Extract from Tirana Cityspots by Tim Clancy

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The Best of Tirana

**Top 10 Attractions / Tirana’s Highlights**

**Sheshi Skënderbej (Skanderbeg Square)**

Skanderbeg Square is the literal heart of the city. From here roads lead in all directions – connecting the rest of Albania to its capital. ..

**Sali Shijaku Ethno House**

This old, typical Ottoman house is believed to have been built in the 15th century. It is the private home of Sali Shijaku, one of Albania’s most famous artists ..

**Mount Dajti (Dajti Mountain)**

The pleasant ride on the cable car leads to Tirana's largest recreation centre with walking trails, restaurants, horseback riding, and biking. ..

**Petrela Castle**

One of Albania's best-preserved castles, Petrela Castle sits picturesquely on a steep slope overlooking a river, 15 km south east of Tirana, along the road to Elbasan.

**Blloku (The Block)**

This area, prior to the fall of communism, was reserved solely for government officials. Today, it has become the number one spot for Tirana's best cafés, shops, and restaurants. ..
Parku Rinia (Youth Park)

The Youth Park is attractive for more reasons than one. As a park, its just a large green area in the middle of city. But the contrast of the rural vendors selling sunflower seeds and chestnuts to the jet set sipping coffee in front of the fountains is just something that is very Tirana -- and should not be missed.

Muzeu Historik Kombëtar (National History Museum)

Located in the heart of Tirana, this museum best represents the cultural and natural heritage of Albania and the Albanians.

Pazari i Ri (Central Market)

Market places are often a window to the soul of any place. Tirana's central market is a fascinating experience of colours, smells, and sensations.

Galleria e Arteve (National Art Gallery)

The National Art Gallery has a fund of over 4,000 works of art by Albanian and foreign authors, spanning seven centuries of Albanian cultural heritage.

Tirana Café Trio

The Qerimi family band is a father and his two sons combining classical violin with folk, jazz, new age, blues and traditional Albanian ballads to create the countries most unique and exciting sounds.

Half-day

After a stroll through the impressive Skanderbeg Square, head to the Blloku. On the way, stop at the youth park for a coffee and snack before venturing into the once forbidden quarters of Enver Hoxha.
**1 day**

Be sure to check out the National Museum in Skanderbeg Square. The morning hours offer a better chance of having electricity. The Arts Gallery, just a few minute walk from the museum, hosts a fascinating collection of both antique and contemporary art. Just across the street from there is the Youth Park and the perfect place for a coffee break or even lunch.

After a break, head directly across the street and into the Block. There are great streets to roam, window shop, lunch spots and café's An interesting alternative is the ethno museum of Sali Shijaku, one of Albania’s most famous artists. Aside from meeting the man himself and enjoying his great artwork, there is a comfortable café/restaurant in the garden of his old Ottoman home.

**2–3 days**

One can surely fit in both the ethno museum of Sali Shijaku and the Grand Park. After a good first day in Tirana following the 1-day itinerary suggestions above, use the other days to explore a bit out of the city centre. Dajti Mountain has an excellent cable car **Dajti Express** that takes one high above the city. Upon return the option of another 20 minute ride to Petrela Castle is a great way to end the day with a pleasant walk to the hilltop fortification and a drink or traditional meal within the stone walls. Day three is just an hour from Tirana in the historical town of Kruje. This is an excellent place for shopping for handicrafts in the local bazaar.

**Longer**

For longer stay be sure not to miss Berat, which is a two hour drive from Tirana. It is best to spend the night in this potential Unesco Heritage Site town. Aside from the fascinating architecture and great views from the Castle settlement above the town there is white water rafting available on the Osumi River in the Krapari Canyon. This can be organized by the **Hotel Castle Park** [a] Rr. Drobonik, Berat-Permet [t] (032) 35 385, (068) 256 4999 [w] [www.bashkiaberat.net](http://www.bashkiaberat.net) or Outdoor Albania.
Something for nothing

The Grand Park circles around a lovely artificial lake in the southern end of Tirana’s main strip. This is an ideal place for a calming walk, people watching or just sitting on a park bench and reading a book. The locals flock there in large numbers to relax and exercise.

Market places are very often windows to the soul of any city. The smells, colours, and sounds of the Pazari i Ri (Central market) [t] (04) 225 287 [h] 08.00-14.00 Mon-Sun just off the Sheshi Avni Rustemi, are all free. The tastes, however, will probably cost you a bit. Be sure to explore thoroughly, as there are hidden sections of the market around the corner. Vendors will always allow you to try the olives, honey, fresh cheese, and home-dried meats and the raki stalls will gladly let you sample the home made brandies.

Many enjoy long walks through side streets and residential areas to gain more insight to a new city. Aside from the obvious Skanderbeg Square, the heart of Tirana is divided into four main neighbourhoods. Tirana's oldest areas, Mujos and Pazari, are both on the east side of the main boulevard and divided by the Lana River. Many off-the-beaten track historic buildings, quaint neighbourhoods, and small marketplaces can be discovered here. On the west side of the Deshmoret e Kombit are two of Tirana's nicest quarters. The Shukurit quarters on the north side of the Lana River and just behind the Youth Park are great walking areas with tree lined boulevards. Unlike the Dëshmorët e Kombit and Shukurit's southern neighbour the "Block", where many of the chic cafés and tourist attractions are located, Shukurit is a taste of authentic Tirana. Prices here will also be slightly lower than the centre and the Block. The most popular area for tourists to visit is the area better known as the Block. Once closed off for ordinary citizens, this elite quarter is the most 'western' and wealthy area of Tirana. Strolling the various streets one will easily notice that the Block was once home to the politically privileged of Hoxha's regime.

When it rains

There are not many large indoor venues in Tirana. Café's are a dime a dozen and always a good way to pass the time. The 'Block' neighbourhood and former residential area of Hoxha's communist elite is home to the cities best café's, bars and restaurants. Pick one or hop around and check out the rainy day Tirana social scene. The **National History Museum** is perhaps the best option when the weather gets bad though. There are enough exhibitions to keep one interested for several hours with a guide (if, of course, there is electricity). Ask for Armada as a guide. She is a young historian from Tirana and an enthusiastic and
The Galleria e Arteve (National Art Gallery) ([a] Blv. Dëshmorët e Kombit, [t] (04) 233 975[h] 09.00-13.00,17.00-20.00 Tue-Sun, closed Mon [!] admission charge, closed Sun) is always a good choice for soaking in traditional Albanian art and seeing the latest of contemporary artistic movements in Tirana. The National Art Gallery is by far the most impressive collection and exhibition of artwork in all of Albania. Just past the National Art Gallery across the Lina River is the 'Pyramid' International Cultural Centre [a] Blvd. Dëshmorët e 4 Shkurtit. This venue frequently hosts events, art exhibitions, concerts, and fairs. It's a popular place for young people to gather as well. Further down Dëshmorët e Kombit boulevard is the Muzeu Arkeologik (Archaeological Museum) in Mother Theresa Square. Although the displays seem somewhat amateur, the content of some of the exhibitions is rather interesting [a] Sheshi Nene Tereza [t] (04) 228 389 [h] 10.30-14.30 Mon-Fri, closed Sat&Sun [!] admission charge.

If the rainy weather persists and you've had enough of city centre museum scene, the cable car ride up Dajti Mountain is not a bad alternative. The modern cable cars are a short ride to the mountain station where there are several excellent restaurants with magnificent views of the city and the surrounding area. The ride up, a slow and lazy lunch, and the ride back will fill the good part of a half the day.