



# **Trek the Zagoria Valley, Albania**

**explore the dramatic landscape and unspoilt  
natural valleys of the Zagoria Valley  
in aid Marie Curie**

**15th – 21st September 2026**

**Self-funded Trek Fee £1270**

**Minimum Sponsorship or Fundraising £250**

**Supporting those with a terminal illness is important  
as sadly we will all know someone who will experience  
a critical illness on our journey through life.**

**For more information, please contact:**

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**[www.meetup.com/oxfordshire-stars-walks-socials-and-charitable-events](http://www.meetup.com/oxfordshire-stars-walks-socials-and-charitable-events)**

**Trip organised by The Ultimate Travel Company  
Marie Curie - Registered Charity No. 207994**



## Quotes from previous trekkers:

I felt the trek would be something I'd be capable of achieving, but the thought of fundraising was daunting ... how would I be able to raise the funds? Once I had signed up, there was no turning back. Fundraising began and to be honest I got a bit hooked and have to say how enjoyable it was! I had an amazing response from family, friends, neighbours and colleagues and great support from Oxfordshire STARS and Marie Curie. Having reached my target, all that remained was for me to read the packing list and enjoy the trek – which was fantastic! A real reward!

Signing up for the trek was a great challenge, both in the fundraising and the trekking. It was great to be involved in raising money for a wonderful charity and getting to know a lovely group of people. It was a good motivator to get fit before the trek and showed me that I am capable of coping with and adapting to the different challenges presented. All of this was made so much easier by all the help and encouragement given by Oxfordshire STARS and Marie Curie (thanks!).

The trek was one of the best experiences of my life. The trek team and the whole adventure was brilliant. The journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step and this trek was a massive step in the right direction.

Unforgettable! Brilliantly organized ... an experience I'll treasure! Thank you!

Every step was worth it - challenge yourself to discover yourself!

# Trek Albania

In aid of Marie Curie  
15th – 21st September 2026

## Exploring the dramatic landscape and unspoilt natural valleys of the Zagoria Valley

Albania is a small country located in the Balkans on the Adriatic and Ionian Seas within the Mediterranean Sea and shares land borders with Montenegro to the northwest, Kosovo to the northeast, North Macedonia to the east and Greece to the south.

Albania's landscapes range from rugged snow-capped mountains in the Albanian Alps and the Korab, Skanderbeg, Pindus and Ceraunian Mountains, to fertile lowland plains extending from the Adriatic and Ionian seacoasts. The country has many castles and archaeological sites.

Tirana is the vibrant, rapidly evolving capital of Albania, known for its colorful, eclectic mix of Ottoman, Fascist and Soviet-era architecture. As a top-rated affordable Balkan destination for 2026, it features a lively cafe culture, buzzing nightlife in the Blloku district and a "quirky" charm that blends intense history with modern reinvention.

## Albania

If you were to visit just one place in Albania, it should be the Zagoria Valley. You'll embark on a remarkable adventure through the captivating Zagoria region of Albania, a mountainous paradise brimming with awe-inspiring landscapes, charming villages, and hidden treasures. Along the way, you'll encounter picturesque churches, monasteries, and enchanting waterfalls, adding a sense of wonder to your adventure. Your experience goes beyond the trails. Stay in welcoming guesthouses hosted by local families in remote villages, where genuine hospitality is a way of life. The trails are well maintained, offering a balance of comfort and adventure. Expect daily walks of approximately 4 to 9 miles with elevation changes between 400 and 800 meters. The routes are designed to be rewarding yet accessible, making them ideal for active travellers who appreciate both scenic beauty and cultural discovery. Whether you're drawn to nature, the charm of historic villages or the warmth of local traditions, this journey through Zagori promises a deeply enriching and memorable adventure.

**Explore Albania with the Oxfordshire STARS Marie Curie Team and you're guaranteed to have a truly memorable time!**



# Itinerary



Following on from the wonderful Transylvannia trips in 2024 and 2025, some of the group have signed up again to explore a different part of the world. The fun, laughter and camaraderie on our previous adventures will be re-kindled and once again, leave virtual footprints in our minds.

## Day 1: Flight from London

Upon your arrival at the airport, a private transfer will be arranged to pick you up and drive you to the charming village of Peshtan in the South of Albania. Peshtan, nestled on the mountainside, is a village steeped in history as it witnessed a significant battle during the Greco-Italian war and holds remnants of World War II. We will be staying in a welcoming guesthouse and your local hosts, Mira and her husband, who are also teachers in the village, will provide you with a fascinating tour of the first battle and the Axis lost in WWII.

## Day 2: Peshtan to Limare Distance: 11km (approx. 7 miles)

### **Uphill cumulative: 750m Downhill cumulative: 425m Trekking 5-6hrs**

Embarking on a moderate hike, you will start from Peshtan and walk 11km to Limara. We will start the hike on a trail that ascends through open woodland to a pass what offers a panoramic view of the valley which is flanked on both sides by mountains. Along the trail you will encounter the magnificent stone bridge over the Deshnica River built by the renowned Albanian leader Ali Pashe Tepelena during the nineteenth century. Continuing, you enjoy breath-taking views of the Deshnica River valley, with the majestic Strakavec peak towering above 2000 metres. After approximately 5-6hrs of hiking, including a final ascent, you will reach the welcoming village of Limara, where Nol, the village teacher, will host you in his guest house. Limara offers a glimpse into the past, with its time-frozen atmosphere and picturesque surroundings. As you explore the village, you will be captivated by the three imposing peaks of Strakavec, Hormova, and Sheshi Malit, creating a stunning backdrop. The village is adorned with stone houses and an Orthodox Church. These buildings bear witness to the struggle for religious freedom during the early 20th century, marked by their transformation from places of worship to cattle farms under communist rule. Limara is also home to hundreds of sheep and goat that pasture these mountains and provide for the eco food in the village and the valley.

## Day 3: Limare to Hoshteve Distance: 14.5km (approx. 9 miles)

### **Uphill cumulative: 725m Downhill cumulative: 575m Trekking 6-7hrs**

The hike from Limara to Hoshteve will be immersed in the beauty of beech and oak forests, vibrant fields, and meadows adorned with colourful flowers. You will leave Strakavec peak behind and witness the Dhembeli massive on your left, resembling a line of tooth-like peaks. Take a refreshing break by dipping your feet in a cool stream while enjoying a picnic. The trail will lead you through the nearly deserted village of Deshnice, often considered one of the most isolated villages in Europe. Your journey culminates in Hoshteve, a village renowned for its larger church and remarkable icons. Overnight we will stay in a local guesthouse.

## Day 4: Hoshteve to Sheper Distance: 12.5km (just under 8 miles)

### **Uphill cumulative: 600m Downhill cumulative: 550m Trekking 5-6hrs**

A shorter, gentler path with views of Mount Cajupi makes for a relaxing but satisfying day of walking. Roads connect the settlements of Vithuq, Koncka, Nivan, and Sheper, and their effect can be seen in modern buildings that serve as weekend and retirement homes. The trail descends to the river, monastery, and the final of Ali Pasha's stone bridges only once more. After taking a detour through the meadows, you'll arrive in Sheper where many nomadic Aroman sheperds were compelled to reside during communism. Sheper is the largest village along the trail, situated at an altitude of 800 metres, making it the highest village in the region. The village features its own church and has recently undergone renovation, preserving its ancient exterior.

## Day 5: Sheper to Permet Distance: 10 km (just over 6 miles)

### **Uphill cumulative: 625m Downhill cumulative: 1250m Trekking 7-8hrs**

The day will start with a transfer along a scenic road from Permet, tracing the vibrant, emerald-hued Vjosa River, a natural park that has garnered the attention of superstars like Leonardo DiCaprio, who advocated for its preservation. Vjosa river is known as one of the last wild rivers of Europe. This day's hike presents what some consider to be the best trail in the region, connecting two valleys and passing through Dhembel, reaching an altitude of 1468 metres. As you climb at 660 meters altitude, you will encounter vast meadows filled with vegetation that has nourished sheep and goats

## Some of our previous trekkers



## Itinerary cont...

for centuries. Take a moment to sit and imagine how even before the time of Christ, Illyrian shepherds grazed their lambs here, perhaps playing a tune on their flutes. Day 5: cont. Reaching the pass, you will be treated to a panoramic view of Permet, Vjosa River and the Zagori Valley. After savouring the view and the tranquil atmosphere, begin your descent towards Permet, which spans a significant altitude drop of 1200 meters. The rocky trail along the descent offers a spectacular panorama. On the way, the village of Leuse presents an ideal stop and boasts another orthodox church adorned with frescoes.

**Day 6: Transfer Permet - Sopoti Waterfall Visit Benjat and Langarica Canyon Distance: 6km (under 4 miles) Uphill cumulative: 350m Downhill cumulative: 350m Trekking 3-4hrs**

The view alone is worth the 45-minute journey to today's trailhead. The blue waters of the Vjosa have carved deep into the rock beneath us, while the craggy Nemercka Range stands above the river. As you return from your hike, another unique natural wonder awaits you at the neighbouring entrance to the Langarica Canyon. The warm thermal pools of Benje are believed to have curative properties for various ailments. They provide a delightful treat after the past few days of hiking, allowing you to soak and relax in their sulphuric waters or venture through the river canyon. After soaking in the warm waters of Benja, you'll head to Tirana, the modern capital that tries to be anything but traditionally Albanian for the night and to celebrate your achievements.

**Day 7: Transfer to Tirana Airport**

After breakfast transfer to the airport for the onward flight to London.

**Challenge grade: Moderate**

There are no technical sections on the route.

Walks are on average 6 to 8 hours daily, but with no narrow or jagged rocky places.

Best time of year April to mid June, mid September to October.

This trip has been organised through the Ultimate Travel Company.

© Ultimate Challenges

This itinerary is complex and subject to change.

Trek Romania  
Team 2025



Trek Romania  
Team 2024



**Marie Curie** is the UK's leading end-of-life charity. We provide frontline nursing and hospice care, a free support line and a wealth of information and support on all aspects of dying, death and bereavement.

Marie Curie Nurses work on the front line, night and day, in people's homes across the UK, providing hands-on care and vital emotional support.

Our nine hospices offer the reassurance of specialist care and support, in a friendly, welcoming environment, for people living with a terminal illness and their loved ones around the UK.

Our trained Helper volunteers and advisers are here to provide practical information and support when patients and their families don't know what to do next or just need to talk.

We'll help individuals to talk, plan and prepare, to get things sorted in advance. Our frontline nurses, hospices and free support line will help individuals through their final years, months, days and hours of life – whether they have cancer, or any illness that they are likely to die from. Our bereavement service will also be there for the people who are left behind after someone dies.

Our researchers, policy experts and campaigners push the boundaries of knowledge around what makes a good death, and fight for a society where everyone gets the best experience possible at the end of their lives.

We're here to help everyone affected by a diagnosis of a terminal illness to achieve the best quality of life and we'll support our patients to keep their independence and dignity for as long as possible.

This includes treating or managing pain and other symptoms with medicines, therapies and other specialist approaches. It also means giving emotional support to families and friends when they need it most.



## The facts about the trek

**How much is the trek?** £1,270

### How much do you need to raise?

Minimum sponsorship/fundraising £250

We have set up a dedicated Just Giving site.

**Number of days away:** 7 days

**Number of days trekking:** 4.5 days

**Accommodation** will be twin share, in comfortable mid-range hotels or guest houses. Accommodation will be single-sex unless otherwise requested.

The trek deposits will be collected by Nicky and transferred on block to The Ultimate Travel Company. Once everyone is registered the balance will be paid direct to the Ultimate Travel Company.

All fees are non-refundable owing to the fact that organising activities of this nature does incur costs. Included:

- UK Leader (Nicky).
- UK Doctor (Julian) If 15 individuals sign up.
- International flights to and from London.
- Local specialised English-speaking head guide.
- Activities as listed.
- All overseas participant and luggage transfers.
- All overseas accommodation.
- All meals, except when in free time.
- Water provided daily.
- Local taxes and park fees as per the itinerary.

# Your questions answered ...

## What's included in the trek?

Flights and all internal travel, accommodation, trekking permits, all meals (except on free days when at leisure – see the itinerary for B – Breakfast, L – Lunch, D – Dinner), water, refreshments, medical support and guides. Personal travel insurance is not included and must be taken out separately.

## What kind of support will I get?

Nicky Clargo will be available to provide guidance and support for your fundraising ideas. You'll also be given a training guide giving you a fitness programme to follow that will prepare you for your trek. Oxfordshire STARS also organise regular walking days when all of the trekkers can meet up for fun days/afternoons out.

## Do I need to be fit?

Yes, but you don't need to be super-fit. Most people who take part in these events are not seasoned trekkers. However, in order to gain maximum benefit and enjoyment from the trip you must be able to comfortably trek for 6-8 hours (including lunch and other breaks) a day on varying terrain.

## What do I need to bring?

A suggested packing list will be sent to you on registering. You will need adequate walking boots, waterproofs, rucksack and trekking poles (trek poles are optional).

## What happens to my luggage when I'm trekking?

This will be transferred to the next hotel or B&B for you. You will need a rucksack when trekking for your water, lunch, camera, sunscreen, snacks etc.

## Am I the right kind of person to do this?

If you have enthusiasm and a sense of adventure, then yes! People from all walks of life take part in these challenges and participants usually range in age from 18+ to well into retirement! Some people will not know anyone else on the trip when they register, but we will hold several trekkers' meetings so that you can meet other participants before our adventure. We always welcome couples and teams too. Either way, you will go home with some great new friends.

## How many people take part?

We are limited to 15 people per trip. A group of this size provides a great deal of friendship, fun and moral support.

## What about food and drink?

Meals will be prepared in the hotels/accommodation by our ground agent. Breakfast and packed lunches are also provided. A hearty dinner will be served each evening. We can, of course, cater for vegetarians and people with other dietary requirements, as long as you let us know in advance.

## I'm not sure I can raise the sponsorship money ...

Oxfordshire STARS can give you some moral support in reaching your target. We can have a chat about your situation and think about how you can engage your friends, family and colleagues to support you. We will provide you with a sponsorship form and once you get going you'll be surprised at how quickly you can raise £250. We will also organise some get-togethers where you can meet fellow trekkers and exchange ideas.

## Some people will not only meet their target – they will exceed it!

## Can I extend my stay in Albania?

YES! Please ensure you discuss any return flights changes with The Ultimate Travel Company once you have signed up. There may be an additional fee, but we can work with you on this.

## Quotes from previous Oxfordshire STARS trekkers

It was a brilliant experience... such a great team spirit!

I'm definitely going to do another trek in aid of Marie Curie

Can't wait for the next adventure.

I didn't want to come home.

It was awesome!

An experience I'll never forget.



# Fundraising ideas

Here are just a few ways in which the funds could be raised:

**How much you might raise**

|                                                                                                                                               |              |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|
| • <b>Bingo</b>                                                                                                                                | £500 – £1000 |
| • <b>Themed party in a local bar</b> (donated venue, naturally!)                                                                              | £300         |
| • <b>Pledges</b> from friends, family and work colleagues (we'll send you a donation form when you register)                                  | £300         |
| • <b>Fundraising activity on your behalf</b><br>(e.g. dress up or dress down day at work or a local school)                                   | £100         |
| • <b>Five-a-side football/netball tournament</b>                                                                                              | £150         |
| • <b>Quiz night</b>                                                                                                                           | £200         |
| • <b>Cake stall</b> (ask your friends and colleagues to bake some cakes or make some jam – you'll be amazed at how quickly they sell!)        | £150         |
| • <b>A street collection</b> in your local town (combine it with bric-à-brac or cakes and get your friends to help you – we'll tell you how!) | £400         |
| • <b>Car boot sale</b> (ask friends for their unwanted items)                                                                                 | £100         |
| • <b>Letters to companies/suppliers</b>                                                                                                       | £200         |
| • <b>Sponsored walk</b> (Oxfordshire STARS will set a date – you just need to ask your friends to participate!)                               | £300         |
| • <b>A grand charity race night</b>                                                                                                           | £500 – £1000 |
| • <b>Easter egg raffle</b>                                                                                                                    | £150         |
| • <b>Christmas bazaar and raffle</b>                                                                                                          | £300         |

Other ideas ... auction, BBQ, car wash, dinner party, egg race, fete, Guy Fawkes party, Halloween party, Italian evening, jumble sale, karaoke, line dancing evening, murder mystery party, non-uniform day, physical challenge day, party (any excuse!), music recital, raffle, sponsored action (head shave, leg wax, swim, slim etc.), tombola, unwanted gifts sale, Valentine's ball/pyjama party, wine tasting, Christmas event (carol singing, gift wrap service etc.). There are many other ways in which you can fundraise and we will be happy to provide you with an A – Z of great ideas to inspire you!

## How can Oxfordshire STARS and Marie Curie help me raise the funds?

Once you have registered, Oxfordshire STARS will organise a get-together for all trek participants. We will tell you all about our walking group and fundraising activities. Marie Curie can provide you with leaflets, a collecting tin(s), a letter to approach companies, a donation form and an A – Z of ideas. Oxfordshire STARS can also organise sponsored walks so that your friends and colleagues can help you to get to your target (they will obtain sponsors for their efforts and the money they raise will be allocated to your fundraising target). You will find that some of your friends and colleagues will want to help you raise funds if you explain what a great charity Marie Curie is. Most people enjoy giving some of their time to support those in need.

## Oxfordshire STARS on-line donations page

Marie Curie has signed up to JustGiving.com. This is great news for trek participants as it means that your family, friends and colleagues can make on-line donations to sponsor you! A designated Oxfordshire STARS trek fundraising page will be set up. You'll then be able to check who's sponsored you as JustGiving list all of your sponsors, together with the amount they have donated! It couldn't be easier!

## About Oxfordshire STARS

Our aims are to contribute to health and well-being by providing walks, social nights and trek weekends, and to raise funds for worthy charitable causes.

Our group is made up of a friendly bunch of individuals. Some enjoy the great outdoors, some enjoy socialising and others like to support our charity work.

We like to bring people together in a fun and happy environment and a strong emphasis is put on being supportive, respectful and kind to one another.

Sign up for free by logging on to:  
[www.meetup.com/oxfordshire-stars-walks-socials-and-charitable-events](http://www.meetup.com/oxfordshire-stars-walks-socials-and-charitable-events)

# Some things you might like to know before visiting Albania

Source: By Ellie Marr

1. There's hardly a stretch of sand from the tip of Italy to the fast-developing resorts in Montenegro where you can lay your towel on the Mediterranean, but you can still find a spot in Albania.
2. Staggered along the climbing foothills of rugged mountains, the whitewashed walls and terracotta tiles of the homes in Berat have the perfect natural stage for their own architectural beauty.
3. Albania is teeming with cities that reveal the country's turbulent history. Enveloped by mountains in the centre of the country, its capital city of Tirana is comprised of soviet-era buildings and decorative Ottoman domes, making for a truly unique architectural spectacle.
4. Known for its hospitable culture, Albanian people are incredibly welcoming to visitors. Unlike some other countries, this sense of friendliness does not deviate from cities to rural areas, with some villagers even opening their homes to accommodate tourists. A vast section of the Albanian population also speak English, meaning they are generally happy to suggest restaurants to try, activities to do, and places to visit.
5. The Albanian Alps are stunning... The serrated peaks, frothing mountain rivers, and sparkling glacial lakes in the Albanian Alps are a mountainous landscape with few rivals. For now, there are also few visitors. Albanian mountain passes are slowly being signposted and roads freshly tarmacked to attract tourists. But, come today and you'll mostly share the scenery with the wolves, lynxes and other wildlife that flourish here.
6. Coffee is not just a beverage in Albania, it's a way of life. Which is why you'll find a café on pretty much every street corner in Tirana. Unsurprisingly, Albania inherited its passion for a strong cup of java from the Ottoman Empire, who brought it to the Balkans in the 16th century. Though not itself a coffee-growing country, Albanians enjoy a wide variety of coffees. Its favourites are by far the Italian espresso and Turkish coffee – the latter involving an ancient method of using finely ground beans and forgoing the filtering process to produce a thick, rich brew. Enjoy your coffee Albanian style – served in a small compact glass with a side order of water or Raki (vodka brewed in Albania) – to truly immerse yourself in the culture.
7. Foodies will love Albania. With its mix of incredible restaurants serving traditional favourites such as ferges (Albanian stew) to its buzzing street food culture, the cuisine here is seriously underrated – if rated at all! Byrek is one of the country's 'must-try' dishes. Also known as 'Albanian pie', Byrek is an incredibly portable snack made from filo pastry that contains various fillings, from spinach and feta to meat and onions, and is often served with yoghurt or 'dhalle'. Afterwards, satisfy your sweet tooth with some traditional Baklava: honey-soaked layers of pastry filled with chopped nuts. Simply divine! Notably, Albanian dishes are largely made from home grown fresh produce, and agriculture takes up much of the country's landmass. It's therefore extremely common to find vendors at the side of the road – stalls selling organic fruit and vegetables – while passing through the Albanian countryside.
8. While it's not a secret anymore, Albania still feels refreshingly accessible. Whether you're exploring lively Tirana, relaxing on the Albanian Riviera, or heading into the mountains, you'll find that your money goes a little further here – especially when it comes to eating out, getting around, and enjoying cultural experiences.
9. Skanderbeg Square is the main plaza in the Albanian capital of Tirana. It is widely considered the epicentre of Albania and is named after national hero, George Kastrioti, who successfully resisted the Ottoman's in the 15th century. Spanning over 40,000 square meters, it's home to some of the most significant buildings in the entire country, including the National History Museum, the Bank of Albania, the Clock Tower, and Et'hem Bey Mosque.

