

# Albanija

## Neodkrit biser na balkanskem polotoku

BESEDILO IN FOTOGRAFIJE: NINA KOGEJ



ALBANIJA JE BILA KAR 40 LET POD KOMUNISTIČNO TAKTIRKO ZLOGLASNEGA DIKTATORSKEGA VODITELJA ENVERJA HOXHE, KI GA LJUDJE OPIŠEJO Z »VZEL NAM JE VSE, DAL NIČESAR!«.

S prihodom komunizma, po letu 1945, se je namreč življenje za mnoge obrnilo povsem na glavo. V tem času je veliko Albancev zapustilo svojo domovino in odšlo na tuje v upanju, da tam najdejo boljše, lepše in svobodnejše življenje. Tisti, ki so ostali, so stisnili zobe in se podredili novemu režimu. Šele v zadnjem desetletju 20. stoletja, po padcu komunističnega režima, je za prebivalce Albanije zavel nov veter in v deželi so se začele dogajati spremembe.

Potovanje po Albaniji ni bila prva izbira, a morda naju je z možem nekoliko bolj pritegnila prav najina nevednost o tej skrivnostni balkanski državi. Vse, kar sva o njej vedela, sta bila kanček zgodovine in podatek, da je to dežela bunkerjev in mercedesov. A kako zelo sva se motila! Albanija naju je sprejela z odprtimi rokami, gostoljubnost njihovih prebivalcev ne pozna meja. Z njimi sva se srečevala tako v mestih kot na odročnem podeželju, do koder vodijo večinoma slabe makadamske ceste. Brez terenskega vozila bi bil marsikateri najin cilj nemogoč in prikrajšana bi bila za najlepšo podobo Albanije. Vasi, kakor pozabljene od boga, sem in tja popestrijo eno najlepših pokrajin, ki jo človek lahko odkrije. Na eni strani se bohoti živo zeleno rastje, na drugi pa se suhi travnati pašniki svetijo v soncu kot zlato. Globlje kot gremo, bolj obljudena in divja postaja okolica, ki ji prija tudi dejstvo, da jo na srečo še ni odkril masovni turizem. Rezervirana je za tiste popotnike, ki se sami poimenujejo avanturisti.

Velikokrat se ritem osamljene pokrajine prekine z majhnimi vasicami, včasih celo z večjimi naselji in mesti. Takšni kraji še dandanes pričajo o vladajočem komunističnem režimu, saj so bili na odročnih področjih zgrajeni načrtno. Bežen pogled nakazuje, da se od takrat ni veliko spremenilo. V ozračju je še vedno mogoče čutiti nekakšno težko sivino, ki je ostala tu še iz komunističnih časov. Ljudje se iz dneva v dan bojujejo za preživetje in revščina je, žal, še vedno del vsakdana. A kljub težkemu življenju je v gorskih vasicah opaziti nov vetrič. Redko posel-





Jena strma hribovita področja so do zadnjega kotička skrbno obdelana in urejena. Ljudje res nimajo veliko, a so že od nekdaj navajeni trdo delati in biti skromni. Njihovo glavno prevozno sredstvo je pri premnogih hišah še vedno zgolj osel, ki ga uporabljajo tako za težje tovore kot za lasten prevoz.

Veliko cest je v Albaniji dobro urejenih, a kljub temu je država še vedno prepletena tudi s takimi, ki so luknjaste in neoznačene. Le-te nas vodijo od obale Jadranskega morja čez visoke prelaze in do globokih kanjonov, kjer nam delajo družbo mogočne reke, zaradi katerih država proizvede kar 94% električne energije za svoje potrebe. Med vožnjo uzreva veliko slavnih bunkerjev, ki jih je v času svoje vladavine ukazal zgraditi Hoxha. Nekoč jih je bilo v Albaniji preko 700.000, eden na vsake štiri prebivalce. Sedaj jih je večina že uničenih, izkopanih ali pa preurejenih v nenavadna prenočišča, kavarnice, restavracije, delavnice in skladišča.

Med potjo opaziva sledi tudi ostalih zgodovinskih obdobij, ki so zaznamovala državo. S sprehodom po mestnih ulicah je morda najlažje opaziti prisotnost otomanskega cesarstva, ki si je albansko področje podrelo kar štiri stoletja. Otomanski vpliv se opazi tako po načinu gradnje hiš, kjer zlasti izstopa mesto tisočerih oken – Berat, kot tudi po veroizpovedi prebivalcev. V času komunističnega obdobja je bila religija v državi prepovedana. Kljub temu je ponovno mogoče zaznati močno muslimansko skupnost.



Kar 70% vsega prebivalstva je namreč muslimanov. Vseeno na najini poti skozi Albanijo le redko zaslediva pokrite ženske in mošeje z minareti. In navsezadnje prav v okolici mesta Berat najdemo eno najbolj rodovitnih vinskih področij, ki ima celo svojo avtohtono vrsto grozdja.

Dobro vino pa v Albaniji ni novost. To področje so namreč dolgo naseljevali tudi stari Grki in Rimljani, ki so še kako dobro poznali učinke rujne kapljice. Danes, več kot 2.500 let kasneje, najdemo na tem področju številne grške in rimske ruševine. Turistično najbolj oblegane so tiste tik ob južni meji z Grčijo, v mestu Butrint. Rimski pesnik Virgil je zapisal, da je mesto ustanovil Helenus, sin kralja Priama Trojanskega. Mesto pa se omenja tudi v povezavi s cesarjem Avgustom, ki ga je v času njegovega vladanja preuredil v kolonijo za vojaške veterane.

Od starodavnega utripa do modernega mesta naju loči slabih pet ur vožnje. Kaotične in prometne ulice nama brez sramu pokažejo, da se nahajava v Tirani, albanski prestolnici. S prihodom na glavni mestni trg, ki nosi ime po največjem albanskemu heroju Skenderbergu, mesto zasije v vsej svoji veličini. Skenderberg je v ponos albanskemu narodu vse od zmage nad sultanom Muratom II. Z njo je namreč



končal vladavino otomanskega imperija. V spomin nanj stoji na trgu 11 metrov visok kip, ki ga krasi albanska zastava. Na trgu najdeva še mestno opero in narodni zgodovinski muzej, ki je najbolj prepoznaven po svojem pročelju. To prikazuje podobe albanskega naroda skozi zgodovino.

Tirana postaja moderna prestolnica, ki ji vladajo tuje korporacije. Opaziva ljudi v poslovnih oblikah, trgovine s prestižnimi blagovnimi znamkami in avtomobili visokega razreda. Tirana je mesto, kjer tistega tipičnega balkanskega obnašanja »lako čemo« skorajda ni več zaznati. Vsi tisti, ki bi jo radi spoznali v vsej njeni pristinosti in neokrnjenosti, pohitite, saj se država razvija in spreminja z bliskovito hitrostjo.

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## ALBANIA

### An undiscovered jewel of the Balkans

TEXT AND PHOTOGRAPHS: NINA KOGEJ

FOR 40 YEARS ALBANIA WAS RULED BY THE NOTORIOUS COMMUNIST DICTATOR ENVER HOXHA, OF WHOM PEOPLE SAY "HE TOOK EVERYTHING FROM US AND GAVE US NOTHING!"

With the advent of Communism, after 1945, life was turned on its head for many people. Large numbers of Albanians left their homeland in this period in the hope of finding a better and freer life abroad. Those who remained gritted their teeth and knuckled under to the new regime. It was not until the last decade of the twentieth century, after the fall of the Communist regime, that a new wind began to blow for the inhabitants of Albania and changes began to take place in the country.

Travelling through Albania was not our first choice, but perhaps my husband and I were swayed by the very fact that we knew so little about this mysterious Balkan state. All we knew, in fact, was a smattering of history and the cliché about Albania being the land of bunkers and Mercedes-Benz. How very wrong we were! Albania welcomed us with open arms. The hospitality of its people knows no limits. We encountered them both in the cities and in remote parts of the countryside, which are mainly reached by poorly maintained macadam roads. Without a four-wheel-drive vehicle many of our destinations would have been impossible and we would have missed seeing Albania at its most beautiful. Godforsaken villages are scattered across one of the most beautiful landscapes you could ever hope to see. On one side there is an abundance of vivid green vegetation, while on the other the dry grassy meadows gleam in the sun like gold. The deeper we go into the countryside, the more sparsely populated and wild our surroundings become – thanks also to the fact that large-scale tourism has fortunately yet to discover this country. It is reserved for those travellers who think of themselves as adventurers.

The rhythm of the secluded landscape is frequently interrupted by little villages, and sometimes even by larger settlements and towns. Even today these places bear witness to the former Communist regime, since they were deliberately constructed in remote areas. A fleeting glance is enough to show that not much has changed since that time. A kind of heavy greyness left over from the Communist period can still be sensed in



the atmosphere. People struggle to make a living from day to day and poverty is, unfortunately, still part of their everyday existence. Yet despite the hard life here, one can feel a new breeze beginning to blow in the little mountain villages. The sparsely inhabited steep, hilly areas are carefully cultivated and tended down to the last patch of land. It is true that people do not have much, but they have long been used to hard work and a frugal existence. The principal means of transport of many families is still the donkey, which is used both to carry heavy loads and for personal transport.

There are many well-maintained roads in Albania but the country is also still criss-crossed by unmarked roads full of holes. Roads like this lead us from the Adriatic coast across high mountain passes and into deep gorges, where we follow the course of the great rivers thanks to which the country produces as much as 94% of the electricity it needs. As we drive along we spot many of the famous bunkers built on Hoxha's orders during his rule. At one time there were more than 700,000 of them in Albania, one for every four inhabitants. Today the majority of them have already been destroyed, dug up or converted into curious forms of accommodation, cafés, restaurants, workshops and storehouses.

During our journey we also notice traces of other periods of history that have left their mark on this country. As you stroll through the streets of the towns it is perhaps easiest to observe the presence of the Ottoman Empire, which held Albania in its sway for four centuries. The Ottoman influence is apparent both in the style of the houses – with Berat, the "city of a thousand windows" a particularly notable example – and in the faith of the inhabitants. During the Communist period religion was banned in the country. Despite this, the presence of a strong Muslim community can once again be felt. Up to 70 per cent of the population is Muslim. Even so, during our journey through Albania we only rarely spotted veil-wearing women and mosques with minarets. Not only that, but in the countryside around Berat we come across one of the most fertile wine-producing regions, which even has its own autochthonous grape variety.

Good wine is nothing new in Albania. For a long time, in fact, this area was inhabited by the ancient Greeks and the Romans, who were very familiar with the heady effects of the fruits



of the vine. Today, more than 2,500 years later, numerous Greek and Roman ruins can be found in the area. The archaeological site that attracts the most tourists is the ancient town of Buthrotum (Butrint), close to the southern border with Greece. The Roman poet Virgil wrote that the town was founded by Helenus, the son of King Priam of Troy. The town is also mentioned in connection with the Emperor Augustus, during whose reign it was converted into a colony for military veterans.

A drive of just under five hours separates this atmosphere of antiquity from a modern city. The chaotic streets filled with traffic proudly proclaim that we are in Tirana, the capital of Albania. When we arrive in the city's main square, named after Albania's greatest national hero Skanderbeg, we are able to take in the city in all its splendour. Skanderbeg has been the proud toast of the Albanian nation ever since his victory over the Ottoman sultan Murad II. This victory marked the end of Ottoman rule. The Skanderbeg Monument that stands in the square is an eleven-metre-high equestrian statue adorned by the Albanian flag. Notable buildings on the square include Tirana Opera House and the National History Museum – recognisable by its striking façade adorned with a mosaic showing images of the Albanian nation through history.

Tirana is becoming a modern capital city dominated by foreign corporations. We notice people in business suits, shops selling prestigious brands, and expensive cars. Tirana is a city where the typical Balkan mentality of *lako çemo* (take it easy) has practically vanished. Anyone who wishes to discover the genuine, unspoilt Albania needs to hurry, because the country is developing and changing at lightning speed.

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