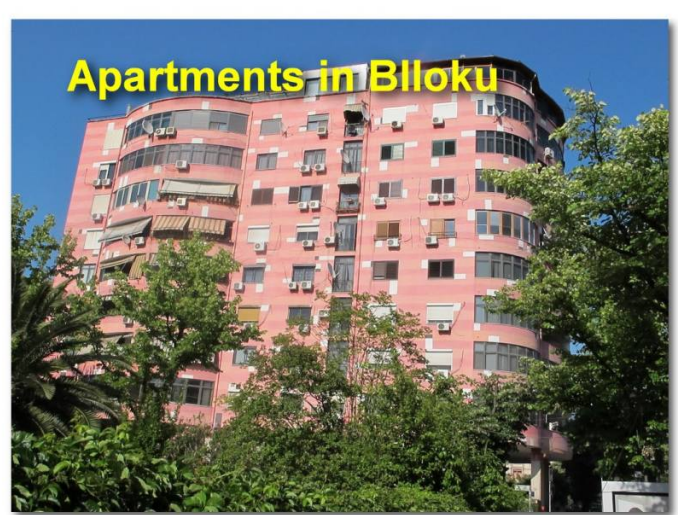


**Casino and Shopping
Blloku**





Restaurant in Blloku



Apartments in Blloku



Newer apartments in Blloku



Blloku restaurant and bar



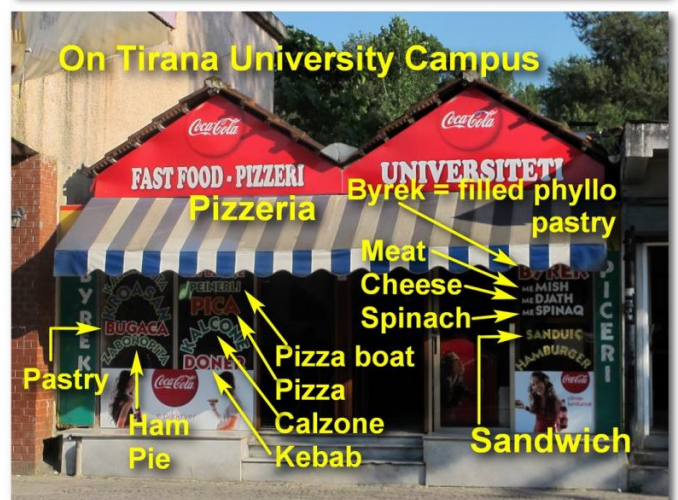
Blloku



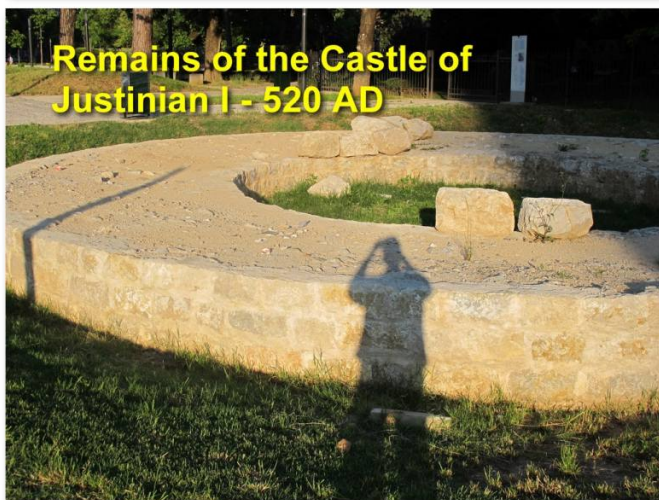
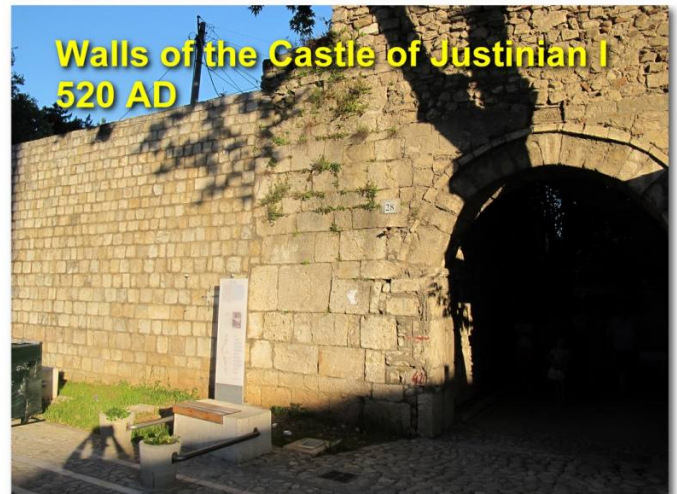
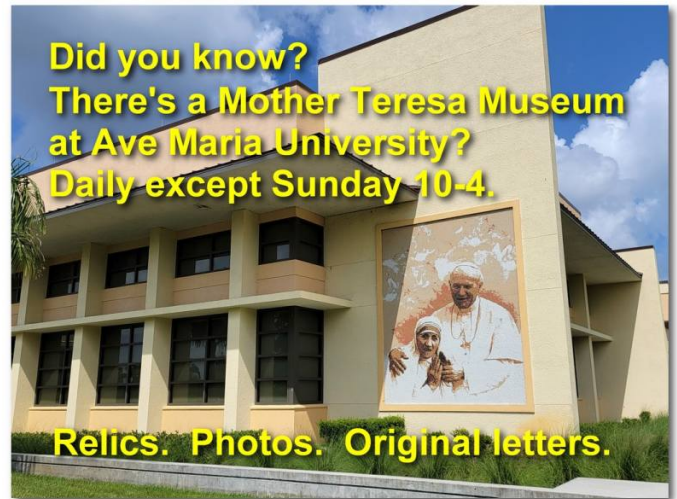
USAID Office in Blloku

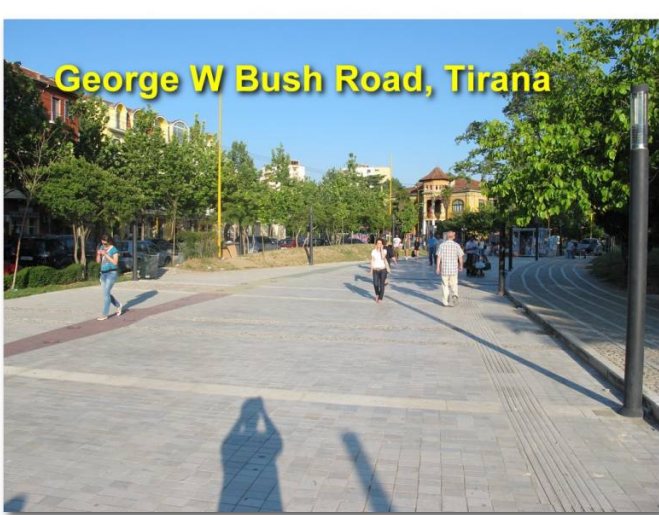


**Tirana University
Largest uni in Albania.
35,000 students.**



On Tirana University Campus

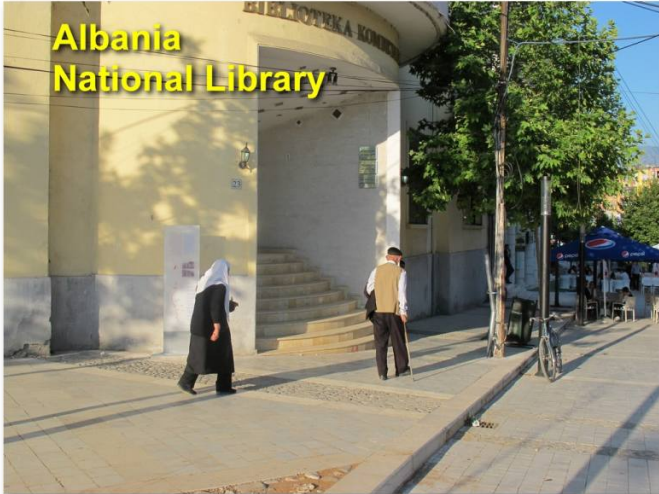




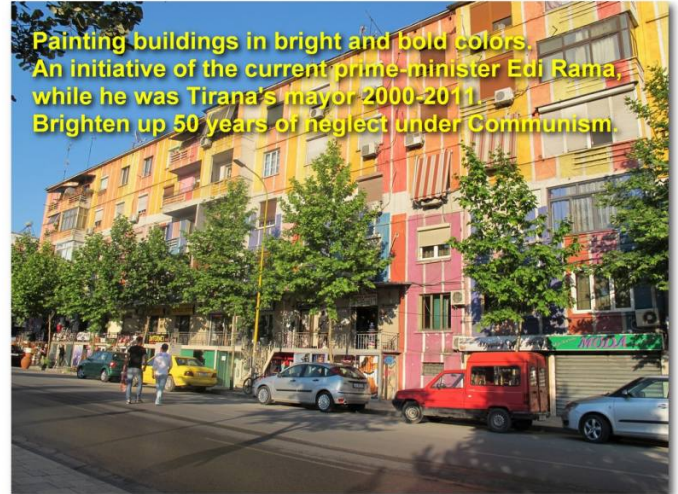
George W Bush Road, Tirana



Government Office for the "intergration of former political persecutors"



Albania National Library



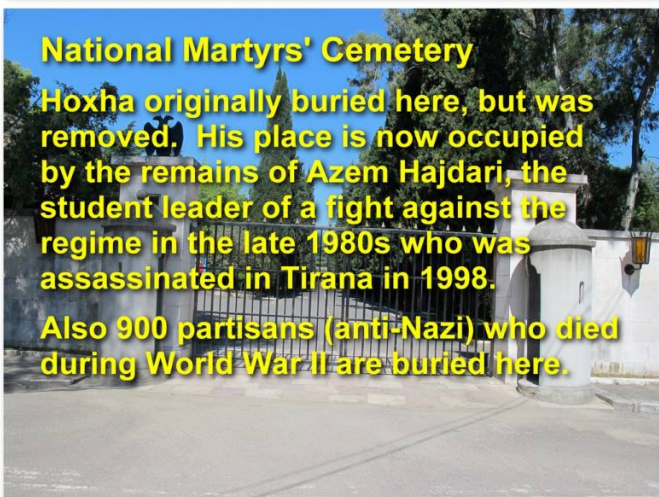
Painting buildings in bright and bold colors.
An initiative of the current prime minister Edi Rama while he was Tirana's mayor 2000-2011
Brighten up 50 years of neglect under Communism.



Soviet-era buildings brightened up



Selman Stërmasi Stadium
Home of Tirana's soccer team
Seats 9,500



National Martyrs' Cemetery

Hoxha originally buried here, but was removed. His place is now occupied by the remains of Azem Hajdari, the student leader of a fight against the regime in the late 1980s who was assassinated in Tirana in 1998.

Also 900 partisans (anti-Nazi) who died during World War II are buried here.



Use extreme caution when walking on sidewalks and roadways in Tirana!

Use extreme caution when walking on sidewalks and roadways in Tirana!



Use extreme caution when walking on sidewalks and roadways in Tirana!



Another example...



Another example...



Another example...



Driving in Albania: From "Tirana in Your Pocket": "The local drivers [are] among the worst imaginable, with road fatality figures some of the highest in Europe. Disrespectful of the law and seemingly unaware that pedestrians are soft and break easily, the quintessential Albanian motorist is easily distracted, oblivious to speed limits, and would rather undergo torture than wear a seatbelt. Before 1991, only Party officials were allowed to own and drive cars, of which there were only about 600 in the entire country. Since then, vehicle numbers have ballooned out of all proportions relative to the state of the roads."

Embassy of the United States

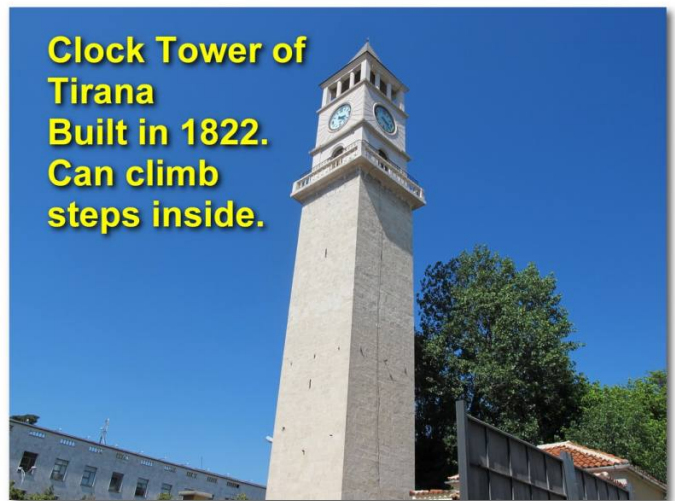


Statue of the Unknown Partisan
Commemorating
WW 2 Anti-Nazi
Resistance





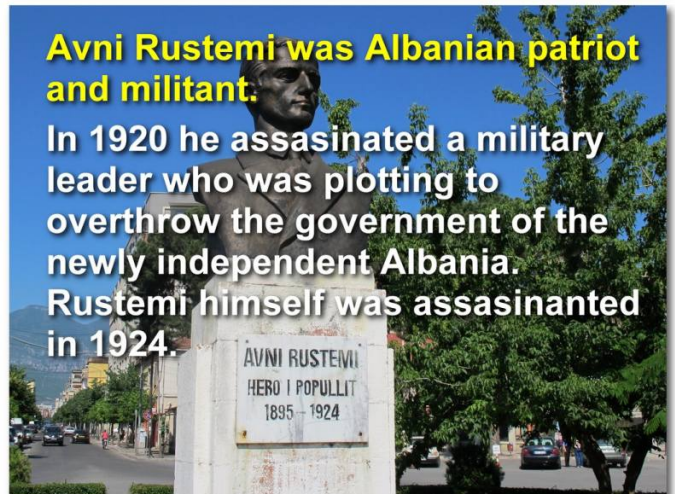
Albanian National Theatre



Clock Tower of Tirana
Built in 1822.
Can climb steps inside.



2010 restoration of clock tower was funded by United States



Avni Rustemi was Albanian patriot and militant.
In 1920 he assassinated a military leader who was plotting to overthrow the government of the newly independent Albania. Rustemi himself was assassinated in 1924.



Old building near the City Market



Pazari i Ri Central Market

Merentino is the local brand of cookies, crackers, and chips



Pazari i Ri (Central Market)



Peshk (Fish) Shop



Pazari i Ri (Central Market)



Lek 110 = US\$ 1 *(at the time of these photos)*
Presumably these prices are for one kilo (2.2 pounds)



Pazari i Ri
Literally: New Bazaar (Market)



Pazari i Ri (Central Market)
Roasted chickens



Pazari i Ri (Central Market) Olives



Pazari i Ri (Central Market)
Not only food...



Cheese Shop
Dhie = Goat
Dele = Ewe (sheep)
Lope = Cow

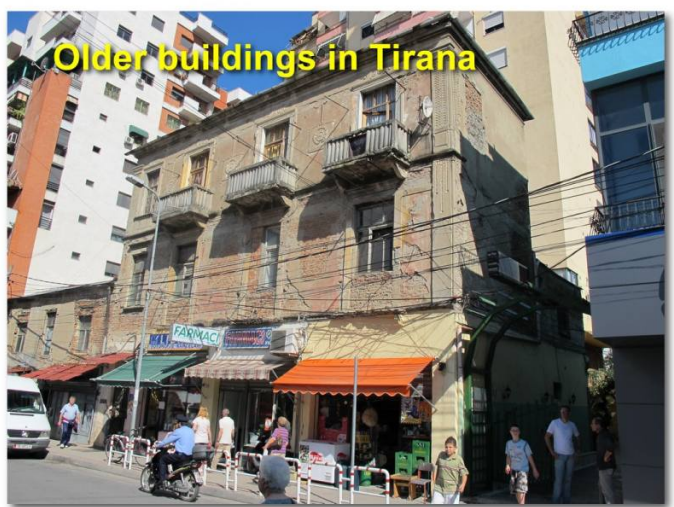


Older buildings in Tirana

Older buildings in Tirana



Older buildings in Tirana



Street Market



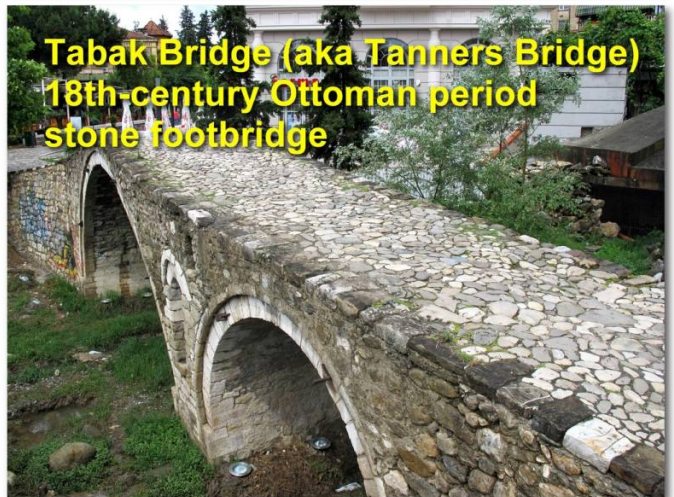
Street Market



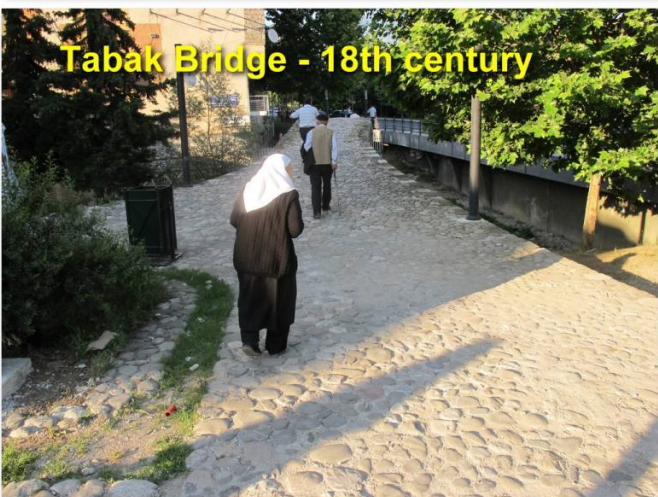
Notice the street sweeper's broom



**Tabak Bridge (aka Tanners Bridge)
18th-century Ottoman period
stone footbridge**



Tabak Bridge - 18th century



**Tirana Railway Station
Trains began in 1947 under Hoxha**



**I had decided to take the train
to Durres, rather than a bus**

Pronounced DUH-Res

The entire Albanian train schedule

NISËT MBRIJ		NISËT MBRIJ		TIRANË ELBASAN		ELBASAN TIRANË	
TIRANË	DURRES	DURRES	TIRANË	TIRANË	SHKODER	SHKODER	TIRANË
6.00	6.58	6.15	7.15	6.00	10.10	6.40	10.45
8.40	9.40	9.45	10.45	14.15	18.23	12.52	17.00
14.15	15.15	13.00	14.00	13.10	16.55	5.45	9.28
15.45	16.43	16.00	17.00	11.01	11.55	11.55	17.00
20.00	21.00	18.00	19.00	6.00	11.01	5.00	10.45
TIRANË VLORE		VLORE TIRANË		TIRANË VLORE		VLORE TIRANË	
6.00	11.55	6.00	11.55	6.00	11.55	6.00	11.55
5.00	11.01	5.00	11.01	06.40	11.55	06.40	11.55

Below the table, it says: BILETA ME TREN PËTET ME GJOJE.

Buy ticket on the train

Obvious lack of maintenance. Carriages bought second-hand from East Germany.



My Train

Notice the windows on the train carriages



Albanian Railway System

Number of passengers per year:

1994 (peak): 4,022,000

2013: 329,000

2024: Passenger trains defunct!

Czech-built locomotive 1978



Albanian Railway system

Passenger Kilometers (PAX x KM):

1993: 223,000,000

2013: 12,000,000

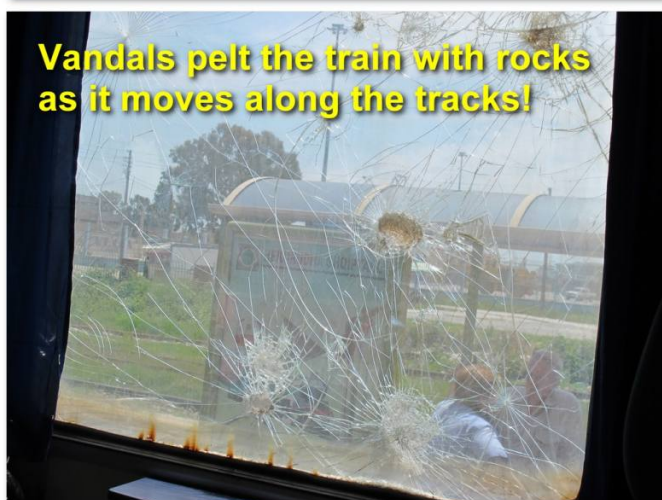
My train - exterior looks rough...



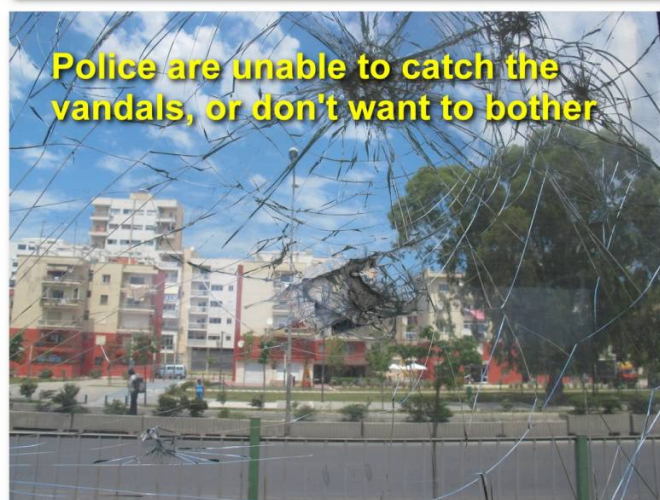
...interior surprisingly well maintained, but few customers.



Vandals pelt the train with rocks as it moves along the tracks!



Police are unable to catch the vandals, or don't want to bother





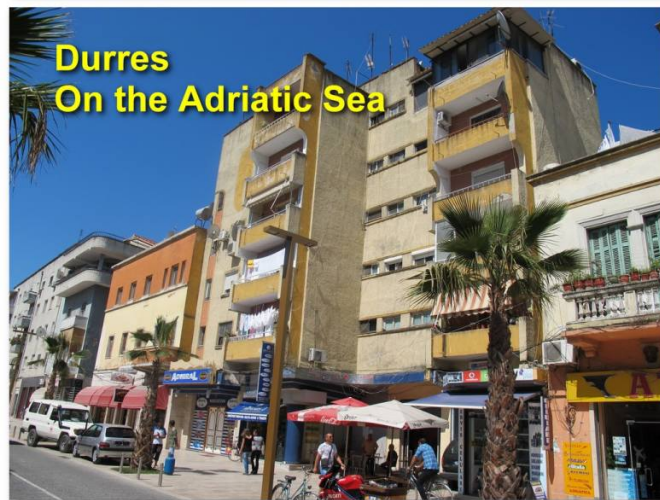
**Just about every window
in every car**



**So cannot get a clear picture
of the lovely countryside**



**Durres - 2nd largest city
in Albania (pop. 210,000).
Was once the capital
of Albania.**



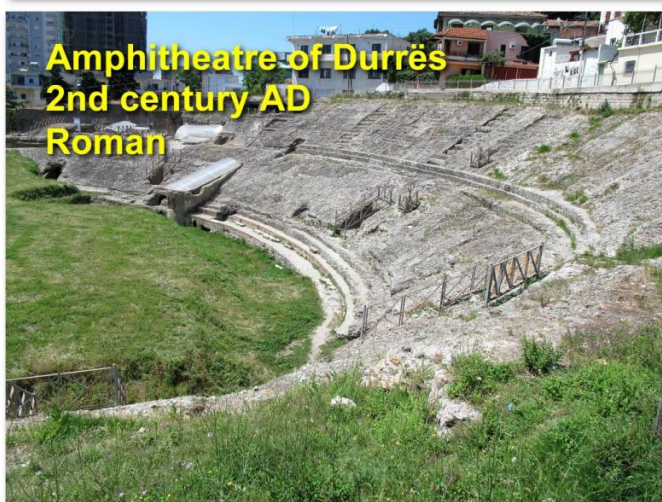
**Durres
On the Adriatic Sea**



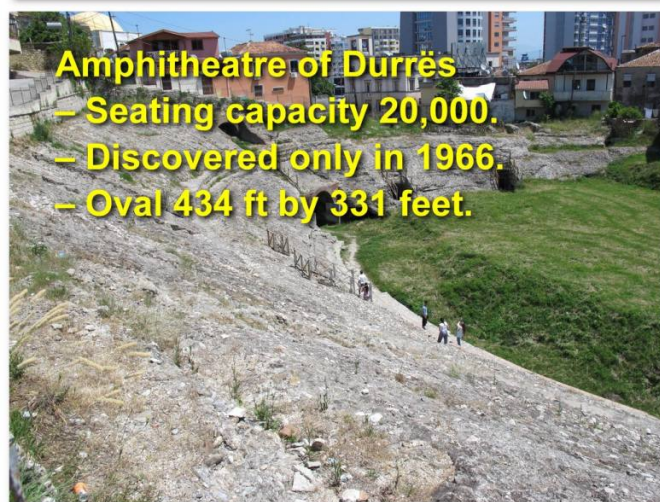
**Durres, Albania
West of Tirana
1 Hour by Bus
On Adriatic Coast**



**Durres, Albania
West of Tirana
one hour by train.**



**Amphitheatre of Durrës
2nd century AD
Roman**



**Amphitheatre of Durrës
– Seating capacity 20,000.
– Discovered only in 1966.
– Oval 434 ft by 331 feet.**

Durres Communist era buildings



Durres Communist-era buildings



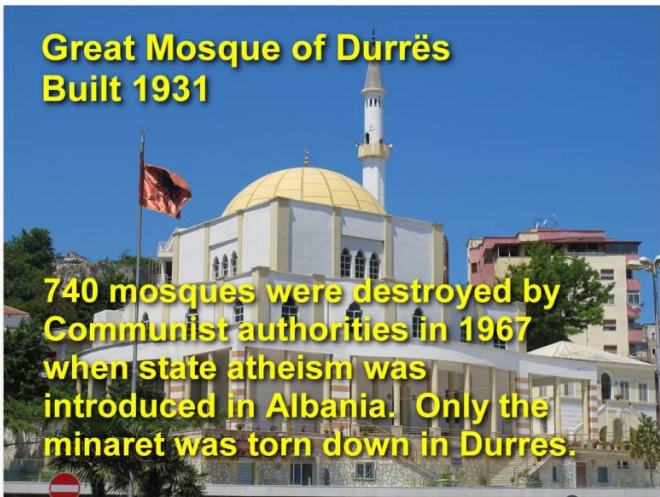
Outdoor Obituaries in Albania



Margarita Salami Proscuitto Mushroom Prosc. & Salami Prosc. & Mushroom Mixed Vegetarian Spicy
Prices Lek 350-450 Lek100=US\$1 Size??
BAR PIZZA BLIZZ

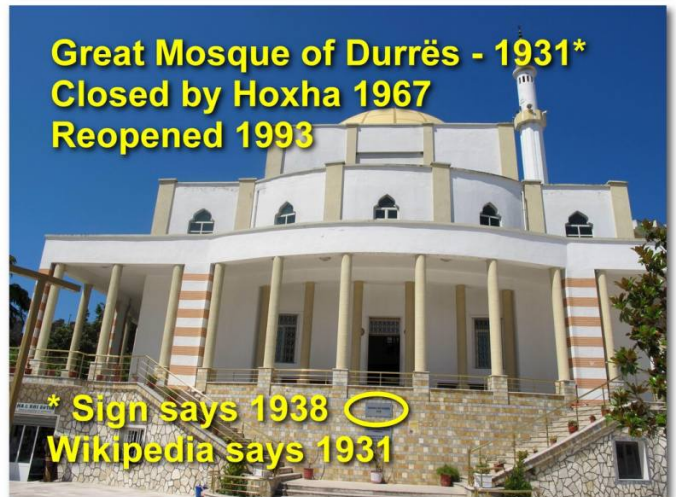


Great Mosque of Durrës Built 1931



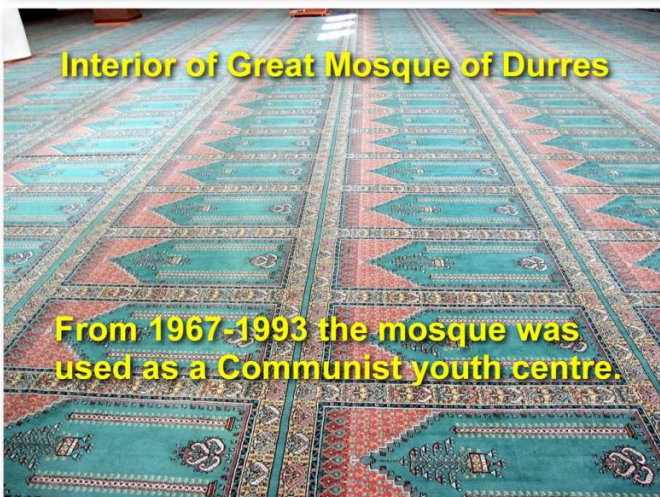
740 mosques were destroyed by Communist authorities in 1967 when state atheism was introduced in Albania. Only the minaret was torn down in Durres.

Great Mosque of Durrës - 1931* Closed by Hoxha 1967 Reopened 1993



* Sign says 1938 Wikipedia says 1931

Interior of Great Mosque of Durres



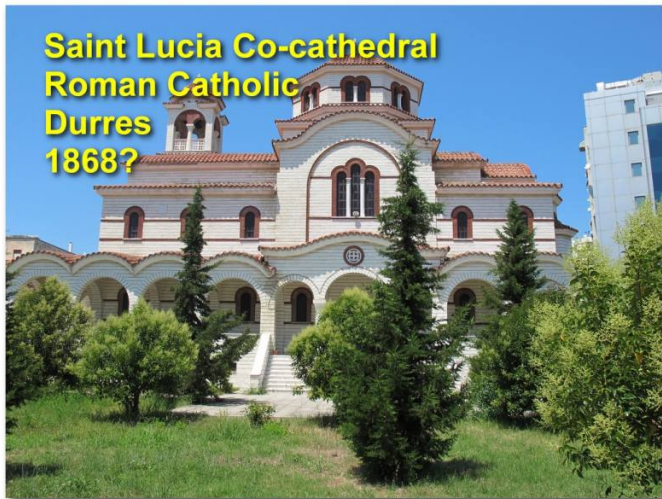
From 1967-1993 the mosque was used as a Communist youth centre.

Durres Cultural Centre



More obituaries

Dyrrachium is the old name for Durres



**Saint Lucia Co-cathedral
Roman Catholic
Durres
1868?**



**Train back to Tirana
Second-hand Italian coaches
1959**



Windows cracked, as before

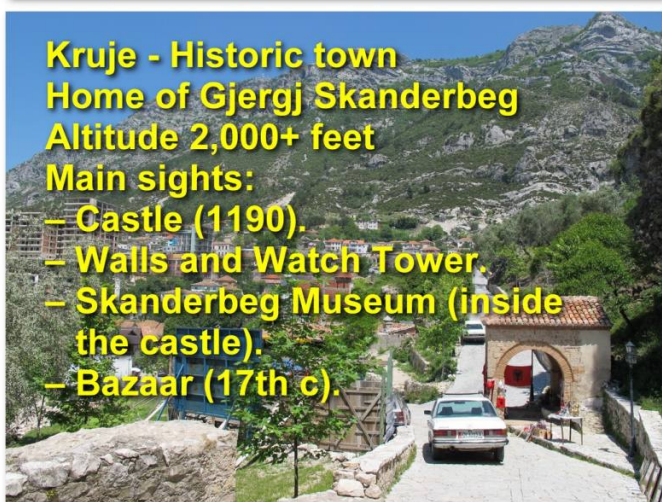


Arrive Back in Tirana

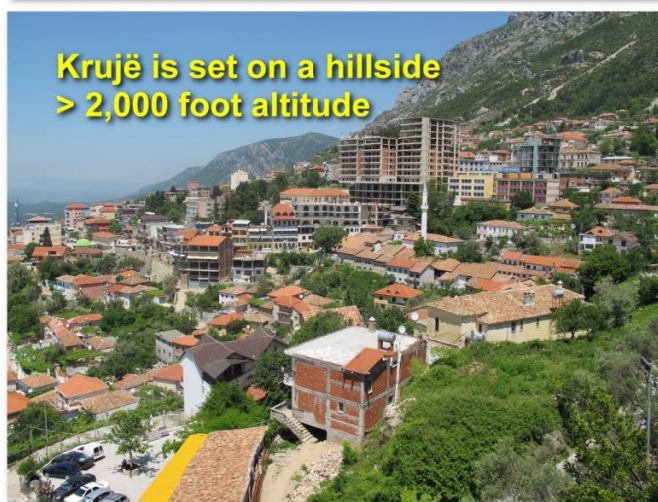


**Bus to Kruje (lovely)
Pronounced: Crew-Ya**

When I bought the bus ticket in Tirana they did not tell me that the bus leaves you on a remote highway where you need to buy a mini-bus ticket to historic Kruje. I followed the crowd.



**Kruje - Historic town
Home of Gjergj Skanderbeg
Altitude 2,000+ feet
Main sights:**
 – Castle (1190).
 – Walls and Watch Tower.
 – Skanderbeg Museum (inside the castle).
 – Bazaar (17th c).

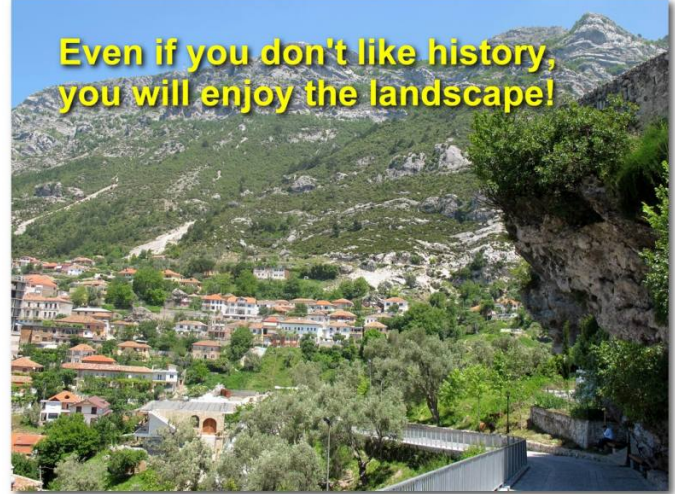


**Krujë is set on a hillside
> 2,000 foot altitude**

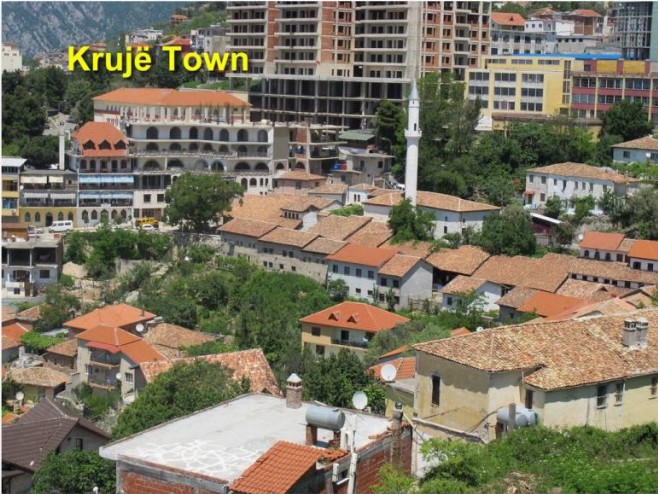


A Bit of Kruje History

1190 Kruje became capital of original Albanian state.
1395 Ottomans attacked Kruje. Took control in 1478.
1912 independence from Ottomans after 450 years.
1925 Albanian Republic. Tirana became capital.



Even if you don't like history,
you will enjoy the landscape!



Krujë Town



Krujë Town



Kruje Castle
Built 1190
Major restoration 1982



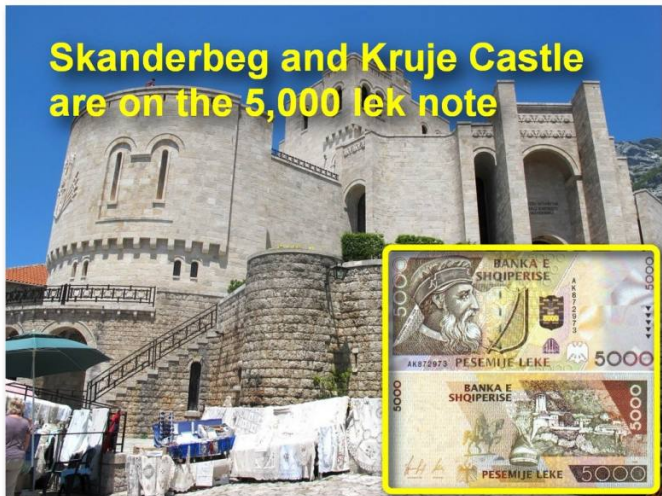
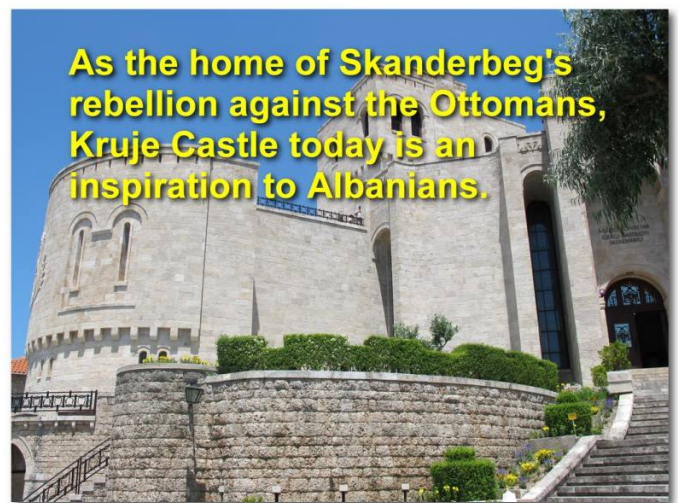
Kruje Castle



Skanderebeg Museum
Part of Kruje Castle



There has been a bazaar (market)
outside Kruje Castle since 17th c



**Skanderbeg and the Tower
are on the 1,000 Lek note.**



**Skanderbeg
on Albanian
Coins**



Skanderbeg Museum



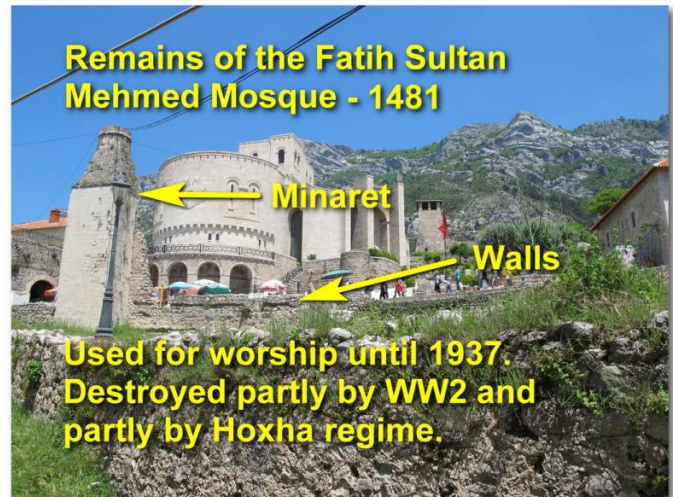
Skanderbeg Museum



Main Tower of Kruje Castle - 1190



**Remains of the Fatih Sultan
Mehmed Mosque - 1481**



**Used for worship until 1937.
Destroyed partly by WW2 and
partly by Hoxha regime.**

Kruje Castle Bazaar



Kruje Castle Bazaar





Downhill Walk to Kruje Town



Kruje Town
Also spelled
Kruja



Kruje Town



Kruje Town is a tourist centre



Kruje Town



Kruje Town



Kruje Town

Argjendar
= Jeweler



Kruje Town
Souvenirs -- yes.
Antiques -- probably not.



Kruje Town



Kruje Town



Kruje Town



Kruje Town



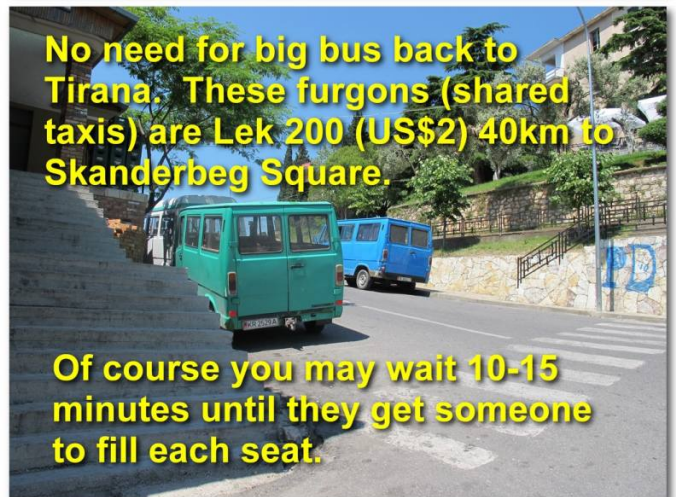
Kruje Town



Kruje Town



Kruje Town



No need for big bus back to Tirana. These furgons (shared taxis) are Lek 200 (US\$2) 40km to Skanderbeg Square.

Of course you may wait 10-15 minutes until they get someone to fill each seat.



Statue of Xorxh W Bush in Kruje

Presentations at Baker Center, 2H 2024

Albania	Monday, July 1, 2024, 3-4:00pm
China: Shenyang - An in-depth look at a capital of China you never heard of	Monday, Sept 16, 2024, 3-4:00pm (Note: third Monday)
Japan North: Tokyo, Kamakura, Kyoto, and Sapporo	Monday, Oct 7, 2024, 3-4:00pm
Cuba – Some interesting places other than Havana	Monday, Nov 4, 2024, 3-4:00pm
Costa Rica – Pura Vida	Monday, Dec 2, 2024, 3-4:00pm



**Thanks for Joining
Our Visit to Albania.**

THE END

ppacter@gmail.com

Copyright © Paul Pacter

www.PaulVisits.com