

Intangible Heritage



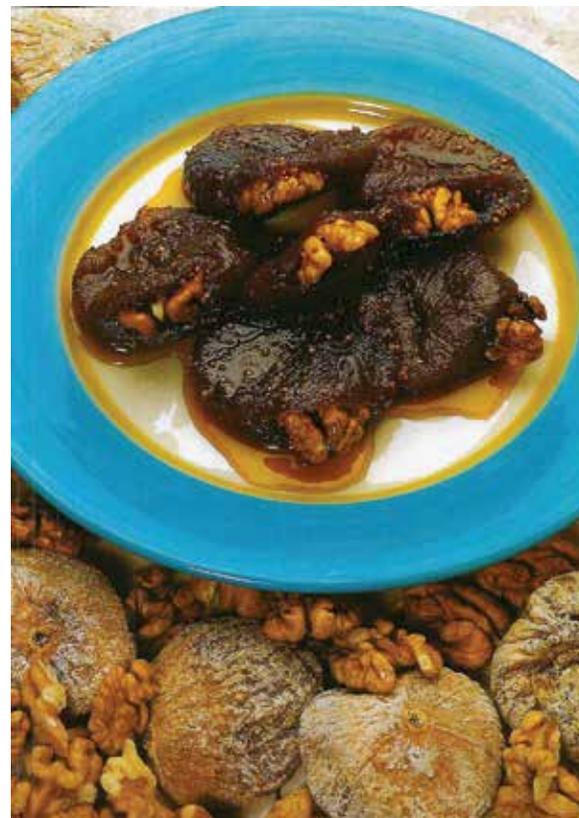


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Food & Drink





Singing & Dancing

Iso-polyphony songs and
the National Folk Festival

Gjirokastra is a modern city that keeps its rich traditions close at hand. One of these is southern Albania's famous iso-polyphonic style of singing, where three or four voices are accompanied by a accompanying chorus. Since 2005, Albanian iso-polyphony has been listed as a "Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity." But this does not mean that its place is only in museums. The Albanian form of iso-polyphonic music is still widely performed during celebrations and in local bars and restaurants. As you walk through Gjirokastra's bazaar, you can often hear the haunting sounds of this music floating over the cobblestone streets.

Over the last few decades, the modest rise of cultural tourism and the growing interest of the research community in this unique folk tradition, have contributed to the revival of Albanian iso-polyphony. If you would like to hear this form of singing,

local songs are performed on request at the Skenduli house. Contact: **Nesip Skenduli, 0692756285** (he speaks Albanian and a bit of French and Italian; his daughter does speak English).

Gjirokastra is the home of the famous Albanian traditional folk festival, which is held every five years. The National Folklore Festival was organized for the first time in Gjirokastra in 1968 and since then it has become the symbol of Albania's intangible heritage. This festival, held in the open air in Gjirokastra castle, features the best of the Albanian folk tradition, including music, dancing, folk art and costumes. Over 1300 Albanian singers and dancers from Albania, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, Italy, Germany, Switzerland and the United States performed in the last National Folklore Festival in May 2015.

Text

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Traditional dishes pictures

Courtesy of Ms Dhurata Daneri, Luga e Argjendtë, Tirana

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Gjirokastra is famous for its food. The delicious cuisine found here is the result of high quality and often organic ingredients prepared by talented cooks. The cuisine has distinct Ottoman roots with its use of oils, spices, herbs and especially sauces, such as one resembling béchamel. Meat also seems to be more common in Gjirokastra cuisine than in some other parts of Albania, where such people often poke fun at the Gjirokastrans for their frugality. But a certain resourcefulness can also be seen as a source of innovation in their cooking. Gjirokastrans can produce many variations of dishes using only a few basic ingredients. Typical dishes include pashaqofte, a soup with small meatballs (01); qifqi, rice balls cooked in a hollow frying pan and mixed with herbs (04); shapkat, a

mixture of sorrels and cornflour (03); sarma or japrak, stuffed grape leaves with rice and mint (02); and qahi tiny spinach pies. Vegetables are grown in Lunxhëri and the muskmelon of Dropull is especially good. A must-try local dessert in Gjirokastra is oshaf, with sheep milk, dry figs and cinnamon. Be sure also to try the Turkish baklava, prepared in the local way. Another important local product in Gjirokastra is the local cheese, which is renowned throughout Albania and is generally considered the best. This cheese is made from goat, sheep or cow's milk. The most common cheeses are called djathë i bardhë, a soft white cheese that is similar to, but a bit harder than, feta, and kaçkavall, a hard yellow variety.



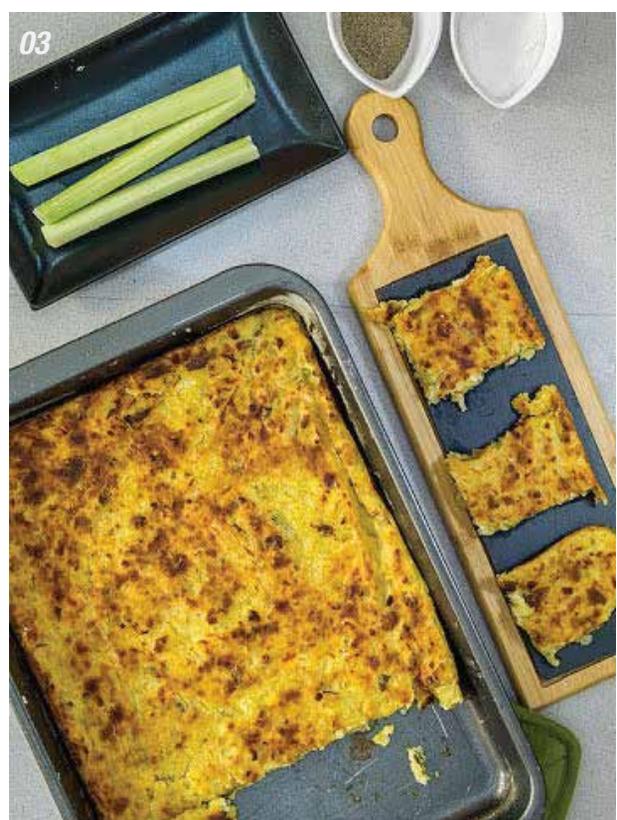
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Anecdotes, superstitions and local stories

The Gjirokastra People: Tight-fisted and stingy?

Like the Dutch in Europe or the Genoese in Italy, the people from Gjirokastra are often the subject of jokes in Albania. People from other areas in the country, particularly from neighbouring Labëria, say that they are frugal to the extreme! The jokes intend no harm, and even Gjirokastrans smile at them. One typical joke goes like this:

“It is early morning and a woman has just started to fry two eggs for breakfast when her husband climbs on to the house’s

roof to fix the television antenna. Fixing antennas is a dangerous business in Gjirokastra, because houses are tall and roof slates are slippery. Suddenly the man slips and falls off. Just as he hurtles past the kitchen window, he shouts, “Just fry one egg – I’m dead now!”

Here’s another famous joke:

“Why don’t Gjirokastrites use refrigerators? Because they don’t believe that the light turns off when the door is shut.”

Calling women by their husband’s name

Men and women often do not call each other by their own names. They find indirect ways of identifying each other, usually using sir, or sometimes pronouns like he, she, her or him. This kind of relationship continues to this day in older neighbourhoods of Gjirokastra, such as Dunavat. Not

mentioning the name of the husband or wife might be related to the respect they have to show in public or with the protection of the person from ‘the evil eye’. The Greek minority to the south of Gjirokastra also practice more or less the same phenomenon today. Here, women are called by the names of their husbands in the feminine gender. For example, if the name of the husband is Niko, then the wife shall be called Nikova, or if the husband is called Vangjeli, then she will be called Vangjelena.

Other superstitions and local stories

In Gjirokastra, it is widely believed that eating after midnight is bad luck.

It is very common to see women dressed in black around Gjirokastra. The traditional reason for this is that women wear black after their husbands have died for the rest of their lives.

In Gjirokastra, when a family member is washing their hands at the same time as you, it is bad luck to immediately give them the soap. Instead, you should put the soap down somewhere, and let them pick it up themselves. It is widely believed that this is done in order to avoid a quarrel in the future.

Folk knowledge in Gjirokastra says that giving qifqi (fried rice balls mixed with local herbs) to a woman soon after she gives birth will help her have more breast milk to feed the newborn. This explains why qifqi-s are made in a round shape, like a woman’s breast.

Dancing & Costumes

The dances of southern Albania are cheerful, charming and elegant. Usually, the dance is performed with a group of 10-12 people holding hands and wearing fustanella (men's pleated white skirts) or other traditional costumes. Each of the many small villages and valleys surrounding Gjirokastra has its own rich tradition of folk costumes, music and customs. These contribute to making the Drino Valley and its surroundings incredibly diverse, with a wealth of intangible heritage traditions.

If you would like to learn traditional dances or watch the local troupes performing them, you can visit the Cultural Center "Fato Berberi" (Qendra kulturore "Fato Berberi"), located in Gjirokaštër, just below Hotel Çajupi. ***For more information or to book a dancing session, please contact Mr. Andon Tunj, +355 (0) 692486199***

