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Ancient Pathways Trail

Weight limit: 90kg / 14 stone

Nearest airport: Tirana

8 days / 7 nights / 6 days riding

Travel back in time and follow the mediaeval Zagoria caravan pathways into the land of myths and tales. Your ride will pass through ancient ruins, medieval villages with their churches, and unique stone bridges built during the period of Ali Pasha. Take in the dramatic, mountainous views and trust your sure-footed steed to take you safely across the narrow, unknown paths. Enjoy the exhilarating canters through the river valleys and dive deep into the heart of rural Albanian culture, staying as a guest in the homes of local families.



The Riding

This trail is suitable for intermediate and experienced riders with a good, balanced seat. You will be riding over challenging mountainous terrain and enjoying long trots, canters and gallops in the valleys and where the terrain allows faster riding.

Good riding fitness is required as you'll be spending 4-6 hours in the saddle each day.

Guides & Group sizes

The guides are professionals with many years of experience in guiding trails through the Albanian mountains. They are adventurous, knowledgeable about history and nature, and most of all, passionate about their horses.

Maximum number of riders in a group is 10.

Horses & Tack

The horses used on this ride are of local Albanian breed, Tarpan, mixed with Arabs. They are small, strong and perfectly suited for the challenging, rocky terrain being surefooted and accustomed to trekking over long mountainous trails.

The tack is English style with small saddlebags provided for items such as water bottles, packed lunches and cameras.



Riders are expected to help with feeding and watering the horses during the trail.

Accommodation & Dining

The first and last night of the trail will be spent in a hotel. The rest of the nights are spent at local, friendly family homes which offer a great opportunity to soak in the rural Albanian lifestyle. The accommodation during the family stays is very basic with shared bathroom facilities. Your hosts may not speak English.

The food served during the trail will be of local produce and traditional Albanian meals. Picnic lunches will be brought to you by the support vehicle or alternatively carried in your

saddle bags while riding. Dinners will be served in a local restaurant when staying in a hotel or by your hosts when spending the night in a local family home. Allergies and special dietary requirements can be catered for with advance notice.

There is very limited access to Wi-Fi during the trail. Access to electricity is possible every night and the whole area has good phone signal coverage.

Your luggage will be transported by car between the overnight stops.



Itinerary

Day 1: Arrival

Arrive at Tirana airport by 15:00 ready for your transfer to Gjirokastra. Settle into your hotel, 10 minutes walking distance from the centre of historical Gjirokastra and feel free to have a walk around the town before dinner, which will be served in a traditional restaurant. Meet the guides and your fellow riders over dinner and discuss the itinerary of the coming week on horseback. It's possible to purchase a map of the area before dinner in order to gain a good understanding of the itinerary.

Day 2: Gjirokastra – Karjan

Start your journey by riding through picturesque countryside and traditional Albanian farms. Your route today will take you through hills and valleys, past cliffs and over streams. Enjoy the view over the beautiful River Drino ("Tree of Life") which is the most important source of water in this area. Pass the ruins of castle Santa Triada which was constructed in 1809-1810 by Ali Pasha, the famous Ottoman leader. Back then this was the perfect location to keep an eye on the passing caravans. After a picnic lunch, your ride will take you to the village of Karjan, a traditional caravan pitstop with its small churches and an old Roman bridge. Spend the night with a local family and enjoy a traditional home cooked dinner.

Day 3: Karjan – Nderan

Continue north on an ancient merchants' stone road with panoramic views over the surrounding hills and valleys. Enter the village of Labova and visit the famous medieval

church. Your path will then take you up the mountain through native vegetation of mountain tea, oregano, wild rose and foxglove. Reach the valley of Cajupi and have lunch here with the local sheep shepherds before enjoying a wonderful gallop along the valley. In the afternoon the trail will follow a medieval caravan pathway and pass by a notorious bandit hangout, “The Cursed Shadow”, which was used by the thieves to rob caravans passing through Zagoria. Your destination today is the village of Nderan, placed right in the heart of Zagoria. The next two nights will be spent here with a local Vllah linguistic minority family who will be happy to show you their way of life. Dinner will be a delicious mixture of local products, raki and wine.

Day 4: Nderan

Wake up to the clean mountain air and start your day with a breakfast of fresh mountain produce. Today’s ride will bring plenty of variety with steep cliffs, rivers, woodlands and rolling hills. Breathe in the gorgeous scent of flowers and enjoy the wild landscapes where the only people you meet are shepherds tending to their flocks. Continue along an ancient pathway which, back in the 17th and 18th century, was an important link between the biggest merchant centres in Southern Albania. Pass the beautiful natural monument of Rock of Zhej before taking a challenging track downhill to the ruins of a medieval stone bridge. Stop here for a refreshing swim during the summer months before riding to Hoshteva to visit a unique church built in 999AD with many pagan elements visible on the wall paintings. Continue past a Byzantine church and the monastery of Nivan Saint Mehili, built in 1702. Cross a medieval bridge to enter the village of Nderan once more and spend the night here.

Day 5: Nderan - Polican

An exciting day ahead! After a fresh country breakfast, ride through a mountain valley perfectly suited for many exhilarating canters, passing small remote farms and wild cliffs. The route through Pogoni region is a true journey back in time, passing by ancient ruins and mythical natural wonders. Stop for a picnic lunch by one of the most famous stone bridges - the most isolated construction of the merchant’s period and can only be reached by horse. In the afternoon you will reach the centre of the Pogon region. Your overnight stop is the mountain village of Polican, populated by a Greek minority. Spend the night with a local family who will offer you the chance to explore and enjoy the local gastronomic delights.

Day 6: Polican – Libohova

Leave Polican and enjoy a day of challenging riding through gorgeous mountain landscapes looking down upon the Suha river below. Pass by the Swallow Rock, 500m above the valley floor, on the way to the lunch spot at Church of Labova of the Cross. This is a monument representing the oldest church in Albania built in 554 by Justinian the Great, an Eastern Roman emperor, who married his wife Teodora here in the small chapel. After lunch, the ride takes you to Libohova, the site of an ancient merchant town nestled at the foot of the Bureto Mountain. This historic town offers great sightseeing for the afternoon. Spend the night with a local family and taste the local delicacies.

Day 7: Libohova – Gjirokastra

The last days’ ride will take you through rolling hills and across the Drino River valley. Climb up steeply to reach an archaeological site of Antigonea, a city that was built in 295BC by King Pyrrhus and named after his beloved wife, Antigona. After a short break, ride back to Gjirokastra and to the stables. Say goodbye to your trusted steed and turn them out for a

well-deserved rest. A picnic lunch will be served close to the stables before returning to your hotel in town. It's time to unwind and relax with your riding companions over the farewell dinner, and perhaps a drink or two at the old Bazaar.

Day 8: Departure

Time for your onward journey. After breakfast you will be transferred back to the airport in Tirana.



The price includes:

- 6 full days of riding
- Trail riding horse, tack & small saddlebags
- Shared accommodation
- Breakfasts
- Lunches
- Evening meals
- Drinks during meals
- Services of guide
- All arrangements for duration of holiday

Not included

- Flights
- Airport transfers
- Tips
- Entrance tickets to monuments & parks

Flights & Airport transfers

Do not book flights until you have received the Booking confirmation email from saddletravel.com.

Please plan your flights to/from Tirana as follows:

Arrival on Day 1 of your holiday by 2pm.

Departure on Day 8 any time after 12pm (midday).

Depending on where you are flying from, it might be easier for you to fly the day before and stay a night in a hotel close to Tirana airport. There is an airport transfer available at 12pm (midday) and 3pm on Day 1.

All airport transfers are at extra cost.



What to bring

We recommend wearing your riding boots when travelling and carrying one set of riding clothing and your helmet in your hand luggage, so should your luggage not make it to the destination you'll still be able to ride.

- Comfortable riding trousers / jodhpurs
- Your own well-fitted hard hat / helmet
- Riding boots/ walking boots with a good grip (riding boots with smooth sole are not suitable as they can be slippery when walking)
- Chaps
- Riding gloves
- Waterproofs
- Long sleeved shirts to protect against the sun
- Warm fleece / jumper for the cooler nights
- Casual clothes for evening
- Lightweight shoes for evening

- Buff / bandana
- Sun cream & lip balm
- Sunglasses & sunhat
- Bumbag
- 2 x reusable water bottle (no bigger than 1l)
- Insect repellent & bite cream
- Compact camera
- Plug adapter
- Head torch
- Copy of passport & insurance details
- Personal medication

Climate

Zagoria Trail takes place in Southern Albania which has temperatures on average 5 degrees higher than the rest of the country. Months with the lowest precipitation are from April to October, however, rains can occur at any time of the year. July and August are the hottest months when daytime temperatures can rise well above 30 °C during the day. You will experience very different types of weather during the trail from cool mountain air to warmer climate closer to the coast.

Health

For health and vaccine recommendations, please consult your healthcare provider at least 8 weeks before your trip.

Country specific information can also be found at National Travel Health Network and Centre website: <https://travelhealthpro.org.uk/countries>

Travel documents

For entry requirements to Albania for UK citizens, please visit the Foreign Travel Advice website: <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/albania/entry-requirements>

For any other nationalities, please contact your local embassy to check entry requirements.

Having correct travel documents is entirely your responsibility.

Currency & tipping

The local currency in Albania is Lek. However, Euros are widely accepted. We recommend not bringing too much currency as the holiday is fully inclusive but just enough for souvenirs, drinks outside of meal times etc.

Tipping your guide is at your discretion.



Riding declaration

"I am an experienced rider and able to mount & dismount unaided. I have a firm seat and I'm confident and in control at all paces over rough terrain (including rising trot, light seat canters and gallops) and have a good level of current riding fitness. I do not suffer from any illness or disability that could prejudice my safety or that of others."

Booking conditions

You are booking with the riding holiday operator, these are their booking conditions:

Horse riding is a risk sport and activity and it can be dangerous. We train our horses to be friendly, confident and with a good understanding about their environment, but they are given to the rider with the understanding to ride at own risk.

Responsibility

- All riders must accept the authority of the tour leader and respect his/her decisions. -The tour leader will not be held responsible for incidents or accidents which may occur as a result of unwise personal initiative, incompetence or other unexpected circumstances.
- If the health or conduct of any client before or during the tour appears likely, in the opinion of the tour leader, to endanger the group, the client may be excluded from the tour.
- Each participant is obliged to inform the tour guide of any condition that might affect their ability to participate in the tour.
- Caravan Horse Riding Albania will not accept any responsibility for luggage and personal property of clients.

Weight limits and physical condition

- Our weight limit is 90 kg. Our horses are small, and it is very important to respect the weight limit. -All clients should be fit enough and able to complete the itinerary before booking. If in any doubt regarding health or special condition they should ask for advice in advance.
- Due to possible damage to unborn children and the woman herself in case of an accident pregnant women (more than 3 months) are not permitted to join the riding tours.

Important information and rider's restrictions

- The wearing of a helmet or hard hat is compulsory for all riders. You are welcome to bring your own hat, saddle bag or irons.
- It is important to respect the packing list given for your ride. It is not allowed to ride with trainers or sandals.
- Hot/cold/wet weather clothing should be brought according to the season of the year. Jewellery, including earrings and other piercings should not be worn.
- Sun cream and personal medication should be part of your riding bag.

- Big cameras are not possible to keep or use in our rides.
- You have to bring your own water bottles (not bigger than 1l) to avoid single use plastic bottles.
- For safety reasons backpacks and the like are not permitted to be worn whilst horse riding.

Accommodation, transfers and entrance fees

- Accommodations are based on double occupancy. If you are traveling alone we will try to assign you a roommate of the same gender. If there is no one with whom you can share, or you prefer a single occupancy, you will be required to pay a Single Supplement Fee. Single accommodations are available only during the first and last night for Zagoria ride.
- We organise two transfers from the airport every Saturday, the first one at 12:00 and the second at 15:00. Flights that fit our normal transfer's schedule should be planned to arrive no later than 14:00 and departures not earlier than 12:00.
- Riders that arrive in Tirana one day in advance can plan to arrive at the airport for the transfer of 12:00 or 15:00. We can't organise transfers from Tirana. It is very easy and cheap to reach Tirana airport by bus. There is a bus every hour starting from the centre of Tirana (behind the opera palace).
- An extra charge will apply for all transfers outside of the mentioned times or private transfers -No trip organised by Caravan Horse Riding Albania includes entrance tickets and fees. A general entrance price to a park or monument during the ride is round 300-400 ALL (round 2,5-3,5 Euros). -It's possible to buy an Albanian SIM-card for the duration of your holiday. For 2000, you can have 10 minutes international calls, 100 SMS, 4G internet for a week (Vodafone). With small exceptions all the area has very good coverage with signal.

Food and drinks

- For the long trails the first meal is dinner on day one and the last is breakfast on the last day. Dietary limitations should be described in advance during booking.
- Water, wine, raki, milk tea and coffee are the main drinks available during long trails. Beer is not possible in family accommodation.
- Water is generally drinkable everywhere. Our guides will advise where to avoid drinking water if it will be necessary.

Cancellation policy

Payment & Cancellation Terms

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Holidays are confirmed with a 20% non-refundable deposit.

The full balance is due 56 days before the start date.

If you cancel your booking less than 56 days before the start date of your trail we are entitled to receive full payment, less refunds as follows:

42 days or more before booking date - 50%

28 days or more - 30%

less than 28 days - nil

Insurance

All saddletravel.com customers are required to take out appropriate travel insurance that covers horse riding and holiday cancellation. Proof of insurance details will be required during the booking process.



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