



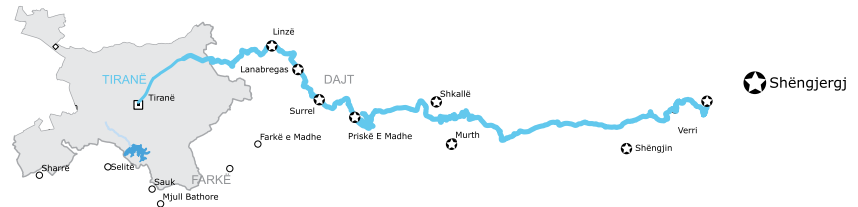
SHEN-
GUERGU

captivates youth

Location

Whether you live in Tirana or are visiting for a few days, an escape away from the urban jungle is really just a step away. Looking for a day trip closer to nature, or an overnight stay at a place where it feels that time has stood still? Head to Shëngjergj and discover what Tirana's furthest destination has to offer.

Begin your trip in Tirana, heading towards Mount Dajti (1,613 m). You will be impressed by its beautiful sceneries and on clear days vast views of an overflowing city. While until a few years ago reaching Shëngjergj was possible only through a road built during the Italian occupation, today the newly built road has cut the distance to 37 km to Shëngjergj. Lasting roughly one hour, the road winds through a couple of small lakes, lush forest, small villages, and what at times seem hair-pinning twists and turns.



Facts about Shëngjergj

Shëngjergj territory lies in the far eastern corner of Tirana, dominated by the panoramic Shëngjergj valley which descends from the Qafë Mollë mountain pass to the Erzeni gorge. It offers a combination of picturesque natural landscape and elements of traditional and cultural heritage.

The first school in Tiranë was established in Shëngjergj in 1913. The area has rich cultural tradition in crafts, folklore, legends, music and dance, traditional food and rites, still retained even today.

The territory contains 12 scattered villages, a few of which are named after Christian Saints, an indication of the early Roman settlements.

The area is rich with natural water sources, and the Shënmëri spring is one of the main sources of drinking water supplying the city of Tirana.

In 2015, it became a subdivision of the municipality of Tirana. The population at the 2011 census was 2,186. It is hard to imagine that despite being close to Tirana, economic activity is limited to only 7 registered businesses, the majority of which are bars and restaurants. Farming is the main source of income, in particular tomato cultivation and fruit trees.



Alternate means of TRANSPORT

Locals from Shëngjergj offer transportation by mini-vans daily, departing from Kinostudio in Tirana at 7:00 am every morning, and returning at 18:00. Contact at [0682632172](tel:0682632172)/ [0683386180](tel:0683386180)



Hospitality

Though most in poor condition, the houses in Shëngjergj stand out for their architecture, traditional building style largely in stone, and their hospitality. All of them have gardens where the villagers cultivate vegetables as well as fruit trees. Beekeeping is also developed, as well as livestock keeping, especially sheep. Once approached, many of the villagers would gladly invite you into their homes for a Turkish coffee and some seasonal fruits. For a more substantial meal, consider going to one of the restaurants.



LOCAL RESTAURANTS

Restorant Selimi
0692127500

Restorant Peshku
0683034441

Restorant Kaon
069339371



The guesthouse

Hospitality is one of the most valuable things a rural home can offer coupled with modest accommodation, a simple home cooked meal and a friendly conversation around the family table.

Today there is one guesthouse in Urë. It is really no more than the second floor of a typical village home. It takes climbing up some wooden stairs and passing through a narrow hallway to get to the guest room. Modest to say the least, yet its details speak of the uniqueness of this rural setting. A mixture of wood and stones, a chimney, a rug, a wooden window overseeing lush serene scenery. Above all the stillness strikes you. An overnight stay in such a setting can shed some light on a totally different way of living.



GUESTHOUSE CONTACT

Dëfrim Ruçi
Contact at **0686436040**



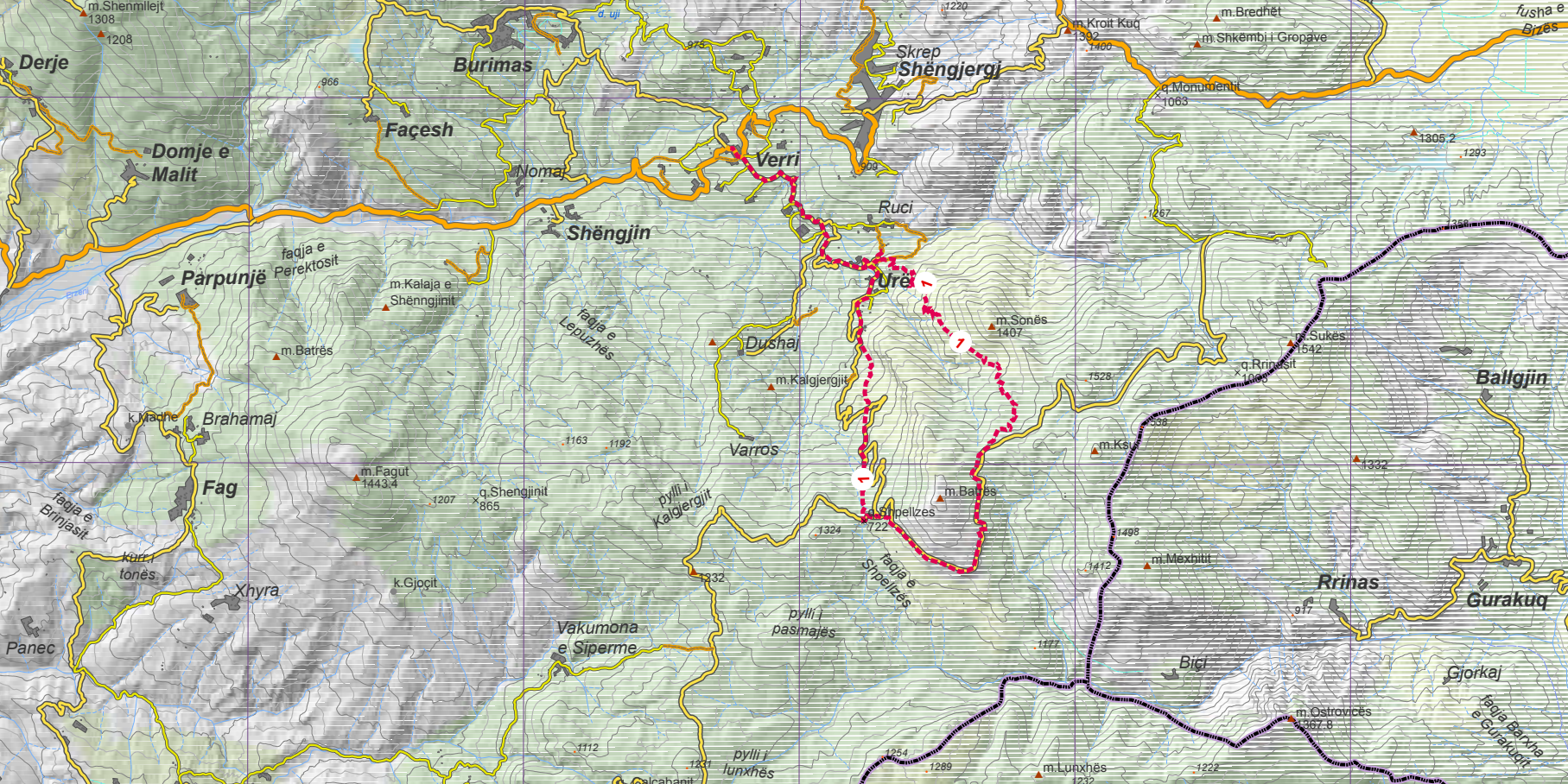
The people

Not different from the rest of Albania, the people of Shëngjergj are very hospitable. Yet, unaccustomed that outsiders would find such a remote rural setting attractive, they are very inquisitive of their intentions and interests. Anyone would invite you in their home for a coffee, a glass of raki (local drink similar to grappa) and a warm chit chat. They will tell you about the area, the people, what surrounds them, stories of their lives, the future of their children, their investments and their failures. Very quickly it strikes you that life here is difficult, but there is also joy, there is hope. The villages are small and scattered, inhabited by few families. They are quick to point out how they differ from their neighbors and how bound they are by their internal social rules and guided by strong principles.



A letter to the next Shëngjergj visitor

Honestly I didn't know that Shëngjergj was part of Tirana till I responded to a call seeking youth involvement in an initiative on Eco-innovation in Tourism. I was expecting seminars and case studies, but a first road trip to Shëngjergj shattered that expectation. After 20-30 minutes into the trip you are stunned by 360° of green views. The surrounding mountains remind me of those beautiful images I encounter on the internet. I am left to wonder, does Tirana have such beauties? I am not from Tirana, but I grew to love this city with all its problems. Probably because I study Architecture... Anyways, my story is not about those problems, I promise. At last we reach the center of the village. Okay, a bit of concrete all around, and hard to figure out where the city center is. We only have to choose one of the many cafés for a short break before planning and gearing for a 6 hour long hike.





For someone like me, who has never climbed a mountain, it looks impossible but I'll do it. Let's do it!

I love photography and I am always in the end of the group because there are a lot to capture.... So many shades of green... There are cherries, plums, red blueberries and other delicious fruits. All organic! These people seem to love the land. We walk, a lot... But I am not tired... I mean, my muscles are, but I do not feel it. It is awesome because the oxygen I am breathing and the views around me beat the tiredness. Oh I forgot, there is something interesting we found on the road, the ruins of an old mosque. Quite interesting since I didn't expect to find one in the middle of Christian named villages (Shëngjergj means Saint George, and the neighboring villages are Saint Mary, Saint John). Nice! I am proud of this characteristic of ours...

We keep on going... I can see the village from the top, the sprawl of its settlements. Many of the older buildings are in stone, reflecting a harmony of architecture and landscape. Slightly disheartening to see the more recent constructions. After two hours of walking we make it to a stockyard. A few meters away we find a water spring.





At 1200 m above sea-level this is the best tasting water ever. All of a sudden the scenery changes dramatically, and the trail takes us through the forest. All I can think about is how to best capture the amazing colors here.

We exit the dense forest, to find ourselves in front of a beautiful meadow full of colorful spring flowers. Beautiful doesn't cut it. It is much more than that, and I am at a lack of words to describe it. Some of us are just glaring, some are laying in greenery, and others are in a hurry to take pictures and post in Instagram. This is the highest peak of the mountain trail, and I want to stay here longer, as I just don't think it will get any prettier than this. Yet, we proceed down an old cobbled road – most likely an old trade route overlooking rolling hills. Following a flat segment of sandy rocks, we quickly started to descend into the valley. Water, trees, the smell of earth, the rocks – so different from the city!

I love it here, but I have to return to the everyday routine of the city with lots of memories, and a desire to tell about this place and come back again.

I hope you find it even more awesome than I did!

Lots of love,

The new lover of mountains!



Other attractions

- Linos Spring
- Drinking water springs (Selitë, Shënmëri, Guri i Bardhë)
- The Red Spring
- Vali Cave (Bixë)
- Kacerri Cave next to the Kacerri meadows
- Waterfall by the Kec Stream (Facesh)
- Kallagjeshi lakes (bordering Vakumonë)
- “Plane tree” in Shënmëri
- Skrep (1011 m)
- The Old Mill in Verri
- Mosque ruins in Urë
- Shëngjin castle



BESJANA SEVO,
POLIS UNIVERSITY,
URBAN PLANNING

It was a truly breathtaking experience and often overwhelming. Even though there were moments when I thought, "can we do this", we somehow made it. We have contributed to bring back some life and vitality to this community that seemed left aside.



HAXHIRE DHIARI,
EPOKA UNIVERSITY,
ARCHITECTURE

Take an hour to travel towards the eastern part of the city. Allow yourself to explore the hidden highs of Tirana, and I am sure you will love to wait for the next sunrise there.



RAY KOÇI,
POLIS UNIVERSITY,
URBAN PLANNING

I was drawn to this project to explore an innovative approach to tourism in remoted areas with limited access. Experiencing each phase of the project was of value to me. It was something beautiful.



EUGLEN BOCI,
ALEXANDER MOISIU
UNIVERSITY,
TOURSIM
MANAGEMENT

As I am approaching my diploma in tourism management, this experience has been even more important to me, giving me the opportunity to put my knowledge into concrete interventions.



ZAMIRA DYLI,
FACULTY OF
NATURAL
SCIENCES,
CHEMISTRY
AND FOOD
TECHNOLOGY

It has been a special experience and a welcomed initiative that other regions in Albania need to replicate to promote their tourism. It has made me proud of my beautiful country.



FLORIANA HYSI,
23 YEARS OLD,
EPOKA UNIVERSITY,
ARCHITECTURE

Discovering and hiking through the beautiful mountain path, was the most existing part. I never imagined the smell of newly blossomed flowers could be so fascinating.



THEODOR KURO,
ECONOMICS FACULTY,
UNIVERSITY OF TIRANA

I was seeking to actively participate in research on rural development and agriculture. Through the UNDP project I learned more about sustainable tourism, which of course is an important element for students aspiring to contribute to the further development of our region.



BESMIR VOKOPOLA,
POLIS UNIVERSITY, URBAN
PLANNING

I decided to be part of this initiative, initially as a getaway from the daily routine, with no big expectations. Now in the end I conclude that this experience awakened in me the desire to come back more often to experience the village, enjoy fresh water sources and good simply cooked food, and the smell the trees. Really, getting to know more of my country.

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Resilient nations.*