Edward Lear on Gjirokastra:
Arghyro Kastro is in fact three towns: and no place could have been more beautifully contrived for the perpetuation of the family feuds which long disturbed its harmony.

What do Ismail Kadare, Che Guevara, Enver Hoxha and Lord Byron have in common? They all in one way or another experienced life in Gjirokastra. Actually Che Guevara, the real one, never went to Gjirokastra in his entire life, but Albania has its own ‘Che’. His name was Çerçiz Topulli, and he is nicknamed the ‘Albanian Che’ due to his revolutionary spirit. Gjirokastra was and still is a source of inspiration for many travellers, adventurers, writers, artists and so on… Just ‘meet’ a few of them and learn about why they are still so dear to Gjirokastra and its people.

Enjoy these five diverse, adventurous and educational cultural itineraries following the footsteps of those who made the city so unforgettable!
Southern Albania has been home to peoples of many different religions, languages, and ethnicities living within close proximity. These disparate groups were linked together by a web of economic and social networks as they traded with each other, lived side-by-side, and even intermarried. One way that we can look at these groups, and their relationships with each other, is through local architecture.

Due to its long architectural tradition, Gjirokastra landed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2005. This listing reflects the city’s outstanding universal values as a well-preserved Ottoman-era town and testimony to the diversity of urban society.

View of Gjirokastra - Giuseppe Massani 1940
The fortified houses* of Gjirokastra were owned by rich local landlords. Some say that the houses are oriented in such a way that owners could see their properties in the valley below.

What we do know for sure is that they fit perfectly to the terrain. Different parts of the houses have different numbers of floors, so as to better fit the steep terrain.

These fortified houses hosted many family members at the same time, sometimes reaching up to 30-40 people. This is why each living room had its own fireplace and toilet. The more chimneys on the roof, the richer the family was. Each space had its own function. For instance the ground floor was mainly used for storage. The first floor was used as a winter residence, with its thick walls and small windows that kept the heat of the fireplaces in.

The second floor was used during the summer, with high ceilings, big windows and specially-decorated interiors that were used for hosting special guests and celebrations. In some cases, there is a smaller house in the yard of the house that was used to host guests or servants.

The ground floor is also the location of the water cistern. Since there are very few sources of water in the city, the inhabitants thought of collecting rain water from the roof and storing it in big water cisterns on the lowest level of the house. These cisterns were built with stone masonry and plastered with special water resistant plaster. Each cistern could hold, depending on the house, 10,000 - 100,000 liters of water.

According to oral tradition, master craftsmen from the region of Erseka came to the city during the warm months to build these fortified residential houses. They were divided into teams led by a head craftsman and shared everything together during those months. They even had their own language, which allowed them to communicate with each other without the owner understanding anything.

* Typology based on Emir Riza terminology.
Different typologies of houses were developed over the years, but the main characteristics and building materials remained the same. Without having any engineering education, the craftsmen managed to pass on their experience and knowledge from generation to generation. Local materials were used in very intelligent ways that maximized their performance within the buildings. Local limestone was used for the masonry. If you see black stone masonry, you should know that that house might be one of the oldest in the city. Timber ties were placed almost every meter in the stone masonry to make sure the structure works together as one. These ties hold the house together like a belt. They are so essential to the stability of the house that there are cases when they continue uninterrupted through the middle of a window opening.

Different types of timber are used in different elements, in the way that best suits their capacities. Timber is used for windows and doors, floors, beautifully carved ceilings, furniture and dividing walls.

Timber is also very important when it comes to the intricate roof structure. Stone tiles are used to cover the Gjirokastra roofs, playing an important role in its grey landscape. In order to support the heavy stone slates that cover the roof, many timber elements are used to build the underlying structure. They are so close to each other that the interior of the roof seems like a forest. Its technology is still a topic of study for academics.

Did you know?

Stone and timber are not the only materials that were used. Mud, sand, limestone and even hay and goat hair are used for mortars, plasters and renders, covering the surfaces of the walls. Technology today is still imitating what our ancestors did, by adding synthetic fibers into renders and plasters, instead of goat hair.
Cobblestone streets of Gjirokastra

Among the many specialists who worked on the cobblestone streets of Gjirokastra during the communist time, Spiro Bezhani is certainly one of the most knowledgeable. Spiro is a living legend, and when he talks about the streets of his hometown Gjirokastra, he gets emotional. He tells the story of a lifetime spent paving the streets and alleys of the ancient town, together with his craftsmen colleagues. It was a hard job, since they used to work outdoors during the very cold winters and the hot, dry summers. But they all were happy to contribute to beautifying their beloved city. Today Spiro, who is in his 70s, is still actively working in Gjirokastra as a master stone carver, teaching the new generation of craftspeople and contributing to the preservation of Albanian cultural heritage.
Be sure to check out the brochures ‘Artisans & Bazaar’ and ‘Intangible Heritage’ for more info on the people and culture in Gjirokastra.

Note: Numbering on the general map differs from the numbering on each of the itinerary maps.
From the Neck of the Bazaar, continue onto Ismail Kadare Road, in the direction of the Bazaar Mosque. After passing the mosque on your left, keep walking for 30m and then head down to your right along the road Doktor Vasil Laboviti for about 100m. Turn left when you reach a yellow building on your right side, continuing down Fato Berberi Road.

Fico House

Fico House can be easily spotted due to its unique golden yellow façade. Built in 1902, this house serves as an example of the development of the traditional houses.
in Gjirokastra at the end of the 19th century. The overall organization of the interior spaces is like that of a typical Gjirokastra house, while the decoration of the interior and exterior is treated differently. The elaborate wooden elements present in the interior of older houses are used in a much simpler style in this house, losing much of their decorative carving. On the façade we see many wooden decorations and beautifully cantilevered upper floors of the house.

The attic of the house is one of its most unique elements. It is located in the centre of the house, on the top floor. Its painted walls, decorated ceiling and natural light coming from the many windows create a stunning atmosphere, unique in the city.

Another special detail of this house can be seen on its right. A bridge connects Fico House with the house next to it, which belongs to some family members. They wanted to have access to each-other’s houses, but they couldn’t block the alley, so they built a bridge supported by a stone vault.
The façade of the house has two main cantilevered volumes. This type of structure is very common in the houses of Gjirokastra. It is called erker, and it is used in order to increase the surface area of the upper floors. The erker is built by cantilevering the beams beyond the width of the lower floor. The walls of the upper floors are built using post and pane structure. In most of the cases the infill used is lath which is then plastered in several layers. This lightweight structure allows for bigger windows, providing more natural light and fresh air to the upper rooms. These large, well-lit and beautifully decorated rooms are the most important ones of the house. They are used as summer rooms.

**Kadare House**

The Kadare House is the place where the world-famous writer Ismail Kadare was born. The house was burned in the mid-1990s only to be rebuilt in 2015 with UNESCO support. Today the house is used as a place for different artistic activities. After the visit to the Kadare House, you can walk up the street Sokaku i të Marrëve to get to the Skënduli House and the Ethnographic Museum (formerly Enver Hoxha’s House). The street up Sokaku i të Marrëve is paved with cobblestones and might be slippery, especially when it rains.

**Ismail Kadare**

Born in Gjirokastra in 1936, Ismail Kadare represents the pinnacle of Albanian literary culture. Kadare is a man of letters - a poet, novelist, historian and journalist who has written extensively about Albania and its place in Europe. He is a prolific writer, and many of his books have been translated into more than 40 languages. In 1990, before the collapse of the communed regime in Albania, he went to France, and once there, he applied for political asylum. His act helped expedite the important political events in Albania at that time. Recently, he has been engaged in the debate about the European future of Albania and Albanians.

Kadare has been nominated several times as a candidate for the Nobel Prize in Literature, and in 2005 he received the Man Booker International Prize. In 2009 he was honoured with the great Spanish Award, “the Prince of Asturias for Literature”, one of the most prestigious literary prizes in the world. A member of the French Academy and a Knight of the Legion of Honour, he also holds the most important Albanian medal: Honour of the Nation. His award winning novel Broken April provides some clues into ancient Albanian customary laws called Kanun, regulating all aspects of rural life, especially in Northern Albania. Other must-read are the well-known Chronicle in Stone and Fall of the Stone City, which vividly describe aspects of life in Gjirokastra. You can find his books in many shops in the bazaar.
There is a road heading down to Ismail Kadare’s house called “Sokaku i të Marrëve,” which means “Street of the Mad.” There are many theories for where the name comes from, but the most commonly accepted version is related to the sounds created when people walk along it. Previously, this street was paved with irregular, loose stones. When people walked in a hurry downhill, the stones would shift, making it sound like mad people were walking by. Later, during the communist period, this path was renamed “Street of the Pioneers” because it was repaved by the young stonemasons (the “Young Pioneers”) of the town.

Skenduli House
You might be asked to pay a small entrance fee. Skenduli is the one house that everyone coming to Gjirëkastra should visit. An outstanding example of the local architecture of the city, most of its authentic elements have been preserved through the years. During the communist period, this house served as the Ethnographic Museum. Now that the original owners have their house back, they have continued to keep it open for visitors.

Skenduli House was built in 1823, as stated on one of the paintings that decorates the façade of the house. Other decorations, such as a hunting scene, are visible on the façade. Another element that catches the attention from the outside is the number of chimneys. According to the history of the city, the more chimneys a house has, the bigger the importance of the family.

Visitors enter the yard of the house (only one of the two original yards is still in use). From there, upon entering the ground floor of the house, you can see the muslluk (the tap of the water cistern), the winter rooms on the first floor and then the beautiful summer rooms and the oda on the second floor. As the family living in the house was very big, different rooms were used by different members of the family for different purposes. The room for the young couple even has a small Turkish bath next to it. The çardak is the space connecting all rooms of the upper floor. This space is covered by a beautifully-carved wooden ceiling. A small corner space called goshk is added to this area, to be used during the warm days as a relaxing spot.

Skenduli House

When exiting Skenduli House, turn left and take an immediate right onto Petref Kokona Road. Take the first right again and follow an irregular pathway for 50 meters to reach the Jaho-Babaramo House (the second house on the left). Here, you can have a coffee break or lunch. A reservation is needed. Please see the paragraph on Jaho-Babaramo house for more info.
Jaho - Babaramo House

Jaho-Babaramo is considered to be one of the most interesting traditional houses with two wings. We do not know the exact year that this house was built, but specialists date the house to the end of the 18th century, due to its overall composition and the treatment of wooden partition structures.

The house today is divided into two parts, owned by two different families. According to the original documents, which the families still have, the division was done on 21 November 1881. Dividing the house into two separate parts caused a few changes to the interior of the structure. A lighter timber wall was built on all the floors of the house to divide the central spaces into two parts, while the yard was divided in two by a stone wall that goes right to the center of the ground floor door, dividing it into two parts as well.

Modifications were made to the northern half of the house in 1931 (the right-hand side, when you are facing the house), according to an inscription on the second floor. These interventions were done to give the house a more contemporary style. Some of the upper windows were walled off; the roof eves were made shorter. You can notice some of these modifications when comparing the two halves of the house.

Nowadays, the right-hand side of the house is the most well-preserved of the two. The main guest room still has its beautiful wooden structure, while the plaster of the room is decorated in an unmatched technique in the city. 3D stamps with floral motifs were used to leave an imprint on the plaster. The fireplace and other important parts of the interior are decorated with this technique. Particular importance is given to the roof, which still holds its original structure.

The roofs of Gjirokastra are a main element of its heritage and historic landscape. Many thin wooden beams are put together, using only ties and nails, creating a true forest under the heavy stone tile cover. These structures are very durable, but need a lot of maintenance.

Today both sides of the house are inhabited by the Jaho and Babaramo families. Monda Kallapodhi is a very hospitable lady and an excellent cook, also known for her love of cats. She offers traditional meals for tourists on demand.

For more info, contact Ms. Monda Kallapodhi mob. +355 (0) 692906167. She only speaks Albanian.

When exiting Jaho-Babaramo House, turn right to return along the street you came from. At the main road, turn right and follow Petref Kokona Road uphill. After 160 meters, turn left on Ramadan Mane Street. At the next crossroad, take a hard left on Mazllëm Shazivari Street. You will pass the towering Zekate House on your right before reaching the entrance gate 100m further down the road.
Zekate House

You might be asked to pay a small entrance fee.

At the very top of Palorto neighborhood, you’ll see Zekate House. It was built for Beqir Zeko, a general administrator of Ali Pasha, around 1811-1812. The majestic appearance of this house is a symbol of the elite of the time, where Zeko belonged.

Zekate House is open to visitors and offers a chance to experience a historical house of Gjirokastra, in all its complexity, as well as stunning views of the city and valley below. The beautifully decorated oda and cardak in the center are two of the most impressive spots of the house. This house gives visitors a vast understanding of the vernacular architecture of the city and of the lifestyle of the local inhabitants, centuries ago. Despite the imposing appearance of the lower floors from the exterior, Zekate House is welcoming and very interesting to visit.

The house has strong defensive features, such as the few openings on the first floors and the surrounding walls of the yard. The tall stone walls of the lower floors give the second floor the chance to truly bloom. The upper floor, safe from the troubles that were happening at ground level, has another character and feel: bigger windows and decorated interiors.

The surrounding walls divided the three different yards that the house had, which were connected to one another by gates. Surrounding walls in the city of Gjirokastra are built with dry stone masonry, meaning without mortar. The stones are carved to have flat surfaces and then stacked in layers. Usually, the walls have two sides built like this, while the inner part is filled with smaller stones and plaster. Every few layers, bigger stones are used, to create a connection between the two sides of the wall. The top of the wall is covered with big thin stone tiles, to prevent the rain water from getting in.

Once you have exited Zekate House, proceed downhill along Bashkim Kokona Road for about 150 meters. Keep to the left, and as the road takes a wide curve, you’ll see a ruined monument house, on the right-hand side. This is the house of Musine Kokalari, who was the first Albanian female prose writer and one of the founders of the Social-Democratic Party of Albania in 1943.

More information on Musine Kokalari on the next page.

Angonate House

From the house of Musine Kokalari proceed onto Bashkim Kokona Road. You’ll see Angonate House on your right hand-side. The house is located in one of the most visible spots in the city. Its location, size and beauty are some of the reasons why its image is present on many postcards of Gjirokastra.

The house was built in 1881, for two brothers named Hanko. The Hankos play an important role in the history of the city and Ismail Kadare has written “Breznité e Hankonatëve”, a book about their saga.
Babameto House is located very close to the bazaar of the city. It looks like one elegant three-story house, while in fact it is a composition of two dwellings, built for two brothers. The two sides date to 1885 and 1887 and have their interior spaces organized in different ways. Both the interior and the exterior serve as testimonies of the evolution of Gjirokastra houses during the second half of the 19th century.

Rumours still circulate about how expensive it was to build these two houses. The best craftspeople and materials were used. Still today, we can admire many authentic elements, such as the door frames and the engravings above them. According to information passed from generation to generation, one of the brothers was very religious, so the stone decoration over the entrance door on his side of the house had the engraving of a mosque. The other brother was very passionate about

The Kokalaris are an intellectual and patriotic family in Gjirokastra which contributed to the social and political life of the town. One of the most important members of this family was Musine Kokalari. Musine was the first Albanian female prose writer and a founder of the Social-Democratic Party of Albania in 1943. In her early years Musine used to write in her Gjirokan dialect, which was a powerful way of keeping her culture and heritage alive. Moreover in her collection of tales titled As My Old Mother Telle Me, she denounces the Albanian patriarchal society and describes the struggle of being a young woman growing up in such a male-centred environment. In 1946 due to her political engagement she was persecuted by the communist regime and sentenced to 20 years in prison with the accusation of being an ‘enemy of the people’. After 19 years in prison she was exiled to the northern Albanian town of Rrëshen, where she died 19 years later. During her internment, she worked as a street-sweeper, and she was never allowed to return to her writings. A descendant of Musine, Arjeta Kokalari is still living in Gjirokastra and through her memories the story of her powerful ancestor are kept alive.

Musine Kokalarai

At first sight, you can notice the smaller structure at the front of the complex and the bigger one in the back. The smaller building in front of the house is the odajashta (literally “the outer room”). This type of construction was built in the yard of the house in order to host less important guests or servants, while the most important guests and celebrations would be hosted in the oda, the big decorated rooms in the upper floors of the larger house. Usually, odajashta is a one-storey structure, but in this case it has been treated with great care and only adds to the beauty of the complex.

From Angonate House, you have two options. You can either head downhill, then take a sharp right turn onto Ismail Kadare Road and go back towards the bazaar. Or, you can proceed uphill toward Babameto House Hostel (see the route on the map), which represents another masterpiece of local architecture.
The restoration of Babameto House served as an educational activity for many young professionals, through the Regional Restoration Camps run by CHwB-Albania. The participants at these two-week intensive trainings learned how to use traditional techniques to work with stone, wood and plaster.

When restoring the plaster (on the interior walls) and render (on the façade), only traditional materials were used. Plasters and renders are composed of different layers, depending on the type of wall they are applied to and the function of the area created by those walls. Different mixes are used for different layers. The most common mixes are those using mud and hay; lime, sand and goat hair; and lime, goat hair and ashes mixed with water. Lime is the most commonly used material for plasters and renders. This material allows for natural ventilation of the structure at different times of the year.

Depending on the layer, lime, sand and hay are mixed together in different ratios. Goat hair is used for the final layers, giving them increased flexibility and durability. The lime coat is prepared from lime putty thinned with ash water (ash would be mixed with water, and after ash would settle at the bottom, the water would be carefully collected and used).

Babameto House restoration works

Babameto House Exterior

farming, so above his door is engraved a cart pulled by two buffalos.

The yard has one entrance gate, which serves both sides of the house. In the yard, we can find traces of the original well used by the family, which is also why this house had no water cistern. Also, traces of the water drainage system have been found, collecting all the water coming from up the hill.

The house has recently undergone a full restoration, done by Cultural Heritage without Borders-Albania (CHwB-Albania), and now serves as a hostel and cultural centre.

Beja / Muhedini House

No specific date of construction is known, but some of its elements put it into the category of houses built in the first quarter of the 19th century. The overall organization of the different spaces on each floor, the double entrances to the ground floor and the staircases are done in a unique way in this house.

A very remarkable characteristic of this house is its openness. The two wings are supported by open stone arcades. The columns and the arcades of the ground floor create a natural combination of nature and manmade elements. The overall structure seems lighter. The house has two yards and two entrance gates, with two sets of columns. Another interesting element present in this house is its openness. The two wings are supported by open stone arcades. The columns and the arcades of the ground floor create a natural combination of nature and manmade elements. The overall structure seems lighter. The house has two yards and two entrance gates, with two sets of columns. Another interesting element present in this house

* For more information about these houses see the Old Bazaar Itinerary on page 51.

Other notable houses*

* For more information about these houses see the Old Bazaar Itinerary on page 51.
is the buttresses. They are believed to be original, built together with the structure of the house. The buttresses are built with stone masonry, in order to support the walls of the water cistern in bearing the weight of the water.

Water cisterns were built to collect rain water as water resources in the city were very limited. A system of pipes was connected to the roof gutters in order to collect the clean rain water and deposit it in the water cisterns. These cisterns were built with stone masonry and timber ties, just like the rest of the structure of the house. Placed on the ground floor, they kept the temperature cool for the surrounding storage rooms. The cisterns are vaulted structures with one window/entrance that would allow for it to be cleaned and one or two taps. These taps, called muslluk, are found inside most Gjirokastra houses.

- Another special element of the water cisterns is the plaster that was used. Traditionally a special type of red plaster was used in the inside walls in order to make it water resistant.*

Kurti House

The Kurti house is a second-category monument and a fairly well-preserved example of local architecture. The house has undergone some modifications through the years, particularly in the 1930s. In a second-category monument, the exterior of the building, including its external form, the material used and its aesthetic appearance are the most highly protected characteristics. In the case of Kurti House, there is another element that has received the highest evaluation. The gate of the house is listed as a first-category monument, meaning that it cannot be altered in any way.

Gates are an important element of the historical landscape of Gjirokastra. In most cases, they are composed of two side walls covered by a stone arch. The keystones of the arches are sometimes decorated with carvings. Gates have small roofs over them to protect the masonry and the wooden door. The gate roof is a simpler version of the house roof — a wooden construction covered with stone slates.

In the case of Kurti House, the entrance gate has three round stone columns to support the roof. The door is positioned in such a way that it creates an additional entrance space in front of it, covered by the roof. This is the most elaborate type of gate in Gjirokastra. Carved stones were used to build the gate structure, with its three-layered arch. Some of the stones of the main arch are beautifully decorated with different symbols. Two sitting areas are installed by the door, which also serve as the base for the columns. The small opening in the wall resembles that used inside the house. Small objects, such as candles, can be placed there.

Xhelili House

Xhelili House is located in the Old Bazaar neighborhood, directly below the clocktower. This area was originally used as a market area, when life started to expand outside of the castle walls. Later, the area was transformed into a residential neighborhood. Xhelili is one of the first houses to be found under the walls of the castle. The age of this house and this whole neighborhood can be understood also by looking at the material used, which is black stone. The northern wall of the house transforms into the surrounding wall of the yard and serves as a boundary for the main road of the neighborhood, as well.

Unfortunately, a fire during the 1980s destroyed much of the authentic elements of the monument. Nowadays, the most distinctive features are the arched ground floor and the well. Water sources are a rare thing in Gjirokastra, so the well at Xhelili is one of the few to be found in the city. Sometimes they are placed in the yard and other times inside the house, some of them were even connected to small cisterns and had special water pumps. The well at Xhelili is located in the open arcade found by the entrance of the monument. The arcade itself is a unique element; the two arches are decorated with a face-like carved stone, unmatched by any other example in the city.

*For more information on water cisterns see page 7

Water sources are a rare thing in Gjirokastra, so the well at Xhelili is one of the few to be found in the city. Sometimes they are placed in the yard and other times inside the house, some of them were even connected to small cisterns and had special water pumps. The well at Xhelili is located in the open arcade found by the entrance of the monument. The arcade itself is a unique element; the two arches are decorated with a face-like carved stone, unmatched by any other example in the city.
Meçite Quarter, Hammam and St. Sotir Church

This is an easy itinerary in terms of difficulty and not particularly time consuming. It shows how multicultural the city has always been, while peacefully hosting a melting pot of people of different cultural and religious backgrounds. From the Neck of the Bazaar proceed towards the Bazaar Mosque.

Built in 1757, this mosque is a landmark within the formerly Ottoman market area of the historic centre. Gjirokastra used to have 15 mosques. However, all but this...
one were demolished or re-purposed during the 1967 cultural revolution under Albania’s communist regime.

A mosque, like a church, is a sacred space for prayers, and all of its architectural forms come together harmoniously to support this purpose. When walking up to the Bazaar Mosque, the first part that you will see is the large porch. When you enter the mosque, you will see a wall niche, called a **mihrab**, directly ahead. The **mihrab** always points toward Mecca, and the imam stands there when leading the prayers. On the right-hand side is an elevated pulpit, called a **minbar**, from which the imam delivers the Friday sermons covering important religious and social topics. The upper semi-floor (**mahvil**) was usually a place reserved for women, or where young students would practice Kur’an reading or religious singing.

Muslims are required to pray 5 times a day, at specific times. Five times each day, the **muezzin** would climb up the steps of the minaret and with his melodic call would remind people that it’s time to pray.

When entering the mosque, everyone should remove their shoes and ladies should cover their heads with a scarf.

The following houses are part of the Old Bazaar itinerary. For more info see page 51.

1. Neck of the Bazaar
2. Bazaar Mosque
3. Stone City Hostel
4. Greek Orthodox School
5. Hammam and the 7 Fountains
6. Hadji Murat ruined mosque
7. Children’s Cultural Center
8. Çerçiz Topulli Square / Touristic Info Center
9. Saint Sotir Church
10. Papadopuli House Gate
11. Xhelli House Gate
From the mosque, walk uphill toward the Neck of the Bazaar and then turn left going downhill in the direction of Meçite Quarter towards the **Stone City Hostel**. Follow Aşk Kondi street. About 400 m after the Stone City Hostel, you’ll find a wall plate on your left-hand side with an inscription in Albanian remembering the place and the time where Çerçiz Topulli - a national hero who was fighting the Turks - assassinated the Turkish bimbashi (a Turkish military leader). Continue following the cobblestone road until you reach (right-hand side) the **Greek Orthodox school** - well recognisable due to the cross placed above the large entrance doors.

Turn right and follow Jonuz Çuçi street until it joins another road (80m). The hamam is the building with three domes that you can see a few metres down the street to your left.

**The Hamam**
This Turkish style bath house is appropriately located near the water springs of the Meçite Quarter, which flow into “The Seven Fountains.” The hamam complex includes an entrance courtyard, a block of heated rooms with three domed chambers and other rooms. This is the only hamam of its kind in Gjirokastra - the other hamams of Gjirokastra are not free-standing structures. They can be found within some of the historic houses.

Today, the hamam is closed, due to conservation issues, so it cannot be visited.

**Hadji Murat Ruined Mosque and the 7 Fountains**
Very near to the hamam are the remains of the mosque of Hadji Murat. (‘Hadji’ is an honorary title, which means that Murat completed the holy Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca). In the transformed condition that we find them today, the remains of the mosque are almost unrecognizable.

The base of the minaret (partially destroyed) is on the right-hand side of the fountain, and a house now stands on the mosque’s original foundations. There is a well under the mosque, which is deemed to have excellent tasting water. The fountain built over the well shows an inscription with the name of the mosque in Arabic script.

When you are facing the mosque, turn to the right onto Meçite Street and walk uphill. Turn left at Njazi Hadëri Street and walk up the steps until you reach Fato Berberi Square — which you can recognise by the statue of Fato Berberi in the middle and the **Children’s Cultural Centre** behind it. To the left, you have a very nice view of some of Gjirokastra’s famous roofs. Continue to the left and walk up the stairs to the main road and the **main square of the old town** (Çerçizi Square). Once you reach the main road, just cross it and take Dr. Kalivopulli Street. There are nice viewpoints along this street where the hamam, the Greek Orthodox school and the **Hadji Murat Ruined Mosque and the 7 Fountains** are located.
Edward Lear

The British poet and painter known for his absurd wit, Edward Lear travelled to Albania in the mid-19th century. He was fascinated and inspired to travel to Albania by the previous work of William Martin Leake and Lord Byron. During his visit in Gjirokastra, he recorded through his written accounts, paintings and different sketches the ambience of the town. His work in Gjirokastra includes sketches and paintings of the fortress, Ali Pasha’s aqueduct, local architecture and people’s lives. Edward Lear published his work in 1851 entitled *Journal of a Landscape Painter in Greece and Albania* (1851).

Lear died in 1888 and was buried in the Foce Cemetery in Sanremo. On his tombstone are inscribed these lines about Mount Tomorr (Albania) from Alfred Lord Tennyson’s "To E.L." (Edward Lear), *On His Travels in Greece*:

Tomohrit, Athos, all things fair.
With such a pencil, such a pen.
You shadow forth to distant men,
I read and felt that I was there.

Saint Sotir Church

Saint Sotir Church is located in the Old Bazaar (*Pazari i Vjetër*) Quarter. It was built in 1784 in the form of a typical Orthodox church — rectangular in shape and built on an east-west axis. The church is also called the “Old Metropolitan,” as it was once the seat of the local Orthodox bishop. The church is divided into three main parts: the narthex, originally the place where unbaptized or non-Orthodox people stood during services; the nave divided by two rows of three large columns; and the sanctuary, the holiest area, separated from the nave by the iconostasis. The interior of the church was heavily damaged during communism and the original wall paintings have been destroyed. Framed icons now cover the walls, many of them painted locally and quite recently.

Go around the church and leave it from the opposite side. Once you reach the road, turn right and go uphill. You are now in the heart of the Old Bazaar Quarter (*Pazari i Vjetër*). If you want to explore this area and enjoy the Old Bazaar itinerary please refer to page 51. Otherwise just follow the road, and you will soon see the castle on your left-hand side. If you continue down the road, you’ll reach your starting point - the ‘new’ bazaar.

again the unique roofs of Gjirokastra can be seen from above. After about 400 meters, walk up the steps on your right-hand side, pass through a small arched gateway, and you will arrive at the courtyard of Saint Sotir Church.

Church of St. Sotir

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Red Tour

Location: Historic centre
Duration: 2hrs
Difficulty: Easy
Route: Cold War Tunnel-Arms Museum-Ethnographic Museum (formerly Enver Hoxha’s house)-Kodra and its view

This tour is about remembering, forgetting, preserving and moving on from Albania’s communist past. As you move around Gjirokastra, look for the different responses to the country’s recent history. In some places, people have incorporated the remains of communist-era structures or industrial materials into their homes and businesses. Bunkers might be used for storage. Metal sheets from the silverware
factories can be found as fencing. Houses that were taken away by the communist government have been returned to the owners—who do not always agree about how to maintain and use them. In many places, statues and slogans of the former regime have been torn down or erased. But along some streets, the name of dictator Enver Hoxha is reappearing in red graffiti—and quickly covered by a layer of white paint.

Today, the ruins of communist era buildings still dot the landscape of Albania. For a long time, the significance of these buildings has not been fully appreciated. However, as they face increasing risk of destruction, they are becoming more important as part of the story of Albania’s past.

But how do Albanians see their communist past now, a quarter of a century since the communist regime fell? Today, even after the passage of time, it is still difficult to view the communist past objectively. The country as a whole has never gone through a national process of dialogue and coming to terms with its difficult past. Albanians that are old enough to remember the previous regime can try to understand their experience through personal comparisons to the present. For the younger generation of Albanians, these types of comparisons come from older family members, or not at all. Many Albanians today may seem to be nostalgic about the communist system, but this does not mean that they want to return to that political past. This kind of nostalgia more often reflects an unhappiness with the difficulties that they have faced during the long transition to democracy.

The debate about whether and how to preserve communist heritage in Albania is growing. Every year, there are new projects that address this theme — whether they are museums, dialogue discussions, conferences or artistic installations.
At the main square of historic Gjirokastra (near Hotel Çajupi), you can enter the remains of a military command bunker, called the “Cold War Tunnel.” This intriguing space is ripe for exploration and imagination. Most of the bunker’s furnishings were looted during the 1990s, but what remains can still give you a sense of both the paranoia and the inner workings of Albania’s communist regime at the height of the Cold War. The tunnel is now managed and administered by the Municipality of Gjirokastra. You can request entrance at the Touristic Info Center of the Municipality of Gjirokastra on Çerçiz Topulli Square.

This communist-era tunnel complex tells an alternative story of Gjirokastra. Its 59 rooms show the extent to which the communist regime was preparing for foreign invasion.

The tunnel represents well the mindset of the Albanian state during the Hoxha regime. Especially following Albania’s diplomatic break with the Soviet Union in the early 1960s, the Enver Hoxha regime used the threat of imminent invasion as a means of controlling the populace—keeping the country at a constant state of heightened vigilance. The visit to this tunnel will give you a glimpse into the ‘bunker mentality’ of Albania’s communist regime. You will also see how this bunker was designed to accommodate many different functions in case of a possible nuclear attack — from local government to education to the military, interrogators and the party elite. Much of the original furniture was looted from the site during the 1990s, but some pieces still remain, giving you a sense of how the simple underground spaces would have felt. Moreover, you can visit the de-contamination rooms, the generator room (still containing a rusting Czechoslovakia-made generator) and the air filtration room to get a sense of the facilities needed, in order to be prepared for a nuclear attack.

After visiting the Cold War Tunnel, walk uphill through the Bazaar of Gjirokastra. Turn left and continue up to the Castle, to visit the prison inside it. After entering the Castle, turn left and walk to the end of the Great Gallery. Go up the steep stairs and enter the Arms Museum, which is itself a time capsule from the
Albanian communist period (there is a second small entrance fee). You will find the castle's prison through a door on your left at the top of the stairs.

2 The Castle Prison
Opening hours:
Tourist season (April-September): 9:00-19:00 7 days/week
Winter season 9:00-16:00 7 days/week
Entrance fee 200 LEK

The steps to the left of the Museum of Gjirokastra lead to another interesting part of the fortress; the Arms Museum and the Prison. Originally opened in the 1970s, the Arms Museum is located in a part of the former prison where the prisoners were "re-educated." King Zog commissioned the prison from the Italians, who designed it in a style that looks quite different from the rest of the castle. In the early 1930s, during its building, the stones were taken from the aqueduct that Ali Pasha built. During World War II, the prison was used by the Italian and German occupation forces. Following the war, the communists expanded the prison and used it to hold opponents of the new regime. It is said that the yard was used as a place for executions, particularly in the early years of the regime when Hoxha’s political opponents where brought here from labour camps around Albania.

The prison was closed in 1968 when work began on the Arms Museum. In the early 1970s, some of the prison cells were converted into a small museum. The writings on the walls are from the journals and letters of communists and anti-Zogists who were imprisoned here under King Zog and during the Italo-German occupation of World War II. They make no mention of those imprisoned here by the communist regime.

After the visit to the Castle Prison, you can visit the Ethnographic Museum, located on the site of the former house of Enver Hoxha. To get to the Ethnographic Museum, head back down from the Castle and take a left on Shezai Çomo Road, just before you reach the bazaar. Once you pass Hotel Gjirokastra, turn right onto Ismail Kадare Road and follow it for 350m until you arrive at the Ethnographic Museum.

3 The Ethnographic Museum
Opening hours:
Tourist season (April - September): 8:00-20:00 7 days/week
Winter season 9:00-14:00 7 days/week
Entrance fee 200 LEK

Gjirokastra’s Ethnographic Museum stands on the site of the childhood home of Albanian communist dictator Enver Hoxha (b. 1908, d. 1985). The original house was destroyed by fire in 1916. Therefore, the museum building was constructed in 1964-66, not as an exact replica of the former house but as a model of a traditional Gjirokastra home, including many of the classic cultural elements.

Enver Hoxha

Enver Hoxha was born in Gjirokastra in 1908 and was the communist dictator of Albania from 1944 until his death in 1985. When he was young, Enver Hoxha was awarded a scholarship by the King Zog monarchy to study biology at the Faculty of Natural Sciences at the University of Montpellier, France. In 1936 he came back from France and worked as a teacher in Korça. During WWII, Hoxha became the leader of the communist resistance in occupied Albania. Helped by Tito’s Yugoslav partisans and British special forces, Enver Hoxha managed to stay in control of Albanian political life during the war. From 1944 until his death, Enver Hoxha dominated the whole political stage of Albania, isolating the country from the rest of Europe. Besides the country’s isolation, the communist political leadership relied on surveillance, persecution and purges to hold power over every aspect of Albanians’ lives. The number of those killed or imprisoned during his 41 years in power is of some 100,000 people. Enver Hoxha died in Tirana from diabetes at the age of 77.
Skënduli House) were moved into this space. The rooms are arranged as they would have actually been used. They are decorated with numerous household items, folk costumes and cultural artefacts typical of a wealthy Gjirokastra family of merchants or Ottoman administrators living in the 19th century.

After the visit to the Ethnographic Museum, return back along Ismail Kadare Road until you reach the 5-point intersection at the Neck of the Bazaar. Here, turn left and slightly uphill onto the street called Rruga e Zejtareve. Follow this road 150m down (and slightly to the left) to the large flat plaza that locals call Kodra.

Kodra Viewpoint
Kodra coffee shop and restaurant is a very nice spot to rest while enjoying a unique view of Gjirokastra. From here, you can see where the historical part of the city meets the modern. However, both the coffee and the view come with an interesting story symbolizing the fast-changing Albanian political environment of the past decades.

The current restaurant is the latest of many buildings which have been built and then demolished according to the prevailing political will. It stands where the beautiful Kodra house used to be. Unfortunately, the historical house was demolished during the communist era in order to construct a cultural centre called the Palace of Culture. After the death of Enver Hoxha in 1985, the Palace of Culture was demolished and an enormous statue of the dictator was erected. From its privileged position, the statue overlooked the whole city, as if the power of Hoxha survived his physical death. But even this statue was short-lived. It was removed in the early 1990s. Since that time, the area of the old Kodra house has been occupied by a bar and restaurant. Both the restaurant and the nearby Kodra Hotel belong to the Kodra family, which got back their land after the collapse of the regime.

From 1966 to 1991, the building served as the Anti-Fascist Museum, commemorating the victory against fascism in World War II. A few artillery pieces from the previous exhibitions can still be seen in the museum’s yard. In 1993 the exhibits from the previous Ethnographic Museum (formerly at the Kodra Viewpoint

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This itinerary is for those who are curious to discover the “hidden Gjirokastra,” perhaps the one less known and less developed, but still so authentic and breath-taking that you will remember it for a long time. It is made of places, nature, buildings, legends and history. And, of course, it is made of the people of Gjirokastra that transform the city into a living museum.

Note: This route follows some rough and unpaved paths.

Part of the walking is on steep hills, partially paved with cobblestones, which can be slippery at times. It is recommended to wear comfortable walking shoes (better if closed). Carrying a walking stick might also be useful.
Following in the footsteps of... Evliya Çelebi who describes the Old Bazaar of Gjirokastra in his book Seyahatname:

Under the cliffs to the north of the fortress is the old bazaar, called the Fortress Bazaar, consisting of 40 little shops. This bazaar has wooden gates at both ends which are much like those of a covered market, and which the watchmen close every night. Once the gates are closed, there is no way of getting from the open town up to the fortress on this side. Only the gate on the side of the prayer-grounds is accessible.

Seyahatname. Evliya Çelebi

Begin by walking from the bazaar of Gjirokastra in the direction of the castle. Once you have left the bazaar, continue following the road up and to the left. Continue toward the left, past the foot tunnel that passes under the castle and towards the lower end of the castle (where the clock tower is located). At the fork in the road, keep to the left again, following the brown signs for the Old Bazaar Quarter.
From this point on, the Old Bazaar welcomes you with its quiet, laid-back atmosphere, very different from the lively and hectic new bazaar. It is the perfect place to collect your thoughts and get ready for a new exploration. As soon as you enter the neighbourhood, the first house on the right-hand side is a real masterpiece of local architecture. This house belongs to the Xheli family and is known in the neighbourhood for its distinctive and impressive limestone arches. Please refer to the ‘Architecture Itinerary’ on page 31 for more information on this house.

About 100 meters past Xheli House, you will see a small alley on the left. This narrow passage leads to a very interesting Orthodox Church called St. Sotir. It is worth visiting St. Sotir, not only for the church itself but also for the beautiful view of Mt. Çajupi that you can enjoy from the church courtyard.

The interior of the church was heavily damaged during communism and the original wall paintings have been destroyed. Framed icons now cover the walls, many of them painted locally and quite recently.

From now on this itinerary will consist of a longer walk off the beaten track, which offers a diverse range of experiences. It
walk uphill along the cobblestone street. Take the first right (a sharp turn) and continue walking uphill past 2 beautiful historical houses Beja (on your left-hand side) and then Kurti.

At the Kurti House, take a few minutes to admire the carved door and the inscription in Arabic with different scenes of animals and local flowers. Shortly after the Kurti House, you will reach the main square of Crakë Quarter. Continue slightly to the left on a narrow street until you reach a fork in the road. The left fork heads up to Manalat Quarter; the right goes down toward the castle. Take the road to the right. This is also the perfect moment to see the castle from a unique angle and appreciate its size and architectural form.

For more info on the castle and its prison please go to page 46.
The city of Gjirokastra fell under Ali Pasha of Tepelena in 1811. During his time as ruler of Gjirokastra, Ali Pasha oversaw many new construction works, most notably the expansion of the castle and the building of a twelve-kilometre aqueduct to bring drinking water from Mt. Sopot to the cistern in the castle. At this point behind the castle, you can still see the foundations of the aqueduct’s once-mighty arches.

**Ruins of Ali Pasha’s aqueduct**

For more information on the Aqueduct, please see page 63.

At the point where Argjiro Street meets the main road, turn right. From this point, you can visit the castle by continuing straight down along the main road, until you reach the fork that goes up to the main entrance. Or, 50 meters down the road, you can take a sharp left turn to go down Astrit Karagjozi Street to the Qendra Kulturore (Cultural Centre) Musine Kokalari and have a nice coffee or a delicious local meal at the guesthouse Flora. **Flora’s guesthouse** is located on the right-hand side coming from Astrit Karagjozi Street.

The owner Ms Flora is a very welcoming elderly lady, who skilfully cooks local recipes, spiced up with a taste for storytelling. She also has a vast private collection of antiquities she loves to show to passers-by. Her phone number is **+355 (0) 697653258** but she is mainly at home. However she does not speak English. Continue down the road until you see on your right a wonderful recently-restored monument house called Babameto, which is currently a hostel and a cultural centre.

Not far from this area, there is the Old Bazaar Hotel. This is the place where the famous English traveller and artist Edward Lear painted Gjirokastra’s fortress and the aqueduct in 1848. (see the illustration on page 2) Currently the house belongs to the Xheneti family, which recently transformed it into the Old Bazaar Hotel.

Go back to Astrit Karagjozi Street and proceed down toward the bazaar, passing by the bazaar Mosque (on your right-hand side). There is no entrance fee for the mosque.

* Please refer to the ‘Architecture itinerary’ on page 27 for more information in this house.
Walking through the Neck of the Bazaar, turn onto the road that leads up toward the castle. Continue uphill until you reach the back part of the fortress, then take the road Bule Naipi. Continue on this road all the way up to the top. The road is asphalted, so many cars drive up and down. Be careful since local drivers can be quite “territorial.”

From here, you can admire a beautiful view of the castle seen from a different perspective as well as the view of the ruins of the aqueduct.

Ali Pasha Bridge Itinerary

Location: Historic centre and Dunavit
Duration: 3 hrs
Difficulty: High
Route: Bazaar – Dunavit - Aqueduct-Ali Pasha bridge
The city of Gjirokastra fell under Ali Pasha of Tepelena in 1811. During his time as ruler of Gjirokastër, Ali Pasha oversaw many new construction works, most notably the expansion of the castle and the building of a twelve-kilometre aqueduct to bring drinking water from Mt. Sopot to the cistern in the castle. At the time, this grand aqueduct was one of the greatest engineering achievements to have been carried out in the region. Sadly, only some small parts of the aqueduct remain today. What was left of the aqueduct was torn down in 1930’s during the reign of King Zog, and the stones were used to build the new prison in the castle.

Ali Pasha Bridge Itinerary
1. Neck of the Bazaar
2. Castle entrance
3. Aqueduct ruins
4. Panoramic view
5. Xhevaire House / Refreshment
6. Çani House Wall
7. Bridge of Ali Pasha
8. Mosque of Dunavat
9. Halveti Tekke
10. Tourist Info Center

Ruins of the aqueduct - historical picture
In order to get familiar with the stunning architecture of the Dunavat quarter, take Sado Meleqi Road (on your right, 100m after you have turned onto Bule Naipi Road). Sado Meleqi is not asphalted, so the surface is quite uneven. It used to be the only road leading to Dunavat quarter. In fact, the new road was constructed only in the 1970s.

At the end of Sado Meleqi you will again cross Bule Naipi Road. As you turn right and go up about another 70m, you will see a street on your left. This street leads you to a local family that welcomes visitors any time of the year. Just knock at the 2nd door on the right side. Here, the lovely landlady Ms Xhevaire Xhiku makes stone-ground coffee like no other in Gjirokastra. She is very often at home but you can contact her at the following number, however she does not speak English.

Here you can enjoy a break whilst tasting a delicious local coffee and some exquisite homemade sweets in the shadow of her pergola, surrounded by colourful flowers.

After the refreshing coffee break, go back to the main street (Bule Naipi) and keep going up for another 15 minutes until you reach a tiny irregular cross street (Hito Lekdushi Street). The view of Mali i Gjërë (the wide mountain) from here is really breathtaking! Keep going further up until you reach the end of the road. There you will see a sign pointing in the direction of Ali Pasha’s bridge (on the left path). Again the path is uneven, so take care. At the end of the path, there is an impressive wall belonging to Çani House.

Be prepared to go back to the 19th century and enjoy the landscape enriched by the elegant and majestic bridge down the ravine on the right. Unfortunately there is a lot of trash, too, evidence that historical waste removal practices do not fit with the modern production of disposable plastic goods.
After the visit to the bridge of Ali Pasha, walk all the way back to the road Bule Naipi until you see a reconstructed stone bridge. This stone bridge was built by Ali Pasha at the beginning of the 19th century, following the path of the aqueduct. Although it’s not a particularly necessary bridge, in terms of connecting Gjirokastra with Dropull, it may have served both functions. It has one graceful central arch with windows on both sides to allow for water flow during floods. To get closer to the bridge just follow the path.

Mosque of Dunavat Halveti Tekke

Lord Byron

One of the most influential and celebrated of the Romantic poets, Lord Byron travelled to Albania during his Mediterranean and Eastern tour in 1809-1811. During this period he spent time at the court of Ali Pasha of Ioannina who invited him to his hometown, Tepelena (Albania). Byron described the Land of the Eagles in his famous Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage.

The Land of the Eagles

Morn dawns; and with it stern Albania’s hills, Dark Sulki’s rocks, and Pindus’ inland peak, Rob’d half in mist, bedew’d with snowy rills, Array’d in many a dun and purple streak,

Disclose the dwelling of the mountaineer:
Here roams the wolf, the eagle whets his beak,
Birds, beasts of prey, and wilder men appear,
And gathering storms around convulse the closing year.

During his journey to Tepelena, Byron travelled through the Drinos valley visiting Gjirokastra and Libohova which was at that time not much smaller than Ioannina. In 1809, Lord Byron visited Gjirokastra and the Drino Valley, which he evocatively and accurately described in his poetry.

Epirus’ bounds recede, and mountains fail;
Tired of up-gazing still, the wearied eye
Reposes gladly on as smooth a vale
As ever Spring yclad in grassy dye:
Where some bold river breaks the long expanse,
And woods along the banks are waving high,
Whose shadows in the glassy waters dance,
Or with the moonbeam sleep in Midnight’s solemn trance.

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