

THE LAND OF THE LIVING PAST

**Albanian Alps and Shkodra Lake: an experience to discover
authentic landscapes, flavours and smiles**



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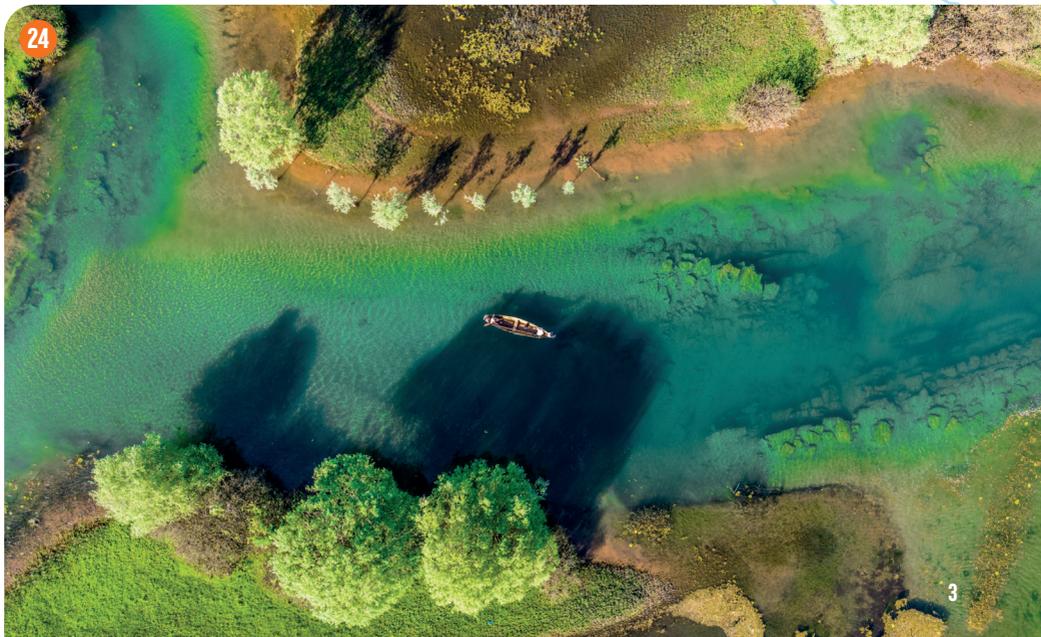
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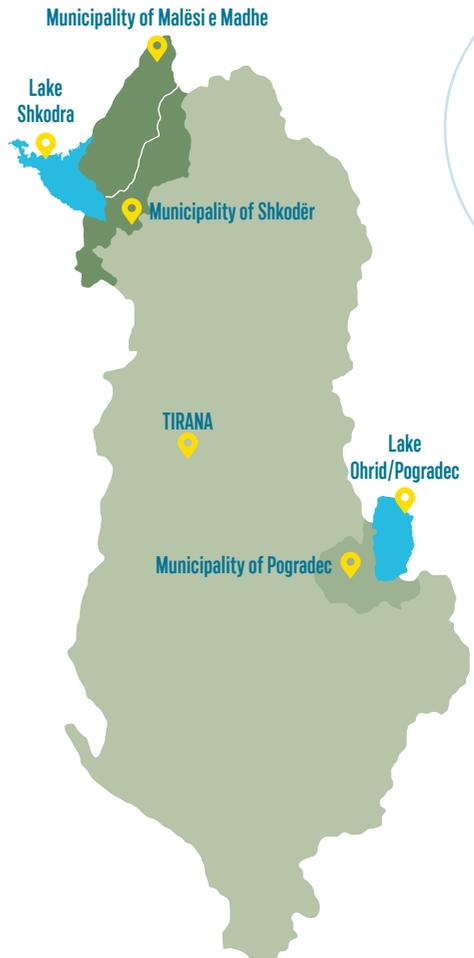
LAGHI D'ALBANIA project

The “ALBANIAN LAKES – Promotion of sustainable and responsible tourism models for the inclusive development of communities” project (AID 012590/02/1), funded by the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation, aims to promote integrated territorial management and sustainable tourism models for the two main Albanian lakes (Ohrid/Pogradec and Shkodra), countering the “aggressive” tourism and development models rapidly expanding throughout Albania.

The project is grounded in the principles of participatory governance and social economy applied to the development of **sustainable tourism in rural areas**. Through broad community engagement, it is therefore possible to implement mechanisms for the **integrated territorial promotion** and strengthened connectivity at the local, regional, and European levels. In doing so, the initiative seeks to foster integrated local development models capable of addressing today’s major economic, social, and environmental challenges.

The project is oriented towards achieving three outcomes:

1. Strengthening the governance system in the two target areas focusing on inclusiveness, sustainability, and connectivity with other European and international actors.
2. Increasing community involvement in shaping interventions that support the sustainable and responsible tourism sector.
3. Expanding and innovating the tourism offer of sustainable and responsible tourism stakeholders in the target areas.





The project also implemented a series of actions:

- **Technical assistance** to improve tourism in the municipalities of Malësi e Madhe and Shkodër, with targeted support for small-scale interventions to reduce environmental impact and promote the social inclusion of rural youth and women.
- **Establishment of the LAG LABEATËT Local Action Group**, designed to encourage long-term collaboration among local stakeholders and promote integrated development of the area.
- **Tourism promotion** through a campaign (<https://rb.gy/6aenan>) co-designed with local youth and participation in national, regional, and Italian fairs.
- **Drafting of an Action Plan for Sustainable Tourism** for the area between the Albanian Alps National Park and the Lake of Shkodra Protected Area.
- **Creation and management of a development fund** partially dedicated to local businesses and start-ups, and partially to public-private co-design initiatives aimed at enhancing and managing rural heritage between Malësia e Madhe and Shkodër.

The Albanian Alps and the Shkodra Lake

Two natural borders framing a land rich in history, nature, and traditions.

In the early 1900s, Edith Durham, a young English explorer, ventured into **Northern Albania**, the land of the *Kanun*¹ and the *Burrneshë*², the *Xhubleta*³ and the *Lahuta*⁴. Despite countless hardships, she was overwhelmed by the charm of an **ancient but ever-living culture**, which she later defined: “The land of the living past”. To relive the same emotions as Durham, Northern Albania still offers the opportunity to visit some of Albania’s **most remote and isolated valleys** and **discover the unexplored natural beauty of Shkodra Lake**, still largely untouched by mainstream tourism.

The region, surrounded by two particularly fascinating natural borders (the Albanian Alps, a National Park since 2022, and Shkodra Lake, a Protected Natural

Park), offers **unforgettable landscapes, pristine nature, and vibrant traditions and customs**. Accommodation options vary to every need and are rich in discoveries: peaceful retreats for families, stays in restored traditional homes, authentic local cuisine for food lovers, rich biodiversity for nature enthusiasts, rugged mountains for adventurers, water sports and swimming for lake lovers, and legends and tales for the romantics.

All this is seasoned with the **joviality of the local communities**, who make hospitality a sacred law unchanged over the years, unchanged since the days when Durham fell in love with the region, according to the dialect proverb: *Shpia e shqiptarit asht e Zotit dhe e mikut* - **The house of an Albanian belongs to God and to the guest**.

1 The *Kanun* is an ancient code of Albanian customary laws that has been used for centuries to regulate various aspects of social life in communities. There are several different codes, depending on the area and the families involved. One of the best-known is the Kanun of Lekë Dukagjini, which has its roots in the Albanian Alps.

2 The *Burrneshë* are known in English by the incorrect translation of Sworn Virgins. The Albanian term instead refers to a woman's social choice to assume the role of head of household and family, where for various reasons (health, war, etc.) there was no recognized head of household. The incorrect

translation stems from the image offered by the *Burrneshë* themselves, who dress and carry out tasks normally expected of the male member of the family.

3 The *Xhubleta* is a very complex ancient traditional garment found only in Northern Albania, particularly in Malësia e Madhe. Since 2022, it has been part of the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage. (<https://rb.gy/q5f82q>).

4 The *Lahuta* is a stringed instrument typical of Northern Albania and widespread in slightly different forms throughout the Balkan region. It is also inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List.



The **Shkodra Lake**, a protected area connecting the municipalities of Shkodër and Malësia e Madhe, is located on the border between Montenegro and Albania and is the largest lake in the Balkan Peninsula, with an average surface area of 475 km². This lake possesses unique characteristics among the world's great lakes: **extraordinary biodiversity** and remarkable natural beauty, with significant tourism potential. The lake's complex freshwater ecosystem, associated wetlands, floodplains, and karst formations provide essential **environmental benefits for surrounding**

communities (such as fishing, drinking water, and recreation) and contribute to the national and regional economic and cultural heritage.

Recreational opportunities around the lake are numerous, while respecting the lake's delicate biodiversity. Some fishermen have begun offering lake tours using their **traditional yellow boats**, called *Sule*. Their experience allows visitors to reach enchanting corners of the lake, such as the **famous Eye of Shegan** (*Syri i Sheganit*), a protected spring now renowned throughout the country.



For the more adventurous, local guides offer [kayaking or paddleboarding tours of the lake and the Buna River](#), respecting the timing and breeding areas of some of Shkodra Lake's native birds, such as the common kingfisher, water dove and the common water swallow.

For birdwatching enthusiasts, scan the QR code and find out more!



From the city of Shkodër, it's also possible to safely reach the villages of Shiroka or Zogaj, along the Shkodër shore of the lake, via a [pleasant cycling path](#) that even takes you to the border with Montenegro. In Zogaj, an [ancient tradition of loom work](#) by local women is also kept alive, and can be visited and reached via the typical white steps, re-

painted every year as a tradition of the local inhabitants.

[Typical local dishes include carp and eel](#), cooked both in the oven and on a tile. In the area, numerous lake-view restaurants welcome visitors. There are also [numerous beaches suitable for swimming](#), while moving along the Malësi e Madhe part of the lake, you'll find several [well-equipped campsites](#).

The [city of Shkodër](#) complements the surrounding natural areas with [numerous cultural, musical, and historical opportunities](#). Of particular interest are visits to ancient sites such as Rozafa Castle, the Mesi Bridge, and the Lead Mosque, as well as attractions linked to more recent history, including the Marubi Museum of Photography and the museum dedicated to the memory and testimonies of the communist regime.

The streets of Gjuhadol and the city center also offer places to relax, thanks to the many venues that, especially in spring and summer, host live music and make the city lively and colorful.

Silver filigree craftsmanship is also one of the city's most popular souvenirs, complemented by **local products made from medicinal herbs**, such as creams, oils, and soaps. Along the road connecting Shkodër to the mountains, you can see the area's significant dedication to **growing medicinal herbs**, particularly sage, lavender, and helichrysum, which in June and July offer scents and colors reminiscent of the charm of French Provence. Some small, family-run agritourism businesses are promoting this tradition, along with that of **high-quality local red wine production**, which pair beautifully with **traditional local cheeses and honey**.

About an hour north lies the second major natural feature: **the Albanian Alps**. This park encompasses diverse natural ecosystems, **creating a majestic spectacle**, from the Valbona Valley and Theth National Park to the beautiful panorama of Qafa e Thores, the Gashi River, and the Accursed Mountains of Kelmend. The Albanian Alps are the most mountainous and fascinating region in the country and are recently becoming one of the most attractive international tourist destinations.

The area has benefited from the rediscovery of **traditional mountain trails** connecting the valley villages with the mountain pastures and the peaks of the **Dinaric Alps**. There are over 330 kilometers of **mountain trails of varying difficulty** between the Kelmend and Shkrel valleys as well as for the Gruemirë Administrative Unit, and just as many in the



The Theth valley, ranging from family walks with children to expert mountaineering climbs. Part of the area is also located within well-known **cross-border trekking routes** such as **Peaks of the Balkans** (peaksofthebalkans.com) and the **Via Dinarica** (viadinaricakosovo.com).

During the summer months, a limited number of families still practice **transhumance** and move to the mountain pastures, allowing visitors to meet them and taste **fresh dairy products**, such as *Jardun*, a refreshing drink made from sheep's milk, water, and salt, or *Dhjath i Zier* (processed cheese).

The area boasts a significant **culinary tradition linked to pastoral life**, which is

also reflected in the Slow Food Ark of Taste. Among these gastronomic gems is *Mishavinë*, a **Slow Food Presidium mountain cheese** found only in the villages of Lepushë and Vermosh. The production had declined significantly over the years, but it has recently revived, becoming one of the flagships of local tradition and one of the most sought-after products by chefs and visitors. In this context, gastronomy is a highlight of any visitor's experience.

Scan the QR code and learn more about *Mishavinë*





ALPINI Guesthouse

Especially in the area's mountain villages, it is possible to meet several witnesses to a centuries-old knowledge of the **properties of medicinal herbs**, with whom you can sip traditional mountain herbal teas. Your meals and the typical, frequent coffee breaks (Turkish coffee and *raki*, the local spirit) will be accompanied by evocative scenery, the beauty of the mountain landscapes, and the scents of medicinal herbs.

The traditional houses have been renovated, maintaining the **typical Alpine style** while ensuring an international standard of hospitality. The hospitality is organized like a multi-building hotel: to ensure sufficient beds and the necessary services, existing accommodations have been networked, and **hospitality is provided by the families** and managed with the typical warmth of the locals.

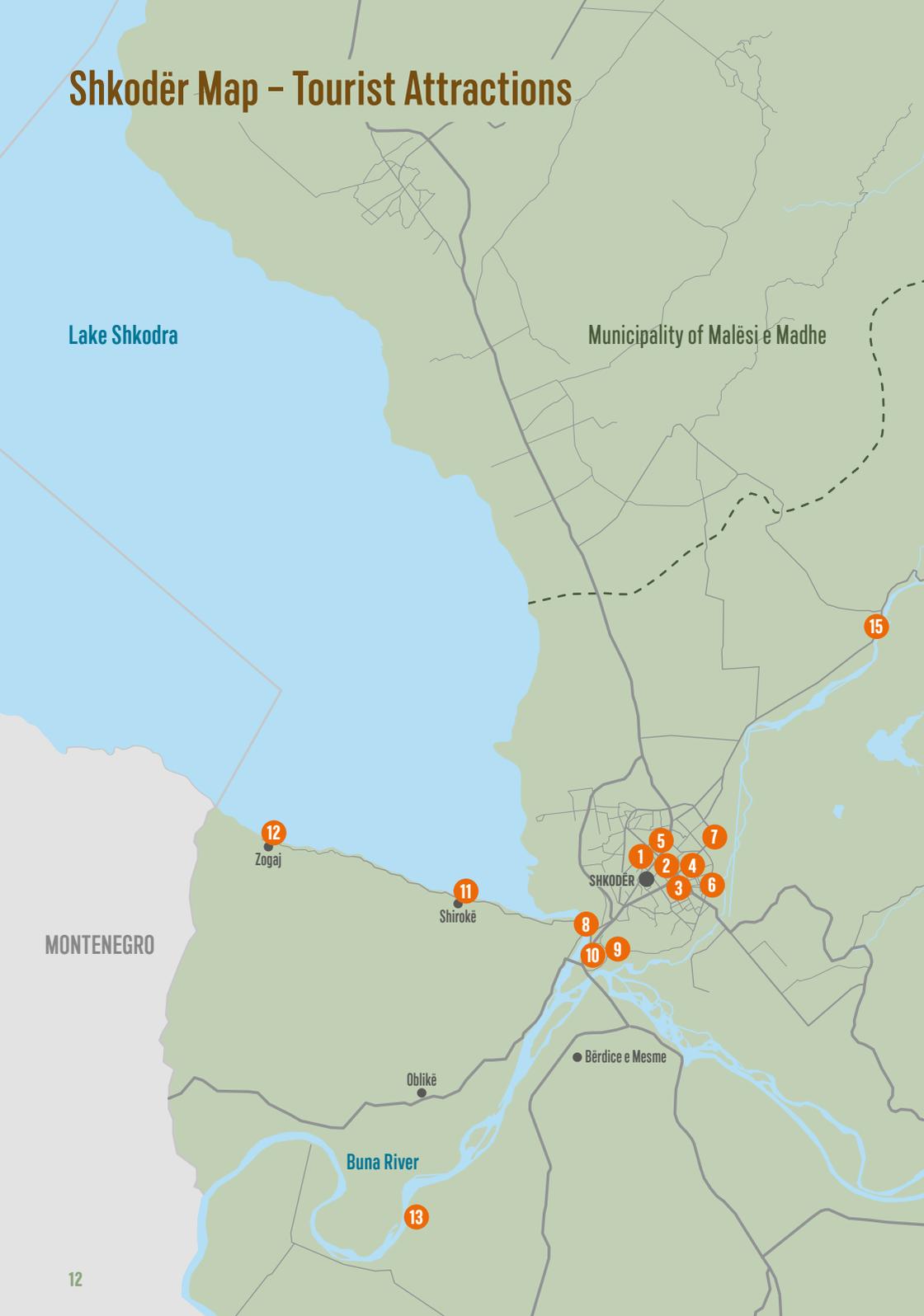
The lake and the Alps form two natural boundaries for the project's target area, offering unique opportunities for the

development of an **integrated and distinctive tourism offering**. This creates an exclusive development landscape for the two municipalities involved, offering a wide range of activities, including cultural (237 listed monuments) and nature (42 identified natural monuments) visits.

Proximity to Montenegro further enriches the area, with four border crossings (Muriqan, Hani i Hotit in the lake area; Grabom and Vermosh in the mountain area) easily accessible depending on the itinerary.

The **interventions of the NGO VIS** (International Volunteering for Development), present in the area since 2009 with integrated rural development projects financed by the Italian Cooperation and the European Union, have helped the communities to enhance what they had most precious: **an enchanting natural environment thriving in harmony with a centuries-old, fascinating culture**.

Shkodër Map – Tourist Attractions



Lake Shkodra

Municipality of Malësi e Madhe

12

Zogaj

11

Shirokë

SHKODËR

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

10

9

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MONTENEGRO

Obliqë

● Bërdice e Mesme

Buna River

13



Municipality of Shkodër

LEGEND

- 1 Oso Kuka Historical Museum
- 2 Marubi National Museum of Photography
- 3 Museum of Memory and Witness
- 4 Gjuhadol Alley
- 5 Shkodër Art Gallery
- 6 Shkodër Cathedral
- 7 Old Catholic Cemetery of Shkodër
- 8 Lead Mosque
- 9 Rozafa Castle
- 10 Old Buna Bridge*
- 11 Shiroka Tourist Village*
- 12 Zogaj Tourist Village*
- 13 Ruins of the Church of Shirgj
- 14 Island of Sarda, with ruins of old Catholic churches
- 15 Old Mesi Bridge
- 16 Ruins of Drisht Castle
- 17 Kiri Canyon

* part of the Lake Shkodra Nature Park

Rragam

Drin River

Shkodër Map – Tourist Attractions

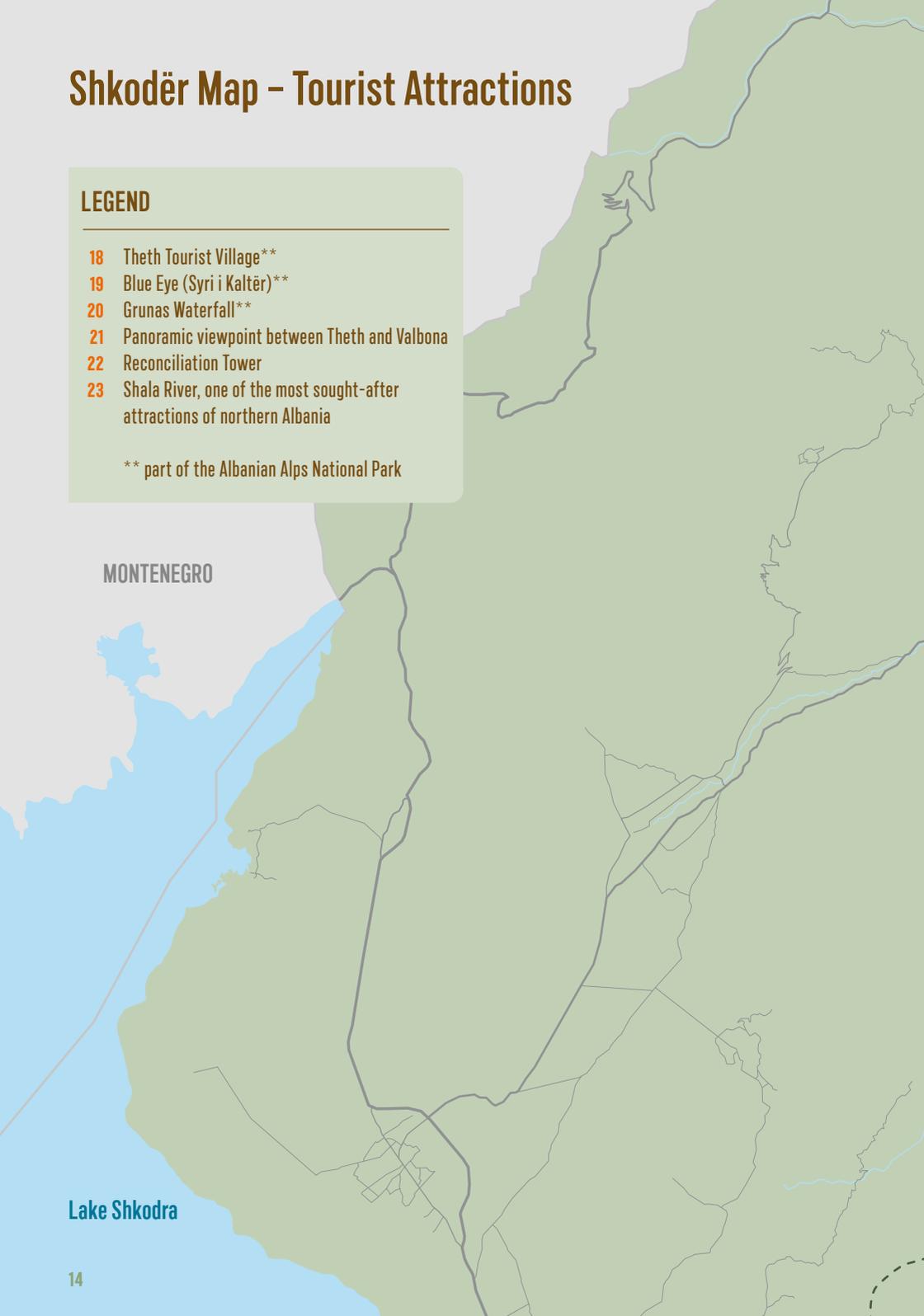
LEGEND

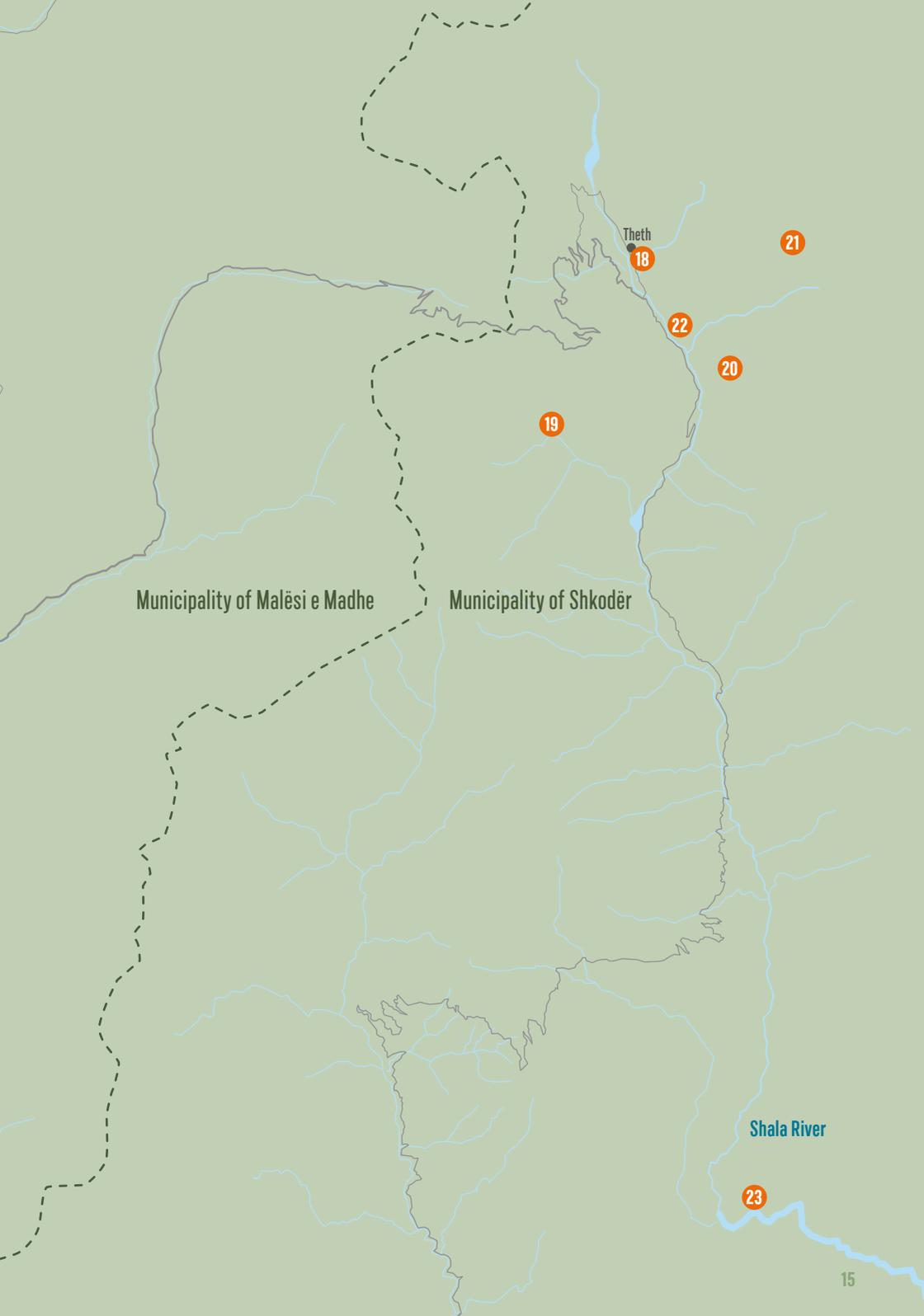
- 18 Theth Tourist Village**
- 19 Blue Eye (Syri i Kaltër)**
- 20 Grunas Waterfall**
- 21 Panoramic viewpoint between Theth and Valbona
- 22 Reconciliation Tower
- 23 Shala River, one of the most sought-after attractions of northern Albania

** part of the Albanian Alps National Park

MONTENEGRO

Lake Shkodra





Municipality of Malësi e Madhe

Municipality of Shkodër

Theth

18

21

22

20

19

23

Shala River

Shkodër – Restaurants and Bars

ARTI I ZANAVE

(+355) 67 376 6211
artizanave@yahoo.com
Shkodër

Small, characteristic restaurant in the center of Shkodër, a social enterprise supporting the activities of a local association that assists women survivors of violence

SIMONI

(+355) 67 436 6454
Shkodër

Traditional restaurant on Lake Shkodra with an apitherapy center

TE NAILI

(+355) 69 970 8552
Zogaj, Shkodër

Traditional restaurant on Lake Shkodra

SIMONI



Shkodër – Hotels

ALEKS

(+355) 69 214 8435
hotelaleks2024@gmail.com
Shkodër

Modern, family-run hotel in an
excellent location



Shkodër – Guesthouses

MI CASA ES SU CASA

(+355) 68 385 9723
hostelshkoder@gmail.com
www.micasaestucasa.it
Shkodër

One of the most famous hostels in Shkodër with bicycle rental services

ECO-SOCIAL FARM

(+355) 68 202 6559
facikastriot@yahoo.com
Oblikë, Shkodër

A farm just outside Shkodër offering bungalow accommodation and experiential guided activities. Profits are donated to young people with disabilities

BEKIM NDRUKAJ

(+355) 69 350 1860
bndrukaj9@gmail.com
Zogaj, Shkodër

Specializing in the village of Zogaj and the entire lake area

BUJTINA POLIA

(+355) 69 301 6781
booking@bujtinapolia.com
www.bujtinapolia.com
Theth, Shkodër

Guesthouse and restaurant in the mountains of Theth

KRONI I MICANVE

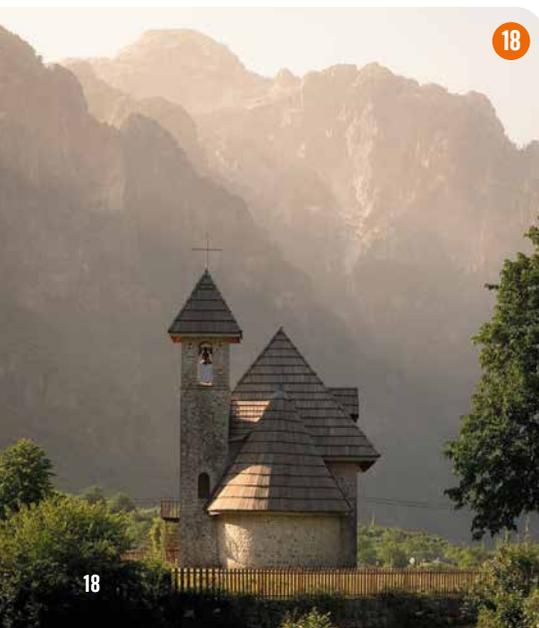
(+355) 69 359 5906
pellumbcarku@gmail.com
Theth, Shkodër

Guesthouse and restaurant in the mountains of Theth

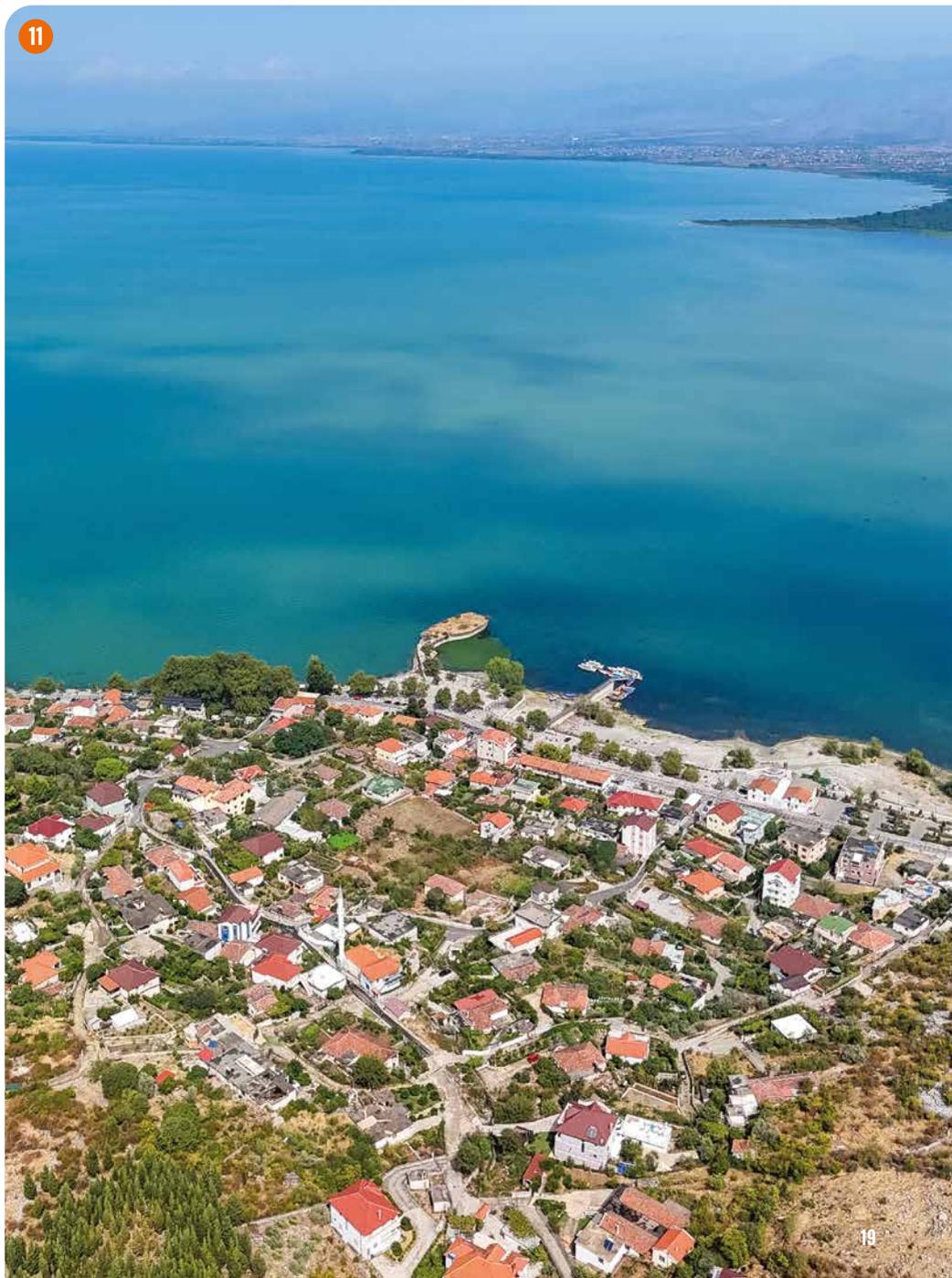
VILLA GJECAJ

(+355) 69 601 5771
info@villagjecaj.com
www.villagjecaj.com
Theth, Shkodër

Guesthouse and restaurant in the mountains of Theth



18



Shkodër – Producers

NATYRA IME

(+355) 67 286 0849
natyraimeal@gmail.com
www.natyraime.al
Shkodër

Handcrafted organic soaps and other handmade products

KOSTUME POPULLORE JONI

(+355) 67 287 0379
teutaa.tahiri@hotmail.com
Bërdice e Mesme, Shkodër

Traditional clothing for children and adults producer

GURI I ZI

(+355) 68 386 2424
info@guriizi.com
www.guriizi.al
Rragam, Shkodër

Handwoven textiles, a women-led enterprise

10



QILIMA DI NEBIJE QOTAJ

(+355) 68 226 2678

Zogaj, Shkodër

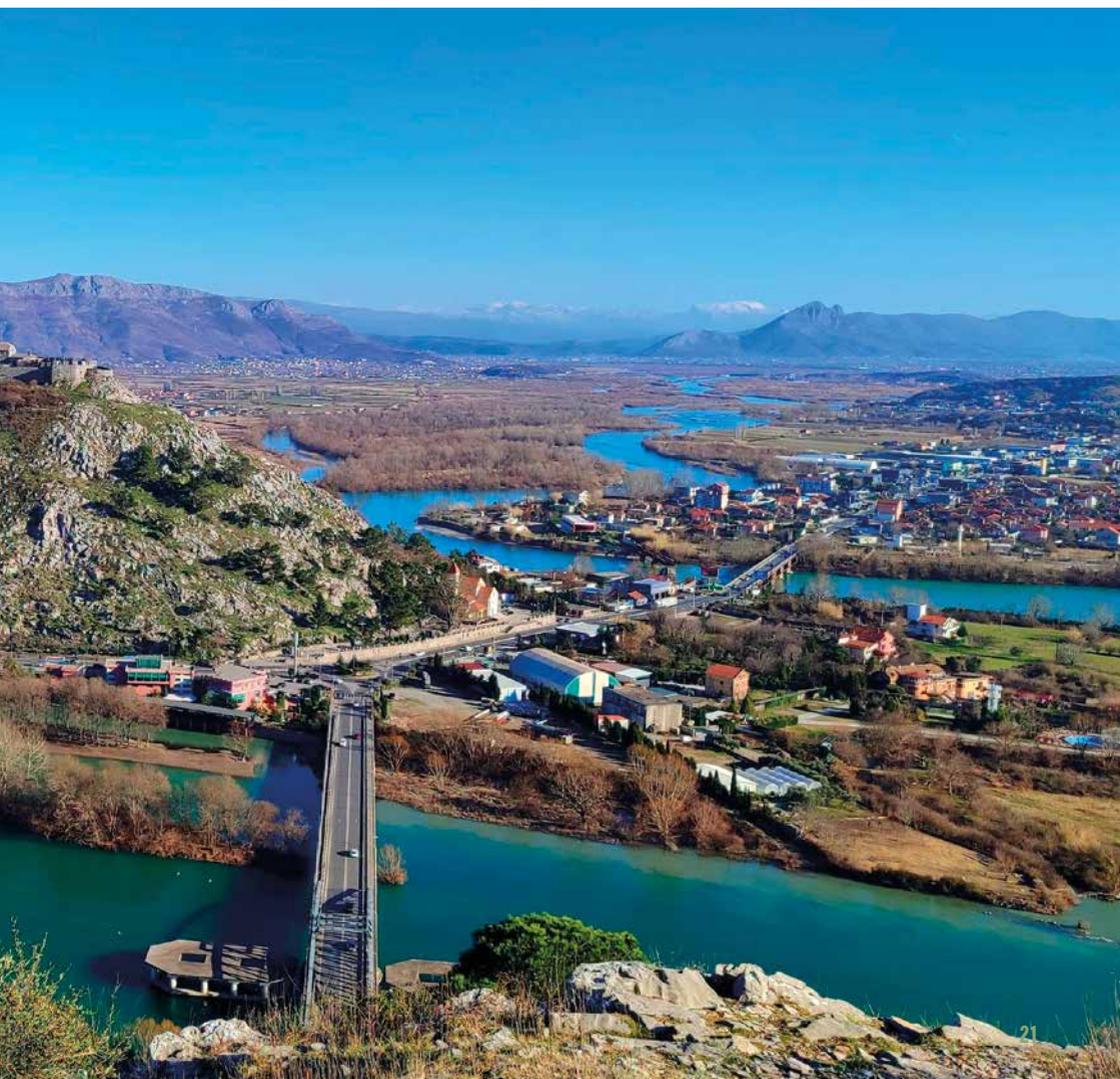
Producer of traditional carpets

QILIMA DI GANIMETE ARTUNDA

(+355) 69 267 9932

Zogaj, Shkodër

Producer of traditional carpets



Shkodër – Tour Operators

ALB CAR CAMPING

(+355) 67 592 3309
lodovikdocaj98@gmail.com
www.albcarcamping.com
Shkodër

Local tour operator offering off-road vehicle rentals, camping equipment, and guided tours

KOPLIKU TRAVEL

(+355) 68 203 1125
koplikutravel@yahoo.it
Shkodër

A well-known agency in Shkodër, offering various day tours, including the Shala River, one of the most popular destinations

DRINI TIMES

(+355) 69 295 6106
info@drinitimes.al
www.drinitimes.al
Shirokë, Shkodër

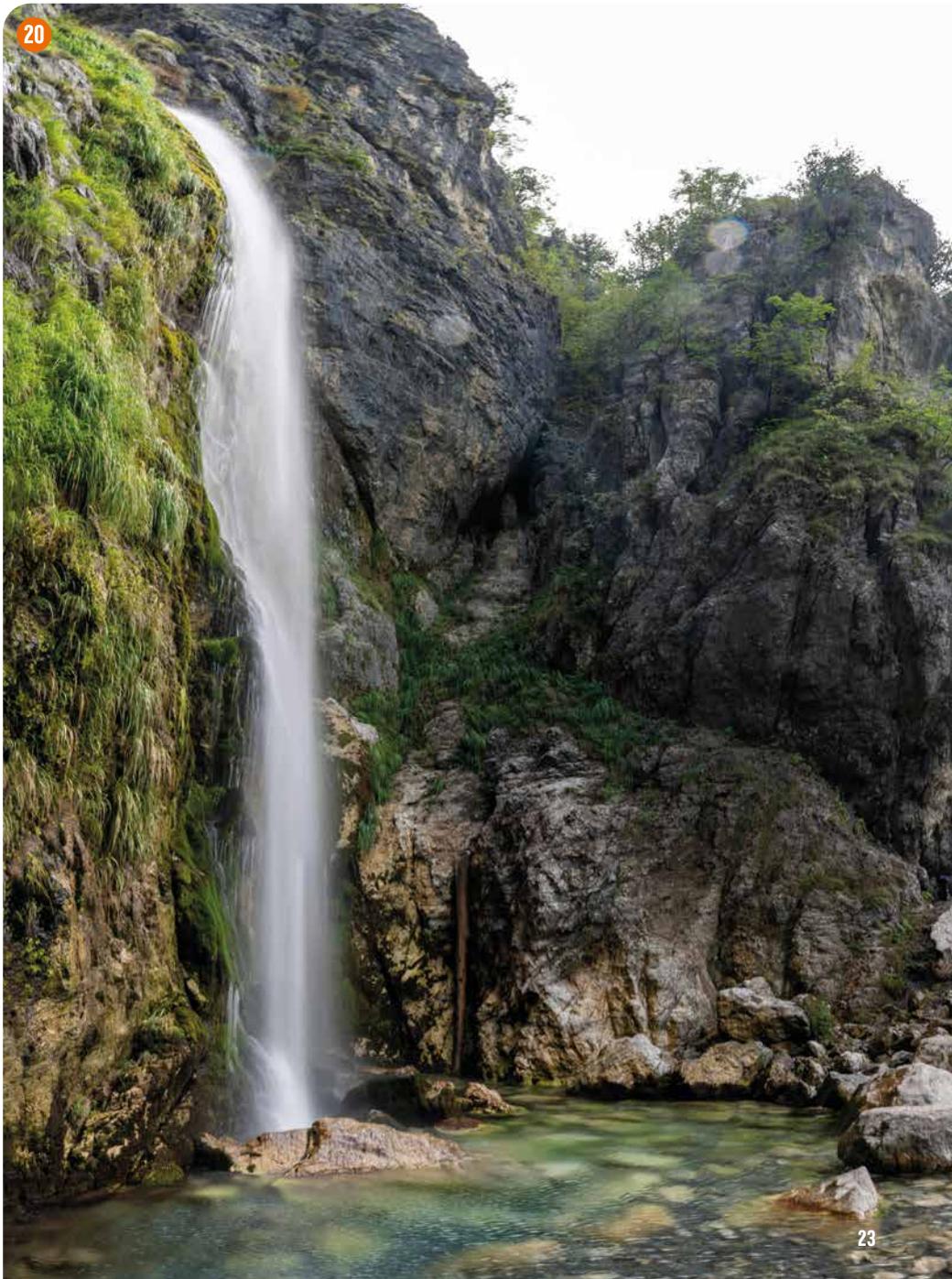
Kayak, canoe, and stand-up paddle tours on Lake Shkodra

THETHI ZIPLINE

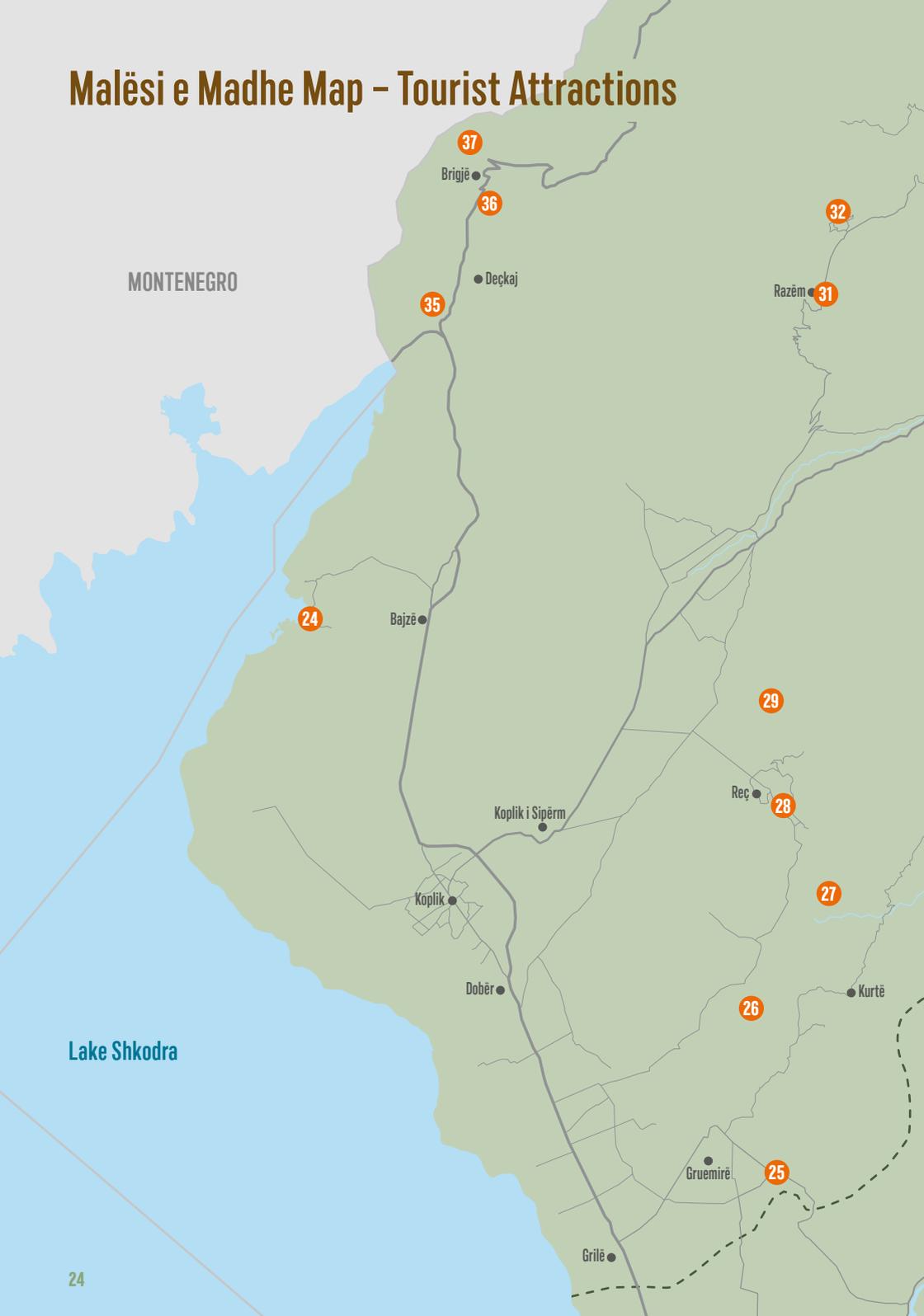
(+355) 69 206 5051
info@thethizipline.al
www.thethizipline.al
Theth, Shkodër

Zipline between the mountains in the tourist village of Theth



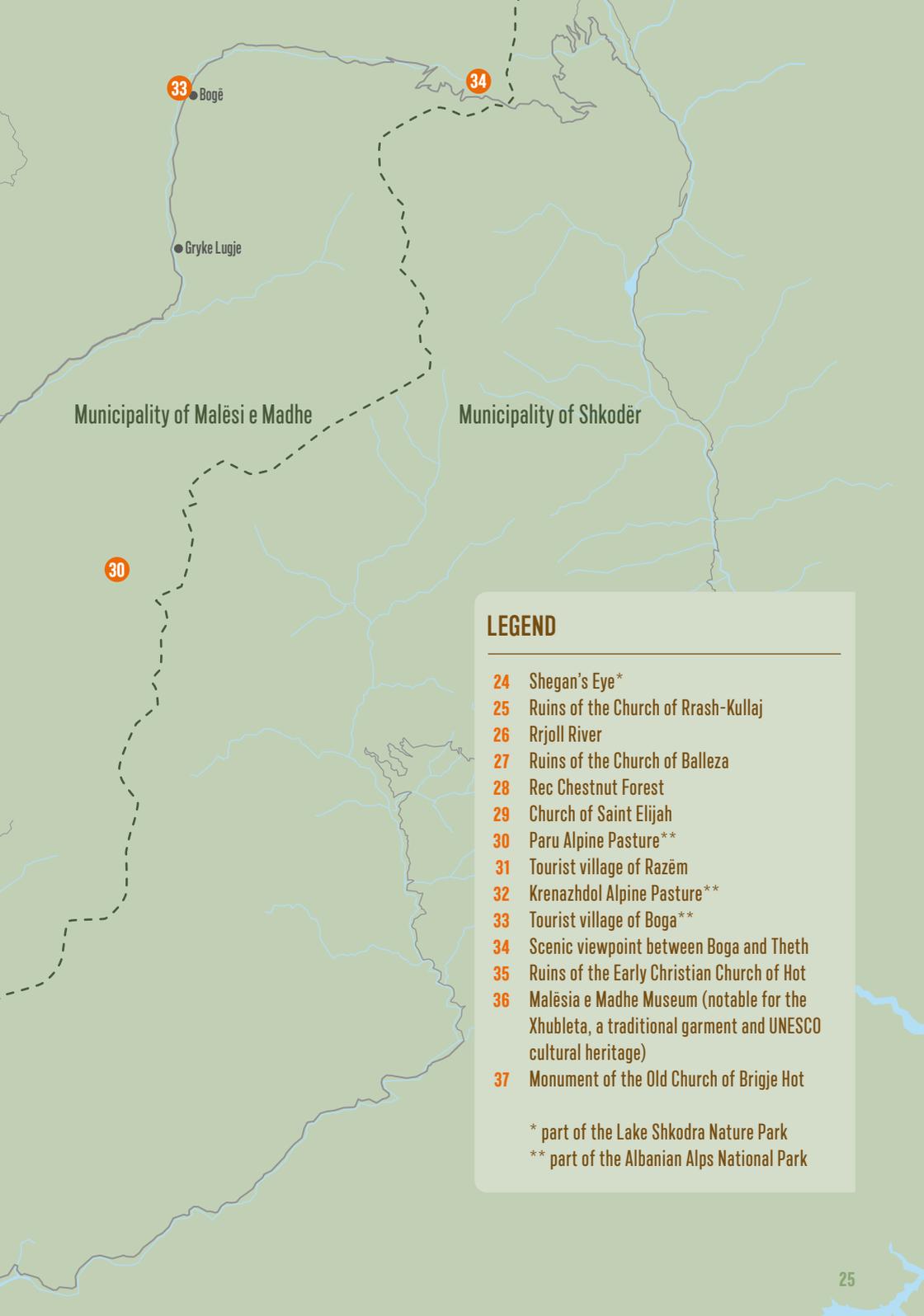


Malësi e Madhe Map – Tourist Attractions



MONTENEGRO

Lake Shkodra



LEGEND

- 24** Shegan's Eye*
- 25** Ruins of the Church of Rrash-Kullaj
- 26** Rrjoll River
- 27** Ruins of the Church of Balleza
- 28** Rec Chestnut Forest
- 29** Church of Saint Elijah
- 30** Paru Alpine Pasture**
- 31** Tourist village of Razëm
- 32** Krenazhdol Alpine Pasture**
- 33** Tourist village of Boga**
- 34** Scenic viewpoint between Boga and Theth
- 35** Ruins of the Early Christian Church of Hot
- 36** Malësi e Madhe Museum (notable for the Xhubleta, a traditional garment and UNESCO cultural heritage)
- 37** Monument of the Old Church of Brigje Hot

* part of the Lake Shkodra Nature Park

** part of the Albanian Alps National Park

Malësi e Madhe Map – Tourist Attractions

LEGEND

- 38 Leqet e Hotit Scenic Viewpoint
- 39 Old Bridge of Tamara
- 40 Tourist village of Tamara
- 41 Selca Waterfall
- 42 Kelmend Fortress**
- 43 Tourist village of Lepushë**
- 44 Mishavin Traditional Cheese Area, a Slow Food presidium with Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) status
- 45 Berizhdol Alpine Pasture**
- 46 Tourist village of Vermosh**
- 47 Bashkimi Canyon

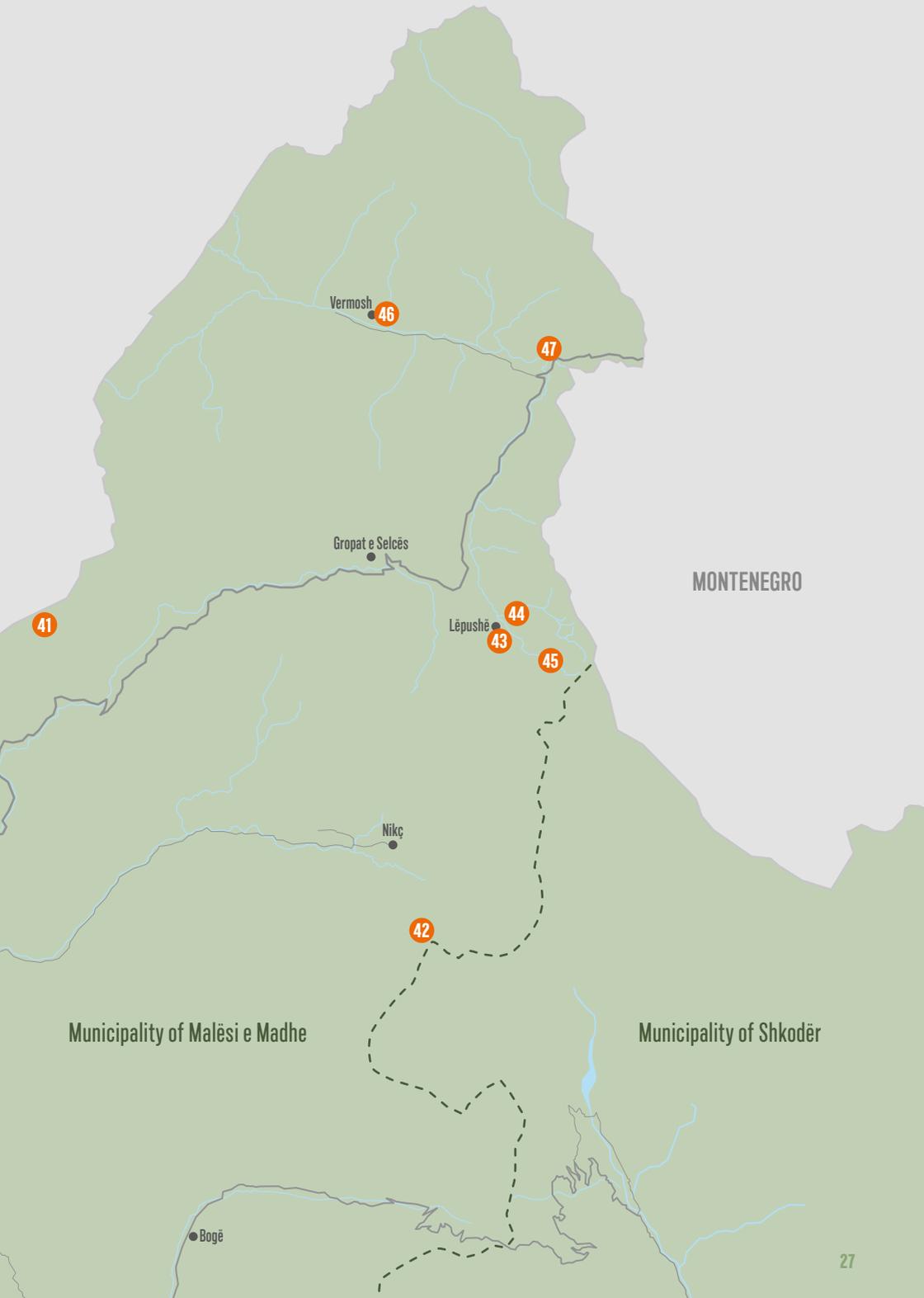
** part of the Albanian Alps National Park



FOR THOSE WHO LOVE TREKKING: SCAN THE QR CODE OR DISCOVER THE NATURE AND SPORTS ITINERARIES IN THE FINAL SECTION OF THIS CATALOGUE

MONTENEGRO





Vermosh

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Gropat e Selcës

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Lëpushë

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Nikç

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Municipality of Malësi e Madhe

Municipality of Shkodër

MONTENEGRO

Bogë

Malësi e Madhe – Restaurants and Bars

OAZI

(+355) 69 262 2557
sametrecaj@gmail.com
Gruemirë, Malësi e Madhe

Recently opened, offering service and typical local dishes

SYRI I SHEGANIT

(+355) 69 989 0987
Bajzë, Malësi e Madhe

Restaurant serving typical local dishes with a stunning view of Lake Skadar

TE LANDI

(+355) 67 258 5244
landigjoni07@gmail.com
Dobër, Malësi e Madhe

Offers restaurant, bar, and shop services with typical local products

SHPORTA E REÇIT

(+355) 68 566 5945
armando-gjeloshaj@hotmail.com
Reç, Malësi e Madhe

Restaurant serving typical local cuisine





Malësi e Madhe – Hotel Restaurants

KULLA E ARTE

(+355) 68 200 1946
info@kullaearte.com
www.kullaearte.com
Razëm, Malësi e Madhe

Modern hotel with a pool, sauna, gym, and traditional restaurant

VILA ALPINI

(+355) 69 976 7060
anjelagoraj15@gmail.com
Razëm, Malësi e Madhe

Very well furnished structure with a beautiful panoramic view

NATYRAL RAZMA RESORT

(+355) 68 604 5455
info@natyralrazmaresort.com
www.natyralrazmaresort.com
Razëm, Malësi e Madhe

Surrounded by nature, with a pool and sauna. Offering traditional cuisine

VILA PEPAJ

(+355) 68 520 5066
nikolin_pepaj@hotmail.com
<https://vilapepaj.site.al>
Razëm, Malësi e Madhe

Very comfortable hotel with a garden and traditional restaurant

24



HOTEL HOLIDAY

(+355) 69 731 1111
holiday.koplik@gmail.com
Koplik, Malësi e Madhe

Family-run hotel in an excellent location and the only hotel in the Koplik area

BUNI I BAJRAKTARIT

(+355) 67 708 8444
kullabajraktarit@gmail.com
www.kullaebajraktarit.com
Bogë, Malësi e Madhe

Contemporary structure, traditional food, and a beautiful mountain view

TE CEMI

(+355) 69 349 2289
shabajlindita@gmail.com
Tamarë, Malësi e Madhe

Located in the center of Tamara, it offers a pleasant atmosphere and typical local dishes

KELMENDI

(+355) 69 204 4131
kelmendihotel@gmail.com
www.hotelkelmendi.al
Lëpushë, Malësi e Madhe

Hotel and restaurant services with capacity for many guests



Malësi e Madhe – Guesthouses

SUNNYSIDE FARM HOUSE

(+355) 67 374 2326
eristjansmajlaj@gmail.com
Deçkaj, Malësi e Madhe

The only guesthouse in the area

TRADICIONALE

(+355) 69 479 6867
Lëpushë, Malësi e Madhe

Traditional architecture, typical local dishes, and a picturesque view

SOFRA E MALËSORIT

(+355) 67 351 2254
martinmilaj750@gmail.com
www.sofraemalesorit.al
Razëm, Malësi e Madhe

Houses with very comfortable interiors, suitable for multiple guests

SOFRA E KELMENDIT

(+355) 69 301 9810
cekajlucie0@gmail.com
www.sofrakelmendit.al
Tamarë, Malësi e Madhe

Offers a pleasant atmosphere and typical local dishes

MAJA E SHNIKUT

(+355) 69 291 0073
mirelaturkaj@gmail.com
Nikç, Malësi e Madhe

The only business in the area offering overnight stays and traditional local dining

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PEPUSHAJ

(+355) 69 230 8448
Lëpushë, Malësi e Madhe

A very beautiful setting and truly delicious food

LEPUSHA

(+355) 69 682 7046
bujtinalepushe@gmail.com
Lëpushë, Malësi e Madhe

A combination of traditional and modern architecture. Local cuisine

ALPINI

(+355) 69 452 4246
lenadercekaj@yahoo.com
Lëpushë, Malësi e Madhe

Nestled in the Albanian Alps, it offers comfortable accommodation and traditional cuisine

AURELI

(+355) 69 218 2854
aurelibujtina@gmail.com
Gropat e Selcës, Malësi e Madhe

A very clean and comfortable environment with excellent local food

PERAJ

(+355) 69 612 2556
guesthouseperaj@yahoo.com
Vermosh, Malësi e Madhe

Offers modern accommodation and traditional dishes



Malësi e Madhe – Agritourism Farms

MANI

(+355) 67 288 9009
fatjon.mani44@gmail.com
www.kantinamani.com
Gruemirë, Malësi e Madhe

It is the only business of its kind in the area. Producer of grapes, wine, and grappa in several varieties.

RRUGA E MULLIRIT

(+355) 69 919 1534
Reç, Malësi e Madhe

Surrounded by chestnut groves, it offers traditional local dishes and cuisine using local products



Malësi e Madhe – Campsites, Resorts and Farm stays

LAKE SHKODRA RESORT

(+355) 69 275 0337

reception@lakeshkodraresort.com

www.lakeshkodraresort.com

Grilë, Malësi e Madhe

The only resort of its kind in the area, offering variety of services and tourist activities

CAMPING & BLETARI DI KLARIS KURTAJ

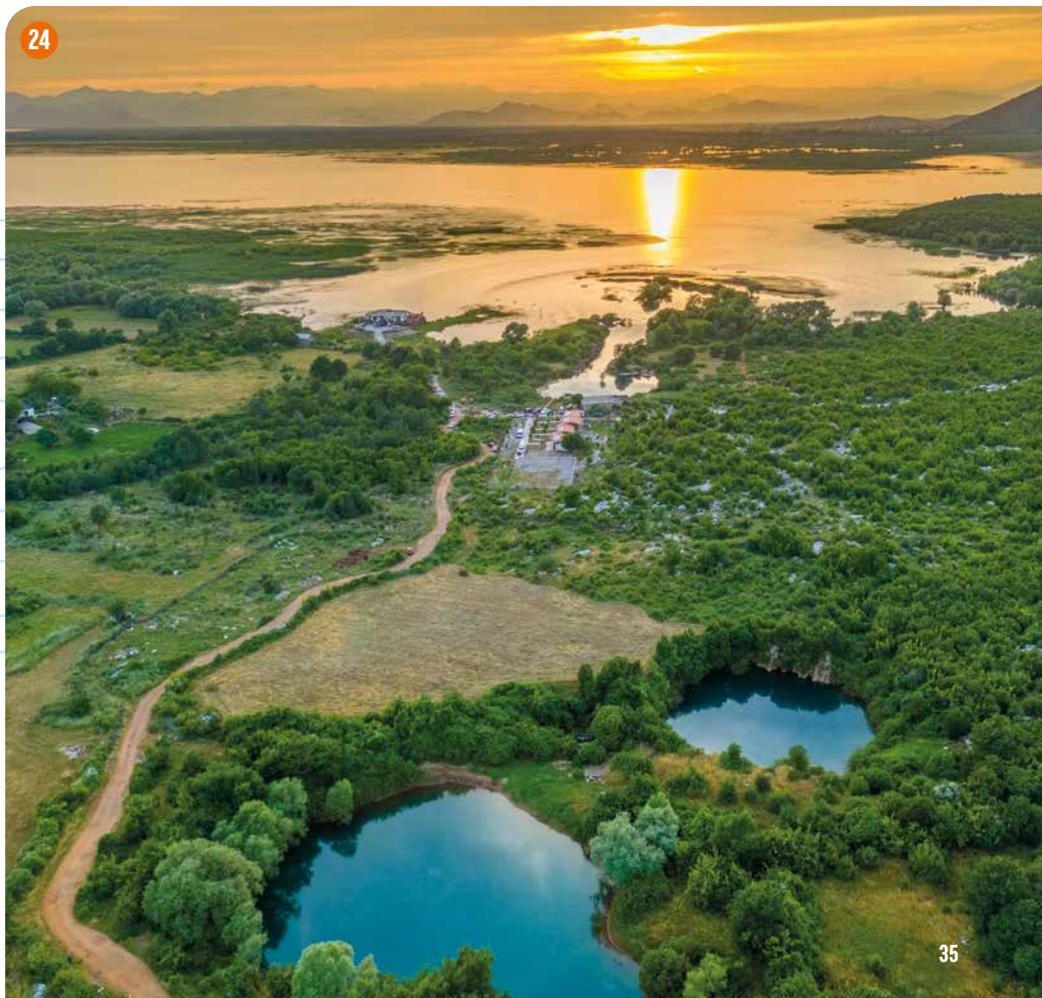
(+355) 69 390 8551

klariskurtaj1@gmail.com

Kurtë, Malësi e Madhe

Beekeeping, camping, and guided photography services promoting the area

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Malësi e Madhe – Producers

TROFTA E KELMENDIT

(+355) 69 888 0745
mandi_h93@hotmail.com
Tamarë, Malësi e Madhe

Fish reserve with fresh trout

PRODOTTI NATURALI KELMENDI

(+355) 69 223 3587
Tamarë, Malësi e Madhe

Processor of wild berries and
producer of natural juices

SALVIA NORD

(+355) 69 376 6804
agimrama@yahoo.com
www.salvianord.com
Koplik i Sipërm, Malësi e Madhe

Organic farm operating for over 30
years, specializing in the selection
and cultivation of medicinal and
aromatic plants



SALVIA NORD

TE DADA ZINA

(+355) 67 263 3216

silvesterdurgaj@hotmail.com

Gryke Lugje, Malësi e Madhe

Production of mountain tea, *kaçimak*, cheeses, jams, juices, and other local products

VELECİK MILK

(+355) 69 467 5505

velecikmilk@hotmail.com

Brigjë, Malësi e Madhe

Goat farm and producer of special types of cheese, cured meats, dried meat, etc



Malësi e Madhe – Arts and crafts

HANDMADE BY SAMI

(+355) 68 415 6823
kurtajsamedata@yahoo.com
Kurtë, Malësi e Madhe

Textile works and other handmade items created by a young local artist, featuring both traditional themes and custom designs

JEHONA E KELMENDIT

(+355) 69 350 6580
Malësi e Madhe

The cultural heritage of the area passed down from generation to generation (songs, dances) and traditional garments such as the Xhubleta and Çakshir

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Travel Proposals

FOOD AND WINE ITINERARY

For those who love discovering culture through food and local products, Northern Albania offers a unique opportunity to experience taste and history, **combining lakeside and Alpine flavors**.

We begin with an introduction to the flavors of the lake, particularly *krap në tjegull* (**carp in a tile**), a rich and unexpected flavor, particularly for visitors unaccustomed to eating carp.

The tasting then becomes a cultural experience if spent in the **village of Zogaj**, a small community that lives off fishing and the sale of **hand-woven fabrics and carpets**. Perched on a rocky shore

of the lake, it is famous for its clean air, where the citizens of Shkodër used to take refuge during the summer months. Walking through the village of Zogaj is a pleasant exception compared to the villages of Northern Albania, which are usually sparsely populated, but in this case it is still possible to wander among the steps and perched streets of the village.

For those who enjoy a bite to eat even in the city, **traditional restaurants are numerous**, including several well-known social enterprises supporting victims of violence or other vulnerable groups.





Moving towards Malësi e Madhe, it's advisable to stop at one of the **local wineries and/or cheese factories**, all family-run. The owners will be pleased to serve you the most local cuisine available, with a view of either the lake or the mountains beyond. The **local raki**, especially if **flavored with gentian or blueberry**, a local specialty, is also worth a try. It pairs well with **goat's cheese and chestnut honey**, popular in the area given the three-hundred-year-old chestnut grove that extends from the village of Reç to the villages of Gruemirë.

Before heading up into the mountains, we recommend a stop at **Salvia Nord**, where a family particularly dedicated and knowledgeable about the **use of medicinal herbs** will offer you local teas and juices, ice cream, and lavender biscuits. You'll also have the opportunity to

savor at least 10 different local herbs, both fresh and processed.

Climbing up towards the valleys of Kelmend, Shkrel and Shalë, **you can visit two local dairies** and some **local producers of wild fruit** such as blueberries, pomegranates, and dogwood. While climbing, it's always advisable to request tastings of **local meat and dairy products such as dried pork, Mishavinë, Dhjath i Zier, Maza e Caprës**, etc. In the villages of Lepushë, especially in August and September, **you can ask the women of the house to help prepare Mishavinë** or even prepare byrek with them, using local herbs collected together, including mint and nettle. **For chestnut enthusiasts**, a visit to the Reç incubator in October is recommended, followed by a walk through the chestnut grove, about a 15-minute walk away.

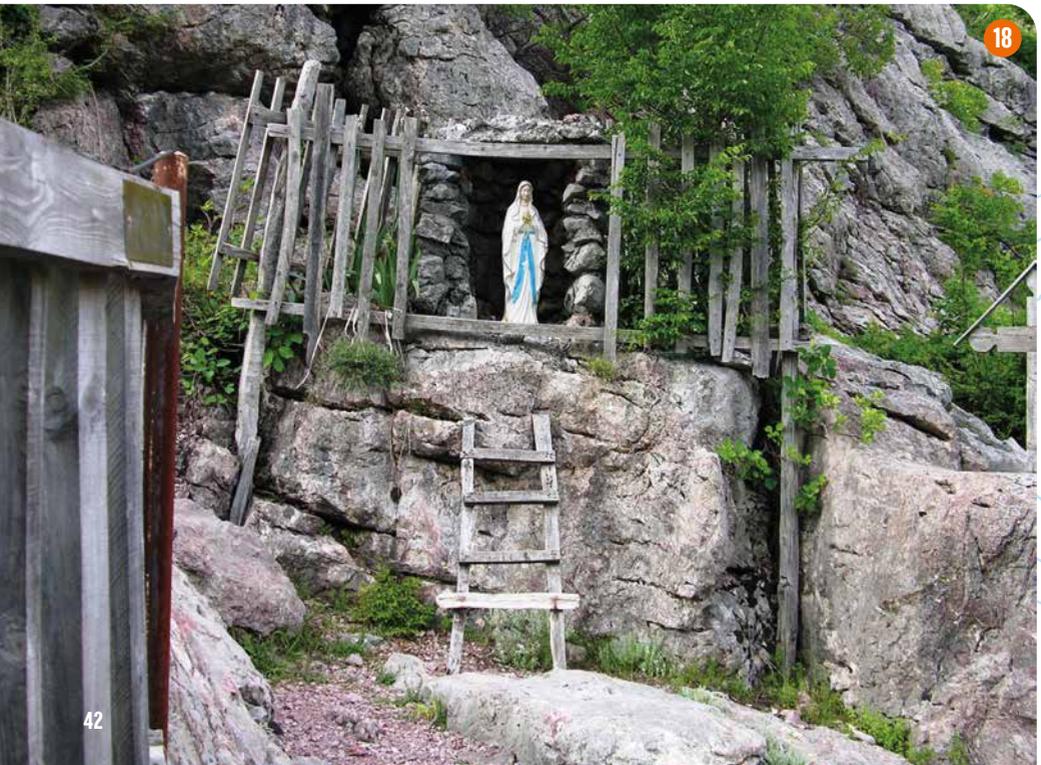
CULTURAL ITINERARY

For history buffs, the options are numerous and often unexpected.

Beyond the traditional museums in the city of Shkodër, a gem often overlooked is the **Shurdha family house-museum**, brimming with memories of late-nineteenth-century Shkodër, a wealthy and modern city, later disrupted during the communist regime.. The house is open to the public by its owner, who has striven to keep alive the memory of his family's and the city's commercial traditions.

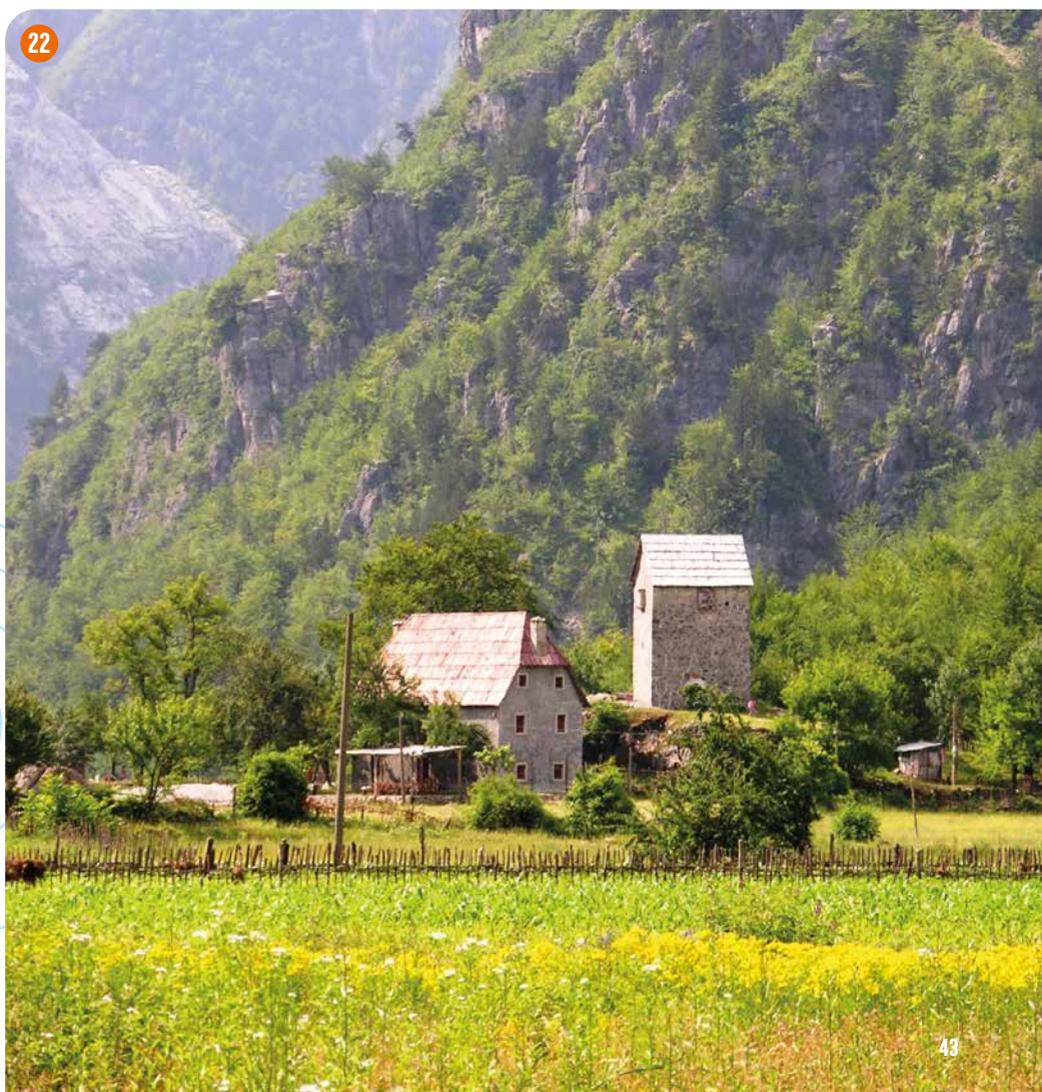
Also of particular note is the **history linked to the Catholic roots** of northern Albania: a foundational overview can be

found at the diocesan museum at the Shkodër Cathedral, before moving on to visit the sites of early Christian and 19th-century churches in the area, such as the early Christian church of Hot, the ruins of the church of Brigje in Hot, the church of *Shën Gjon* in Gruemirë, the church of *Shirgjit* in Buna, the church of Theth, and the church of *Shën Elia* among the chestnut trees in the village of Lohe. Finally, visitors fortunate enough to **meet the local priests of Koplík and Bzhetë**, who have rediscovered and preserved the **memory of the martyrs of communism** and their stories of escape and exile, is extremely fascinating.



A now-famous landmark is the “**Tower of Reconciliation**” in Theth (*Kulla e Ngujimit*), where visitors can learn a wealth of information and stories related to the *Kanun* of Lekë Dukagjini from one of his great-great-grandsons.

For those **interested in war and military history**, Reç and Razma offer notable sites, such as the **large bunkers of Reç** dating back to World War II, and the panoramic road leading to Razma, built by the Alpine troops during the fascist occupation of Albania.



NATURE-SPORTS ITINERARIES

Outdoor activities abound in an area that combines mountains and lakes, and **can be planned in various ways** depending on your time.

Hiking in the hills between Tarabosh Mountain and the Gruemirë and Reç areas **is ideal for the mid-season**, before the particularly hot summer months.

Alpine trekking is available between Shale, Theth, Boga, Lepsuhë, and Vermosh, **with more significant elevation gains** and access to breathtaking natural monuments such as the **Blue Eye of Theth**, the Sllap Waterfall in Kelmend, the Vajusha Peak in Lepushë, the Italian's peak in Vermosh, and numerous mountain pastures along the trek.





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Treks can last more than a day, so [a local guide is recommended](#). Theth has also recently inaugurated a zipline, one of the few in Albania.

The lake, particularly the areas of Shiroka, Zogaj, and Syri i Sheganit, offer opportunities for [water sports](#). Experts in Syri i Sheganit can bring their own equipment, while Shiroka and Zogaj offer [rental equipment and guides](#). For those interested in experiencing activities with [a significant social impact](#),

there are operators who engage vulnerable groups in their activities, adding a meaningful social dimension, as well as offering outdoor tourism opportunities for people with limited mobility.

During the colder months and around Christmas, guesthouses in the village of Lepushë offer [snowshoeing](#) and the always beautiful opportunity to enjoy the sublime beauty of the snow-capped peaks of the Accursed Mountains (*Bjeshket e Namuna*).

CYCLING TOURISM

Lake Shkodra and the delta of the Buna River are a prime **destination for cycling tourism** and for forms of active and responsible travel. Alongside the well-known **birdwatching opportunities**, the area offers a network of cycling routes of great scenic value, developing along the shores of the lake and through the surrounding hinterland. These routes allow visitors to pass through high-quality natural environments and **traditional villages**, fostering an authentic experience of the territory.

The presence of unpaved trails also makes **mountain biking possible**, representing one of the sustainable ways to enjoy the area. The **recommended period** for cycling activities is **from September to early October**, when climatic conditions are particularly favorable.

The following table presents a selection of **12 cycling routes**, indicating for each route the starting and ending points, total length, cumulative elevation gain, and technical difficulty level. A precise riding time is not provided; instead, routes are **classified as half-day, full-day, or multi-day tours**, as cyclists' fitness levels and riding styles can lead to significant variations in overall duration.

Scan the QR code to access the 12 proposed cycling routes, including detailed maps and downloadable GPX files



Trail (Start: ■ – End: ■)	Type	Length	Ascent	Difficulty
1. Tamare – Nikc – Vukel – and back to Tamare	Full day	30 km	800 m	Medium
2. Lepushe – Bjeshka Morina – and back to Lepushe	Full day	28 km	800 m	Medium
3. Lepushe – Qafe Kurcun – Gropat e Selces – and back to Lepushe	Half day	12 km	450 m	Medium
4. “Tour ad anello Lepushe”: Qafe Bordolec (Lepushe) – Lepushe Qender – Lepushe Budace – Canyon – back to Qafe Bordolec	Half day	10 km	300 m	Easy
5. Tamare – Broje – and back to Tamare	Half day	15 km	600 m	Easy
6. Rrapsh – Bratosh – Vrith – Razem	Half day	18 km	600 m	Medium
7. Rec – Qafe Grade – Lago Piccolo – and back to Rec	Half day	15 km	350 m	Easy
8. Rec – Qafe Grade – Rrepisht – and back to Rec	Full day	23 km	700 m	Difficult
9. Lepushe – Greben – Vermosh	Full day	16 km	350 m	Medium-Difficult
10. Razem – Fushe Zeze – Rrapsh	Full day	21 km	450 m	Difficult
11. Vermosh – Velipoje – end of valley – Vermosh	Full day	17 km	300 m	Medium
12. Razem – Tamare – Vermosh	2 x days	38+39 km	600 + 1600 m	Difficult

TREKKING IN THE GRUEMIRË AREA



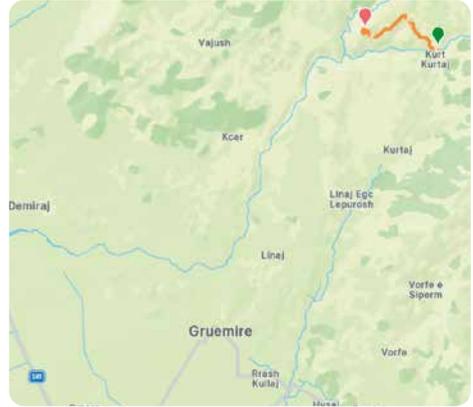
Itinerary 1: Kalaja e Ballexës - Ballexë Fortress

Ballexë Fortress, located in the Gruemirë area, is one of the oldest and most fascinating historical sites in the region. Built in a position to suggest its dominance in the territory, it served for centuries as a strategic point for defence and observation, as evidenced by its **ancient walls and remaining ruins**.

Beyond its historical value, the fortress offers visitors an immersive natural experience. It can be reached thanks to a **fascinating mountain trail** starting from the surrounding villages and winding through green landscapes and wide panoramic views over the Gruemirë area. **The trail is well signed** and open for hiking enthusiasts.

Visitors who reach the top, are rewarded with **breathtaking views** and a strong sense of connection to the site's rich past. On the way back, it is possible to **stop at the Gurra stream**, a peaceful spot known for its fresh, clear water and unspoilt natural surroundings.

Despite being partially in ruins, Ballexë Fortress remains a powerful symbol of the history, identity and resilience of the Malësia e Madhe region, and a must-see destination for lovers of culture, nature and slow tourism.





Itinerary 2: Linaj-Egç-Lepurosh-Qyteze

Qyteza is located in the administrative unit of Gruemirë, in the Malësia e Madhe region. **The route to the site begins in the village of Lepurosh**, an ancient settlement rich in history. Lepurosh is known for its **enchanting views of Mount Tarabosh**, its cultivated farmland still worked by local residents, and its characteristic high stone houses (*kulla*) that preserve the typical architectural tradition of Northern Albania.

The **ascent to Qyteza is characterized by a dense forest**, where along the way the first signs of an early civilisation appear: an area with centuries-old burial grounds, bearing witness to past life in this region. After approximately one hour of walking, visitors reach Qyteza, an ancient settlement of which only the foundations remain today.

Located on a upland plateau of Mount Maranaj, Qyteza offers a **breathtaking view of Lake Shkodra**. From this spectacular point, visitors can admire the entire city of Shkodra and even see as far as Podgorica in Montenegro. Beyond its historical significance, **the area is ideal for picnics and camping**, combining the tranquillity of nature with a unique and stunning panorama.





Itinerary 3: Maja e Maranajt - Maranaj Peak

Mountain Maranaj is located in the administrative unit of Gruemirë, near the village of Kurte, and is an impressive destination for nature lovers and hiking enthusiasts. Rising to approximately 1,576 metres above sea level, this peak challenges and rewards every hiker with breathtaking 360-degree panoramic views over the surrounding valleys, dense forests, and the ridges of the Albanian Alps.

The trail leading to the summit starts from the village of Shpe Ilzaj and is about 8 km long, with an elevation gain of 985 metres. Along the way, hikers encounter a variety of landscapes, ranging from quiet access roads to lush natural trails rich in freshwater springs, and finally to rocky ascents that require greater effort and determination.

Directional signs have been installed along the route, and the trail has been

cleared to ensure a safer and more enjoyable hike. The ascent typically takes around 5 hours, while the descent requires approximately 4 additional hours, making it a full-day hiking adventure.

In addition to its natural beauty, the area offers a rare sense of peace and solitude, far from mass tourism, making Maranaj peak an ideal destination for those seeking authentic experiences and tranquillity in the heart of nature.





Itinerary 4: Rjoll-Bjeshka e Parusë - The Parusë alpine pasture

The **Parusë mountain pasture** is located in the mountainous area of Rjoll, in northern Albania, an area characterized by unspoiled landscapes, wild nature, and a rich cultural heritage. It is an ideal destination for hikers, nature lovers, and photography enthusiasts.

The route to the pasture starts from the **village of Kurte** and follows a trail of approximately **13 kilometers**, which can be reduced to about **6.5 kilometers** for those with a vehicle suitable for mountainous terrain. Along the way, visitors pass through the **village of Shpëllzajve**, with its traditional stone *kulla*, and reach the ancient church of Rjoll.

The **Rjoll area** is rich in natural drinking-water springs, caves, and scenic viewpoints. The trail also crosses a **beech forest**, creating a peaceful and evocative atmosphere. At the end of the route, the **Parusë mountain pasture**, formed by **two overlapping plateaus**, reveals traces of ancient pastoral settlements and **centuries-old tombs**, with breathtaking views of the surrounding mountains.

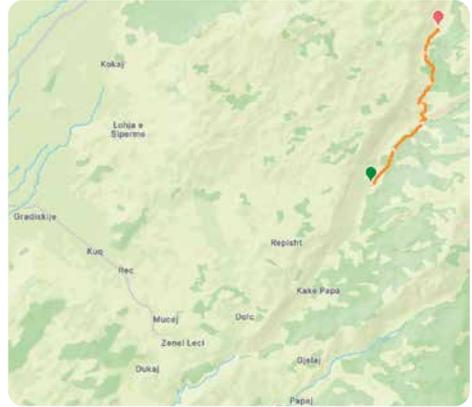
Technical details of the route:

Length: 13 km

Elevation gain: 200 m

Duration: approximately 5 hours, or about 3 hours when approaching by vehicle

Difficulty level: medium

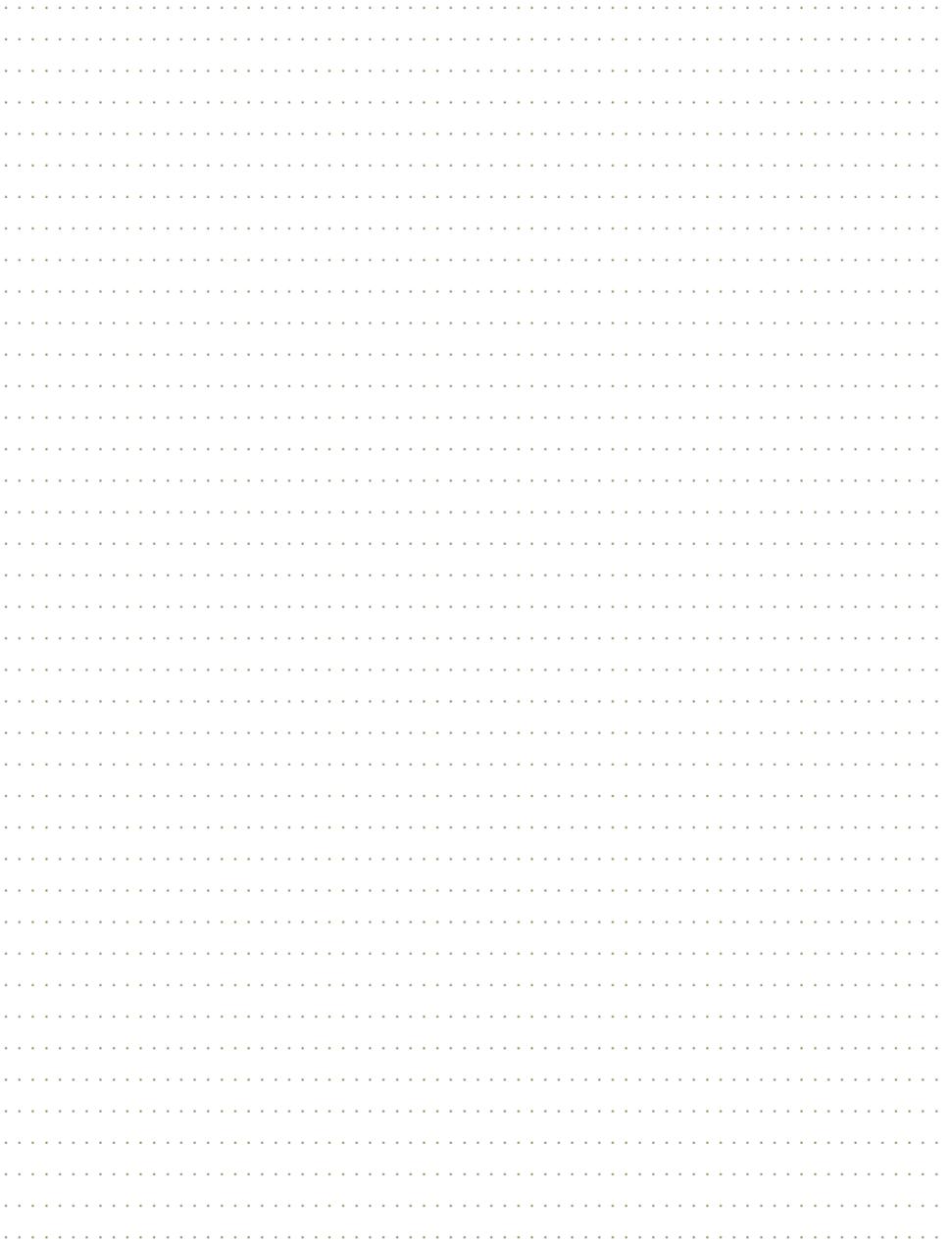


Notes

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Notes

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