



LUSHNJA EXPLORE



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Lushnja

A Journey Into the Beauty of Nature and Culture

The city of Lushnja is located about 80 kilometers south-east of the capital, Tirana, easily accessible by roads and public transportation.

The oldest traces of civilization were discovered in the hills near the city dating back to the Eneolithic period, 2900-2100 BC.

Lushnja enjoys a pleasantly warm climate, characterized by an average annual temperature of around 16°C. This region experiences summers that are both hot and dry, providing a perfect backdrop for summer activities, while the winters are typically mild and humid, offering a gentle contrast to the summer heat.

The city boasts an impressive array of historical, cultural, ethnographic, architectural, and natural treasures, forming a solid foundation for the growth and development of its tourism sector.



Lushnja from a Historical Perspective

Research on the Ancient City of Lushnja

Oral traditions still circulating among the oldest inhabitants indicate that “the city was initially settled on the hills of Virova, near Golemi, and later, it is said that from there the residents moved near the stream (the stream that now runs through the centre and is known as the Lushnja Stream).” Another widespread legend mentions “Salusha’s Inn” as the source of the city’s name, Lushnja. It is believed that Salusha might have been either the widow or the slave of a Pasha, or as some say, his daughter. While the historical existence of her famous inn somewhere near the Institute is supported by photos and the old map of the city, linguistic rules do not permit a transformation of the name Salusha to Lushnja. Naturally, the debate remains open. Besides this, there is another legend that seems more acceptable from a historical and linguistic perspective. According to it, “the city was initially settled on the hill of Vaini near the Great Red Church and from there expanded westward.”

+ What do the archaeological findings on the hill of Vaini reveal?

The oldest object discovered in the city’s territory dates back to the Eneolithic period. However, this is not the only one; other archaeological objects have been found approximately in the same place and belong to a later period. In 1989, in the “Kadri Qystri” neighborhood, during the opening of an irrigation canal, traces from the Illyrian urban period were discovered. Following checks by archaeologists, besides ceramic vessels, an ancient Illyrian cemetery was identified. The construction technique of the graves was simple, with no special constructions. Burial was done by placing the body in the ground. From the surveys conducted, it was found that the archaeological material inventory was rich. Many fragments of vessels, such as the bottoms of skyphos, cups, amphorae, etc., were collected. Intact objects, two lekythoses, were also found here.

Another finding is a vessel of the Gutus type (a feeder for children) which is almost completely preserved. Additionally, a terracotta of a man in an archaic style was discovered there. According to archaeologist P. Çuko, it is believed that the graves belong to the 4th-3rd centuries BC, while the archaeological material indicates the use of ceramics imported from Apollonia. He concluded that the cemetery belonged to an “open Illyrian settlement.”

+ Further evidence

Not far from here, in the place called “Kalifas Hill” in 1988, other ancient graves were discovered. The graves were of a simple and ordinary type, with floors paved with solene-type tiles (laid flat), covered with roof-shaped tiles. The study showed that these graves belong to the Late Antiquity period. Meanwhile, in 2003, the Institute of Archaeology in Tirana organized a survey on the hill with the toponym “Vain” in Lushnja. The discovery of a mosaic tassel sparked this investigation. During the research, traces of an early basilica and many fragments of ceramic vessels were found. Specialists believe that this basilica was built between the 4th and 6th centuries AD. In Tab I fig 5, 6, the objects belonging to this period are illustrated, found near the Basilica. The facts indicate that Lushnja had an early basilica around 1500 years ago and a small community that served it, thus marking a “place of worship.” The exact time of its destruction is uncertain.



In the Ottoman register of 1431, Lushnja is recorded, noting that it had 15 houses and about 100 inhabitants at that time. Nevertheless, Lushnja as a settlement is thought to date back to the 12th-13th centuries. Some ceramic pieces with bitumen belong to this period. Lushnja is mentioned again with the same name in another Ottoman register dated 1583. Historical sources indicate that in 1679, Lushnja had 17 houses and approximately 150 inhabitants. At the beginning of 1701, Lushnja had doubled its population but still retained the character of a village. Between 1728-1738, it is believed that the Saint Friday Church was built. During this period, Lushnja is mentioned as a Çiflig (estate).

A few years later (1741), the Sanjak of Vlora included all southern Albanians from the Shkumbin to Delvinë. The Myzeqe subdistrict was dependent on this sanjak. The lands of Lushnja and its surroundings were called the Nahija of Myzeqe, with Karbunarë village becoming its center. In 1744, Lushnja appeared as a village with 57 houses and about 500 inhabitants, while Karbunara had 47 houses.



During this period, Lushnja took on the appearance of a small town, with a church and two cobblestone streets. Around 1770, with the initiative and support of Kurt Pasha's wife, Hanko Pasha, the first mosque in Lushnja was built, which existed until 1967. Throughout the 18th century, Lushnja gradually expanded and took on the appearance of an important residential and commercial center. In 1830, Lushnja was mentioned for the first time in European encyclopedic dictionaries.

It is noted that "Lusnia" had 200 houses and was inhabited by both Muslims and Christians. In just one century, the population tripled to approximately 1800 inhabitants.

The "town" had cobblestone streets, a church, a mosque, a tekke, and two wells for the residents' needs. There were four small "public" cemeteries located on the hillsides. In 1848, the famous poet and painter Edward Lear visited Lushnja and stayed for a few hours before heading to Berat. He described Lushnja (Lusnia) as a village equipped with inns for travelers. In 1860, the first school was opened in Lushnja, where, in addition to teaching Greek, Albanian was secretly taught. This school was located near the Saint Friday Church. The first teachers were Ndin and Gori Ziu, father and son, from Gorreja. Between 1860-1870, a Mejtepe school (Ottoman religious primary school) was opened in Lushnja, while another Mejtepe school was opened in Karbunara a few years earlier than that of Lushnja. After 1870, Lushnja began to stand out as a center and take on the appearance of a city. During this period, it is believed that the "Baba Skënder" tekke was built. In 1894-1896, the center of the Myzeqe subdistrict (subprefecture) moved from Karbunara to Lushnja.

Natural tourism

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Chap. 1

Lake of Gjyshaj



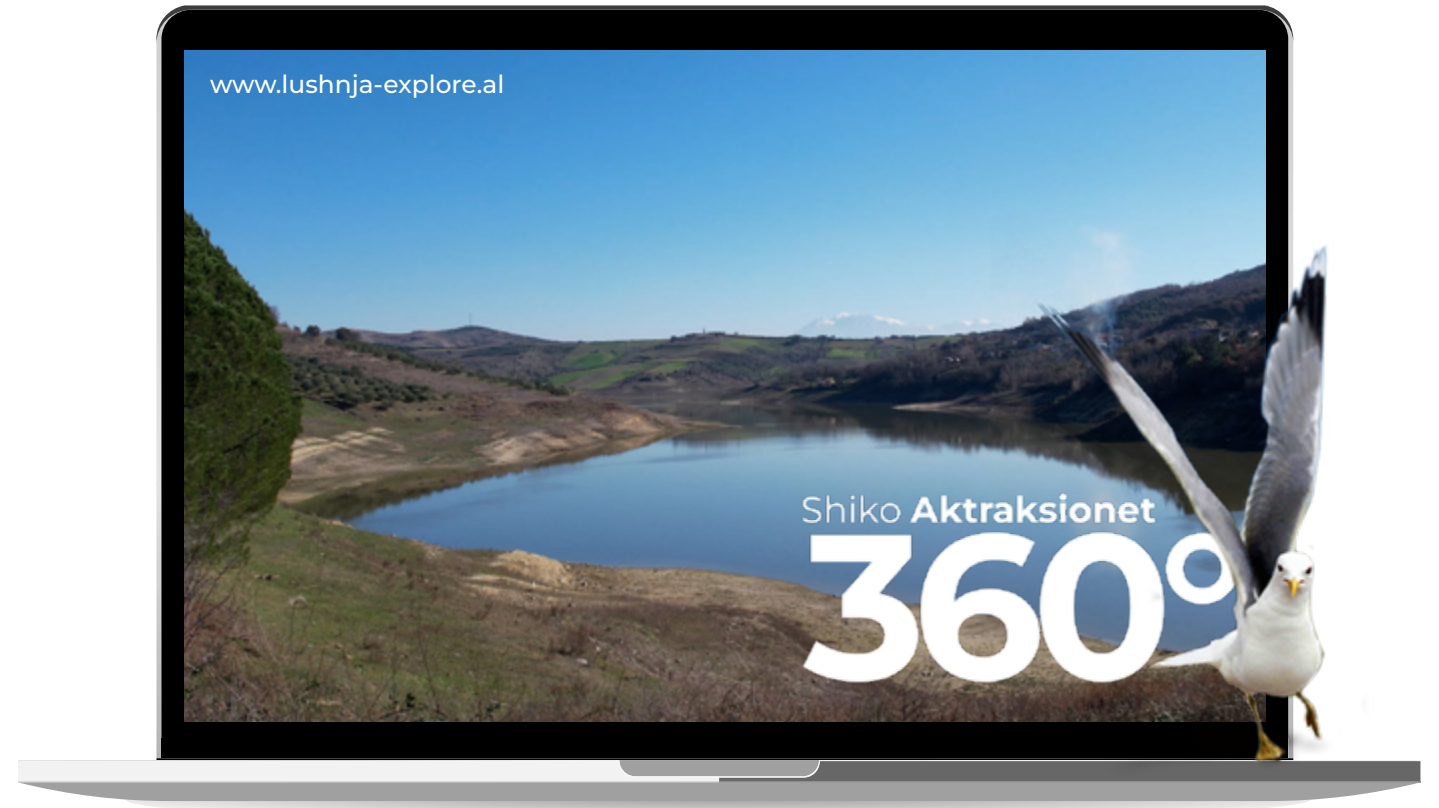
The lake of Gjyshaj is located 15 km from the city of Lushnje, in the Administrative Unit of Ballagat. Due to its picturesque landscape, lying in the hills of Darsia, this area is often compared to the “Tuscany of Italy”.



Lake of Kasharaj

The lake of Kasharaj, located only 2 km from the city of Lushnje, in the Administrative Unit of Karbunarë, has a breathtaking landscape, making it an area visited by many tourists.

A cultural and historical monument, the bridge of Kasharaj, constructed in the 12th to 13th centuries is also located there and it is still being used nowadays. Built near the lake of Kasharaj, it used to serve as an old road to connect the territory of Myzeqe with Elbasan.



Lake in the village of Kupas

The lake of Kupas is located 15 km from the city of Lushnje, in the Administrative Unit of Hysgokaj, while the village of Kupas lies in the hills of Lushnja and it is famous for its fruit trees. The lake is used for fishing and having picnics while the geographical position makes it a really attractive tourist spot.



Cultural Tourism

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Chap. 2

Congress of Lushnjë

The house where the National Assembly, widely known as the “Congress of Lushnjë,” was held.

This house was built in the first half of the 19th century. It is said to have been constructed in 1851 and was then owned by the Fuga family. This house is of the Berat type with two floors, and on the roof, there is a small room called the “Konaku i Hankove.” On the day this house was opened to hold the National Assembly, the owner, Shaqir Fuga, had passed away, but his wife and 17-year-old son, Kasem (Kaso) Fuga, agreed without hesitation that the meeting to be held in their house.

During World War II, the house was heavily damaged. An additional room on the eastern side is no longer preserved.

It was opened as a museum house on January 21, 1960, and on that occasion, a television chronicle was made by Albanian Radio-Television.



Historical Museum of Lushnjë



The idea of establishing the Historical Museum dates back to 1982.

“In documents, it was stated, among other things, that the location for the museum should be near the center and by the roadside.

The museum should have contemporary and unique architecture distinct from other buildings in the city, reflecting the history of the city of Lushnjë from antiquity to the 1980s. It should also have a special space dedicated to the National Anti-Fascist Liberation War.

Additionally, it should have a special corner dedicated to Archaeology, Agrarian Reform, Education and the Fight against Illiteracy, Health, Ethnography, etc. The museum should have a high scientific level as it was being constructed after the National Museum in Tirana and several other museums in the country.”

The museum was officially inaugurated on November 21, 1990.



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Saint Mary's Church (Bishqethëm, Lushnjë)

Saint Mary's Church in Bishqethëm is a typical religious building from the 18th century. The paintings were created by Johan, a member of the Çetiri family from Grabova, in 1798. Some of them are well-preserved and constitute an important cultural attraction for visitors.

It is widely frequented by worshippers. The church is located near the Fier-Lushnje highway, on its eastern side, 12 km from Fier and 500m from the Fier-Lushnje highway. It can be reached by small cars and buses.



Saint Nicholas Church (Krutja e Sipërme)

The Church of Saint Koll is thought to have been built in the mid-18th century. It was painted by Nikolla Çetiri from Grabova in 1811 on February 17. The entrances to the church are opened on the western side between two windows, on the northern and southern sides. As usual, the western part of the narthex is wider. In a later phase, in 1924, a sitting room was constructed.

It is widely frequented by worshippers. The church is located near the Lushnje-Fier highway. It can be reached by small cars and buses.





Church of Saint Kolli in Toshkëz

The Church of Saint Kolli in Toshkëz was constructed in the year 1797. In 1813, it was adorned with paintings by the skilled artists Johan and Nikolla Çetiri from Grabova. It represents a typical example of the churches found in the Myzeqe region, comprising Naos and haj-tet that envelop it on three sides.

It is widely frequented by worshippers. The church is located near the Lushnje-Berat highway. It can be reached by small cars and buses.



Monastery of Ardenica

Monastery of Ardenica stands on a hill overlooking the village of Kolonjë in Myzeqe. Above the entrance gate is the date May 1, 1477, which is believed to be the construction date. The church of the monastery is dedicated to the “Nativity of the Virgin Mary” and is celebrated on September 8. Ardenicë means water source, while Theofan Popa in the book “Inscriptions of the Churches of Albania” emphasizes that the word Ardenicë comes from Greek, meaning refreshing. The Virgin Mary, with her prayers, refreshes the faithful from the fire of sins. The monastery is surrounded by high stone walls. The entrance to the monastery is from the east through an arched gate. The courtyard is paved with cobblestones. The verandas are two-story and serve as cells for the monks. The ground floor was used as a granary for produce. Within the monastery grounds, there is a mill for producing olive oil. The monastery has its beginnings in the 10th century with the small church of “St. Trinity,” which has interior dimensions of 5.15×3.06 meters.

The Monastery of Ardenica has several construction phases. It took on the form of a monastery in the 13th-14th centuries, during the time of the Despotate of Epirus. The church of the “Nativity of the Virgin Mary” is believed to have its origins in the 15th-16th centuries. Nektar Tërpo Voskopojari signed an engraving in the Monastery of Ardenica. It contains a short prayer addressed to the Virgin Mary in four languages: Greek, Latin, Aromanian, and Albanian. The engraving has the following text in Albanian written with the Greek alphabet:

“Ανασσα Μητρο Παρθενε / βοηθησον τοις δουλοις σου. Regina mater et Virgo auxilia / re Servis touis. / α ψ λ α (=1731). / ο Ιερομόναχος Νεκτάριος.”

“Virgjin Mamë e perëndis uro prë ne fajtorët”. 1731 Nektar Jeromonaku” The engraving depicts the Virgin Mary holding the infant Christ in her hands. It dates to 1731, and below it is the signature of Hieromonk Nektarios. At that time, Nektar Tërpo Voskopojari was the abbot of the Monastery of Ardenica. It is also believed that at the end of the 17th century, the monastery was destroyed.



Its current form belongs to an 18th-century reconstruction. In this century, the church of the “Nativity of the Virgin Mary,” the small church of “St. Trinity,” and other parts of the monastery were rebuilt.

This is confirmed by an inscription found on a stone plaque on the outer wall of the southern part of the church of “St. Trinity”:

”: + Α Ψ Ο Η (=1778) ΜΑΙΟΥ Α. Ανεκαινήσθησαν εκ βάθ / ρων τά γύρουεν κτήρια επί / αρχ(ιερατείας) (τ) ού Β(ε)λ(ε)γ(ράδων) Ιωάσαφ και η / γ(ου)μ(ένου) Κλ(ή)μ(εντος) και μανασσή / Ιερ(ο)μοναχου τε Μωυση ιεροθ(εου), / Ιακώβ(ου) Θεοδοσίου, Δανιήλ, Θεο / κ' λτου, Διονυσί(ου), Ιωαννικίου μονα / χου δε Κυρίλλου και Αθανασίου δ / ιακόνου ων μνησθητι / Κ(ύρι)ε έν τη βασιλεια σου.

May1, 1778. “The surrounding buildings were rebuilt from the foundations during the time when Joasaph was the Bishop of Berat, and the abbots K.L.M., Manasi, Hieromonk Moses, Hierotheus, Jacob, Theodosius, Daniel, Theoclete, Dionysius, Joannicius, and monk Cyril and deacon Athanasius. May the Lord remember them in His Kingdom.” This inscription informs us that the monastery was rebuilt on May 1, 1778. Also, on the southern wall of the “Holy Trinity” Church, there is another inscription:

Διεκαιώισθησαν εκ βάθρ(ων) τά γύροθεν κτήρια επί αρχιερατεύοντος Β(ε)λ(ε)γ(ράδων) Κ(υρίου) Βασιλείου επισ(τα)τεύοντος οικ(ο)ν(ο)μου. Χρήστο Λέσι, συμβούλον τέ Σπύρο Γίνη, Ιακόβου Βόσδου, Νικολάου Γέργι ιερέος δε Μάρκου. Υπό τών εκ Δίβρα μαστότων Σαλή και Σα.... Πραμτ. Γριγόρι Ζή.

“The surrounding buildings were rebuilt from the foundations during the time of the Bishop of Berat, Lord Vasil, under the supervision of the steward Kristo Leshi, and the advisors Spiro Gjini, Jakob Bosdos, Nikola Gjergji, and Priest Mark, by the craftsmen from Dibra Sali and Sa... Pramt. Grigor Ziu.”

Among the administrators of the monastery is mentioned Luc Bozdo, who repaired the burnt cells and rooms. On a stone plaque written in Byzantine Greek, it is stated that in 1905, Economist Kristo Leshi built the buildings around the monastery.

In 1913, the first Albanian school was opened in the Monastery of Ardenica with the patriotic teacher Economist Kozma Dhima. For a short time in the 1920s, it served as a boarding school. During the time when caretaker Llaz Bozo was in charge, the bell tower was built in 1925. In the absence of water sources, the monastery used cisterns to collect rainwater.


There are four such cisterns, including the well cistern, the southern one adjacent to the large church, the cistern next to the small church, etc. The “Nativity of the Virgin Mary” Monastery in Ardenica covers an area of 2,500 square meters and owned: 1- agricultural land 1,900 dynym, 2- pastures 1,504 dynym, 3- groves 397 dynym, 4- meadows 576 dynym, 5- forests around the monastery 20 dynym, 6- fruit trees 3 dynym, 7- 1,050 olive trees, etc. In February 1754, the veranda of the church was built. This is confirmed by an inscription carved in stone on the first arch of the western veranda column of the church.

For the past three years, the local festival “The Coronation of Gjergj Kastriot - Skanderbeg with Donika Arianiti” has been revived.



LUSHNJA EXPLORE



An aerial photograph of a rural village in a valley. A river flows through the center, with a road crossing it. The landscape is a mix of green fields, brown plowed earth, and dense trees. Several houses with red roofs are visible. The overall scene is a typical rural landscape.

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