

The free comprehensive travel guide

SARANDA

Sarandë: Albania's Ionian gem



Mirë se vini në Sarandë!

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WELCOME

Welcome to Saranda (Sarandë)

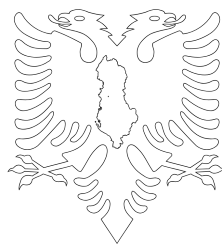
Tucked between green hills and the turquoise Ionian Sea, Saranda, **Sarandë** in Albanian, is the capital of the Albanian Riviera: a sun-soaked port town looking across the strait to Corfu. It has everything a Mediterranean holiday needs: beaches, seafood tavernas, ancient ruins and a promenade made for slow evenings, all at prices that feel like the Mediterranean of twenty years ago.

This guide covers everything for your trip: what to see, where to swim, what to eat, where to stay, how much things cost, and the local know-how that makes travel smooth. For live listings with photos and reviews, visit sarandaguide.com.

Saranda or Sarandë? A word on names

You'll see Albanian places spelled two ways, and both are correct. Albanian nouns have two forms: an **indefinite** form (Sarandë, Butrint, Gjirokastër) and a **definite** form (Saranda, Butrinti, Gjirokastra), roughly like the difference between "a town" and "the town." English writing mixes them freely. The letter **ë** is a soft "uh" sound, often barely pronounced at the end of a word, so Sarandë sounds like "sa-RAN-duh." In this guide we use the common English spellings with the Albanian form alongside.

English / common	Albanian forms you'll see
Saranda	Sarandë (indefinite) / Saranda (definite)
Butrint	Butrint / Butrinti
Ksamil	Ksamil / Ksamili
Gjirokaster	Gjirokastër / Gjirokastra
Himara	Himarë / Himara
The Blue Eye	Syri i Kaltër ("the blue eye")



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PLAN

Quick facts & when to visit

Currency	Albanian Lek (ALL). Many places quote euros, but paying in lek is usually the better rate.
Language	Albanian (shqip). English is widely spoken in tourism; Italian and Greek too.
Time zone	Central European Time, same as Italy, one hour behind Greece.
Plugs	European two-pin (types C/F), 230V.
Visas	Most visitors (EU, UK, US, and many others) enter visa-free, check your nationality before t

Season by season

May – June

The sweet spot: warm days, a swimmable sea by late May, flowers on the hills and room on the beaches. Prices are gentle.

July – August

Peak season: hot (often 30°C+), busy and buzzing. Nightlife is at full throttle and Ksamil fills up by mid-morning. Book stays and loungers ahead.

September – October

Many locals' favorite. The sea is at its warmest in September, crowds thin out, and golden light settles over the bay.

November – April

Quiet and mild. Many tourist businesses close, but you'll have Butrint and the castle nearly to yourself, and hotels are at their cheapest.

Local tip: even in August, evenings can be breezy on the water, pack one light layer.

ARRIVE

Getting there & around

Via Corfu (most popular)

Fly to Corfu (CFU), then take the ferry from Corfu Town to Saranda's port, fast boats take about 30 minutes, slower ones about 70. Several crossings daily in season; bring your passport, it's an international border.

Via Tirana

Fly to Tirana (TIA), then drive or take a bus south, about 4–5 hours through genuinely beautiful country. Buses run daily; the coastal route via Vlorë (Vlora) and the Llogara Pass is spectacular.

Driving

Roads to Saranda are good. In town, traffic is easygoing but parking near the promenade is scarce in August.

Around town

Central Saranda is completely walkable, most of what you need sits along or near the seafront. Taxis are plentiful and cheap by European standards; agree the fare before you set off.

To Ksamil & Butrint

The local bus toward Butrint stops in Ksamil and runs regularly in season along the coast road. Taxis and scooter rentals are easy alternatives.

Local tip: the Corfu ferry is technically an international crossing, allow time for passport control on both sides, especially in August.

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EXPLORE

Top things to do



Butrint National Park (Butrinti)

A UNESCO World Heritage site 30 minutes south of town: 2,500 years of Greek, Roman, Byzantine and Venetian history layered in a lagoon-side forest. The Greek theatre, the baptistery mosaics and the Venetian tower are highlights. Go early, mornings are cooler and quieter.

The Blue Eye (Syri i Kaltër)

A mesmerizing natural spring about 40 minutes inland, where ice-cold water rises from a depth no diver has fully measured, in impossible shades of blue. Swimming is not allowed, the show is the color itself.

Lëkurësi Castle (Kalaja e Lëkurësit)

The ruined hilltop castle above town serves the best sunset view in Saranda, Corfu on the horizon, the whole bay below. Most visitors come at golden hour for a drink at the castle restaurant.

The promenade (shëtitorja)

Saranda's seafront walk fills every evening for the xhiro, the traditional evening stroll. Grab an ice cream and join the flow; it's the town's living room.

Boat trips

Day cruises run to hidden beaches along the riviera and to Kakome bay; many include swimming stops in water you'll talk about for years. Book a day ahead in summer.

The Forty Saints Monastery

The ruined hilltop monastery that gave Saranda its name, “forty saints” (Santi Quaranta in Italian, të dyzet shenjtorët in Albanian). Modest ruins, big views, few tourists.

Synagogue ruins

In the town center, the remains of a 5th-century synagogue with mosaic floors, a quick, worthwhile stop that hints at how old this port really is.

SIGHTSEE

Butrint: a walking guide

Give Butrint (Butrinti) two to three unhurried hours. The path loops through the forest, so it stays surprisingly cool, but bring water and a hat.

1. The Greek theatre & sanctuary

Just past the entrance: a 4th-century BC theatre that could seat 1,500, beside the sanctuary of Asclepius, the god of healing. Roman columns and inscriptions lie all around it.

2. The baptistery

A 6th-century circular baptistery with one of the finest mosaic floors in the Balkans. Note: the mosaic is usually covered with protective sand and only unveiled on special occasions, so don't be surprised to see gravel.

3. The Great Basilica

Roofless but standing, with its grand arched windows. One of the most photogenic ruins on site.

4. The Lion Gate & city walls

A massive stone relief of a lion devouring a bull, guarding a gate in walls that are over 2,000 years old.

5. The acropolis castle & museum

Climb to the hilltop Venetian castle for the museum (small but excellent) and a panorama over the lagoon, the channel and Corfu beyond.

Local tip: at the site exit, a hand-cranked cable ferry crosses the Vivari Channel toward the triangular Venetian fortress; a fun two-minute detour.

More places worth your time

Lëkurësi Castle at sunset

Drive or taxi up 30 minutes before sunset. The terrace bar fills fast in summer; the view over the bay to Corfu is the best in town. Free to wander the ramparts.

The Forty Saints Monastery (Manastiri i Dyzet Shenjtorëve)

The ruined hilltop monastery that gave Saranda its name. A short uphill walk rewards you with quiet ruins and big views, and almost no other tourists.

The synagogue ruins

In the middle of town: mosaic floors of a 5th-century synagogue, evidence of Saranda's ancient Jewish community. Free, five minutes, worth it.

Best photo spots

Lëkurësi Castle at golden hour; the promenade palms just after sunrise (empty and glowing); the Ksamil islands from the beach headland; the Butrint lagoon from the acropolis; and the harbor boats with the white town stacked behind them.

SWIM

The beach guide



Saranda town beaches

Small, convenient pebble-and-platform beaches right along the promenade, fine for a quick swim between meals, with cafés steps away.

Mango Beach & the north bay

The livelier beach-club stretch north of the port: loungers, music and cocktails, popular with a younger crowd.

Ksamil (Ksamili)

The famous one, 20 minutes south. Shallow, calm, Caribbean-clear water and three small islands you can swim or pedal-boat to. In July–August arrive before 10am or book loungers ahead; in June or September it's bliss.

Pulebardha Beach

A quieter cove between Saranda and Ksamil with famously clear water and a relaxed taverna. Reachable by taxi or scooter.

Pasqyra / Mirror Beach

Named for water so still it mirrors the cliffs. Small, gorgeous, and best early in the day before boats arrive.

Kakome Bay (Gjiri i Kakomesë)

Undeveloped and spectacular, most easily reached on a boat trip. Bring everything you need.

Local tip: most riviera beaches are pebble, not sand, cheap water shoes from any shop in town make a big difference.

FEATURED BEACH BAR / BEACH CLUB

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COMPARE

Beaches at a glance

Beach	Type	Facilities	Crowds (Jul-Aug)	Getting there
Town beaches	Pebble/platform	Cafés, loungers	Medium	Walk from anywhere in town
Mango / north bay	Pebble	Beach clubs, bars, music	High	15-20 min walk or short taxi
Ksamil	Fine white pebble, shallow	Full: clubs, restaurants, pedal boats	Very high	Bus or taxi, 20 min south
Pulebardha	Pebble cove	One taverna, some loungers	Low-medium	Taxi or scooter, 10-15 min
Pasqyra (Mirror)	Small pebble cove	Seasonal bar	Medium (mornings quiet)	Taxi or scooter, 15 min
Kakome Bay	Wild pebble	None: bring everything	Low	Boat trip is easiest

Rule of thumb: for convenience swim in town, for the postcard go to Ksamil early, for peace pick Pulebardha or a boat to Kakome.

TASTE

Eat & drink like a local

Fresh seafood

Saranda's tavernas serve the morning's catch: grilled sea bass (levrek), mussels from Butrint lagoon (midhje), octopus and prawns. If the menu says "fish of the day," say yes.

Byrek

Flaky filo pastry filled with cheese (me djathë), spinach (me spinaq) or meat (me mish), Albania's favorite snack, often under a euro at bakeries. Breakfast of champions.

Tavë kosi

The national dish: baked lamb in a tangy yogurt custard. Comfort food you didn't know you were missing.

Qofte & zgara

Herbed meatballs (qofte) and the mixed grill (zgara), usually shared, always generous. Order a village salad (sallatë fshati) alongside.

Fërgesë

A rich baked dish of peppers, tomato and cheese, the vegetarian star of Albanian cooking.

Raki

The local grape brandy, offered everywhere, often on the house at the end of a meal. Sip slowly. Gëzuar! (Cheers!)

Coffee culture

Albanians take coffee seriously, a slow espresso (kafe) at a seafront café is a ritual, not a takeaway. Locals may linger over one cup for an hour; you're invited to do the same.

Find the best tables: browse restaurants with photos and reviews at sarandaguide.com, updated by locals and travelers.

EVENINGS

Nightlife



Saranda's evenings start on the promenade with the xhiro, move to seafront cocktail bars around sunset, and finish, in summer, at beach clubs and rooftop bars that keep going late. The scene is concentrated along the bay, so you can wander until somewhere sounds right. Ksamil has its own beach-club nightlife in peak season. Outside June–September, things get much quieter.

SLEEP

Where to stay



City center & promenade

Best for first-timers: restaurants, the port and the evening stroll at your door, with bay views from upper floors. Liveliest (and priciest) in August.

Kodra e Diellit / the hillside

Apartments climbing the hill trade a short uphill walk for big views and lower prices.

Ksamil

Stay here if beaches are the whole point. Quieter at night (outside the clubs), 20 minutes from Saranda's restaurants.

North bay (toward Mango Beach)

Newer hotels near the beach clubs, good for a resort feel while staying close to town.

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Day trips



Gjirokastër (Gjirokastra)

A UNESCO-listed Ottoman stone town about 1.5 hours away: a dramatic castle, cobbled bazaar and slate-roofed houses stacked on the hillside. Pairs perfectly with the Blue Eye on the way.

Corfu, Greece (Korfuzi)

Ferries cross from Saranda's port in as little as 30 minutes, a Greek island lunch and back by dinner. Bring your passport.

Himara (Himarë) & the riviera road

The coastal drive north is one of Europe's great road trips: the Llogara Pass, olive groves, and beach after beach, Borsh, Qeparo, Porto Palermo.

Porto Palermo Castle

A moody Ottoman-era fortress on its own peninsula about an hour north, beside a bay made for a swim stop.

Butrint + Ksamil combo

The classic full day: ruins in the morning, Ksamil beach all afternoon, sunset drink back at Lëkurësi Castle.

A perfect 3-day itinerary

Day 1	Morning swim in town, promenade lunch, explore the synagogue ruins, sunset at Lëkurësi Castle, seafood
Day 2	Butrint early, Ksamil beach afternoon, dinner in Ksamil or back in town.
Day 3	Blue Eye in the morning, Gjirokastër for lunch and the castle, home for a farewell raki.

EXTRAS

The Corfu ferry, step by step

1. Buy tickets a day ahead in peak season, from agencies at Saranda port or online. Choose the fast hydrofoil (about 30 minutes, no cars) or the slower ferry (about 70 minutes).
2. Arrive 45-60 minutes early with your passport. This is an international border with real passport control on both sides.
3. In Corfu, the port is a short ride or a 20-30 minute walk from the UNESCO-listed Old Town. Lunch in a kantouni alley, see the Old Fortress, and catch an afternoon boat back.
4. Remember the time difference: Greece is one hour ahead of Albania. Double-check whether your return time is Greek or Albanian time; it catches people every summer.

Packing checklist

Water shoes for pebble beaches, reef-safe sunscreen, a hat for Butrint, one light layer for sea breezes, EU plug adapter (types C/F), lek cash, passport (for Corfu), motion-sickness tablets if you plan boat trips, a dry bag for phone and towels, and comfortable shoes for castle climbs.

Emergency numbers

112	General emergency (works throughout Albania and the EU)
127	Ambulance
128	Fire
129	Police

Traveling with kids

Saranda is easy with children: Ksamil's water is shallow and calm, the promenade fills with families every evening (ice cream everywhere), pedal boats and the little beach slides keep afternoons busy, and Butrint doubles as a shady adventure playground of ruins, best before noon.

A perfect week: 7-day itinerary

Day 1	Settle in: town swim, promenade xhiro, seafood dinner on the water.
Day 2	Butrint in the morning, Ksamil beach afternoon.
Day 3	Boat trip to Kakome bay and hidden beaches.
Day 4	Blue Eye, then Gjirokastër: castle, bazaar, late lunch.
Day 5	Corfu day trip (passport!).
Day 6	Riviera road north: Porto Palermo castle, Borsh or Qeparo beach.
Day 7	Favorite beach revisited, souvenir shopping, sunset at Lëkurësi, farewell raki.

BUDGET

What things cost

Albania remains one of Europe's best-value destinations. Rough guide prices in season (check locally, things change):

Espresso	around 100 lek (≈ €1)
Byrek	100–150 lek (≈ €1–1.50)
Casual lunch	€5–8 per person
Seafood dinner	€12–25 per person with wine
Beach loungers	€5–15 for two, more at Ksamil clubs
Taxi in town	a few euros; agree the fare first
Double room	€30–60 mid-range in summer; more in August

KNOW-HOW

Practical tips A–Z

Money

Cards work in bigger places, but carry lek cash for beaches, taxis and small tavernas. ATMs are everywhere, prefer major banks and always choose to be charged in lek, not euros.

The nod

Many Albanians shake their head for “yes” and nod for “no.” It surprises everyone at least once.

Safety

Saranda is generally very safe, with the usual common sense about valuables on busy beaches.

SIM & data

Local prepaid SIMs with generous data are cheap and sold in town, bring your passport to register.

Tap water

Locals mostly drink bottled water; it's cheap everywhere.

Tipping

Not obligatory; rounding up or ~10% for good service is appreciated.



SPEAK

Speak like a local

Albanian (shqip) is one of Europe's oldest languages, a branch of its own on the Indo-European tree. Locals light up when visitors try even a word or two. The spelling is very regular once you know the sounds:

ë	a soft "uh" (like the a in "about"); often nearly silent at the end: Sarandë = "sa-RAN-duh"
ç	"ch" as in church, çaj (tea) = "chai"
c	"ts" as in cats
xh	"j" as in judge, xhiro = "JEE-ro"
x	"dz" as in adze
q / gj	soft "ch" / soft "gy", Gjirokastrë = "gyee-ro-KAS-tuhr"
j	"y" as in yes
dh / th	as in "this" / as in "thin"

Essential phrases

Përsëritje!	Hello! (puhr-shuhn-DET-yeh)
Mirëmëngjes / Mirëmbrema	Good morning / Good evening
Faleminderit	Thank you (fah-leh-min-DEH-rit)
Ju lutem	Please / You're welcome
Po / Jo	Yes / No (remember the nod!)
Sa kushton?	How much is it?
Ku është plazhi?	Where is the beach?
Një birrë, ju lutem	One beer, please
Shumë mirë!	Very good!
Gëzuar!	Cheers! (guh-ZOO-ar)



ABOUT

SarandaGuide.com

SarandaGuide.com is the local directory for Saranda and the Albanian Riviera, restaurants, hotels, beaches, nightlife and things to do, with photos, reviews and up-to-date details. Made for Saranda lovers: find your next favorite place today.

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Faleminderit për vizitën, thanks for reading, and see you in Saranda!

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