



Funded by  
the European Union



TRAVEL GUIDE BOOK

# THE CULTURAL ROUTE OF MIRDITA



*Disclaimer:*

*This booklet has been prepared by the Albanian Center for Education, Tourism, and Entrepreneurship (CEAPAL) under the EU4Culture Program, financed by the European Union and implemented by UNOPS in partnership with the Ministry of Economy, Culture and Innovation. Its content is the sole responsibility of the Albanian Center for Education, Tourism, and Entrepreneurship (CEAPAL) and does not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union and/or UNOPS.*

## CONTENTS:

### **Pg. 03 MIRDITA OVERVIEW**

### **Pg. 04 POINTS OF INTEREST**

1. INFOKULLA - TOURIST INFORMATION OFFICE & MUSEUM
2. MONASTERY CHURCH OF RUBIK
3. RUBIK PICTOGRAMS
4. MATRIZA CASTLE
5. CHURCH OF SAINT MARY (NDËRFANËS), GZIQ
6. CHURCH OF SAINT ALEXANDER (SHËN LLEZHDRIT), OROSH
7. SPAÇ PRISON RE-EDUCATION UNIT 303
8. STONE HOUSE OF ZEF NDOCAJ IN KODËR SPAÇ VILLAGE
9. THE AQUEDUCT OF DOMGJON
10. "ARBËR WINERY", RRËSHEN

### **Pg. 16 MIRDITA CULTURAL ROUTE ITINERARIES**

1. DISCOVERING THE CHURCHES OF MIRDITA - 1 DAY
2. AROUND RUBIK AND THE OLD VILLAGE (KATUND I VJETËR)  
- 1 DAY
3. SPAÇ, A MEMORY THAT CAN NEVER BE FORGOTTEN - 1 DAY
4. BETWEEN THE CHURCHES OF THE PRINCIPALITY AND  
THE ARBËR WINERY - 2 DAYS
5. DISCOVERING MIRDITA - 3 DAYS

For further information before and during your trip,  
please contact the local InfoPoint  
[hikingmirdita.com](http://hikingmirdita.com) | [info@hikingmirdita.com](mailto:info@hikingmirdita.com)  
Tel (+355) 69 560 29 70



# MIRDITA OVERVIEW

Mirdita is a region in northern Albania, with an area of 865 km<sup>2</sup>, and a population of 37 thousand residents (according to the 2017 census). Its territory is synonymous with the historical Albanian tribe of the same name. The name "Mirdita" is derived from a legendary ancestor called "Mir Diti," from whom the tribe claims descent. Another popular etymology links the word with the Albanian greeting "mirëdita," which means "good day" or "good day to you."

The district of Mirdita consists of one municipality and six administrative centers (Rubik, Fan, Kacinar, Kthellë, Orosh, and Selitë). Rrëshen serves as the administrative center of the municipality. It is part of the Lezhë County and shares borders with Pukë, Mat, Dibër, and Zadrime.

## NEED TO KNOW

Main City Name: Rrëshen

Electricity: 220V/50Hz

Time Zone: GMT +1

## PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION BY BUS:

**Departure from Tirana** (North and South Bus Terminal, Kamëz junction). Schedule: 06:00; 07:30; 09:00; 10:30; 11:00; 12:00; 13:00; 14:00; 15:00; 16:00; 17:00; 18:00.

The journey takes 1 hour and 30 minutes. Refer to [www.etransport.al](http://www.etransport.al) for updated information.

## BY CAR:

**From Tirana:** Tirana-Kukës Highway, turn for Rrëshen, 72 km.

**From Shkodra:** 40 km.

**From Morina (Kosovo):** "Rruga e Kombit" Highway, 90 km.

## EMERGENCY CONTACTS:

Ambulance	<b>127</b>	Traffic police:	<b>126</b>
Fire brigade:	<b>128</b>	Rescue police:	<b>129</b>
Rescue police:	<b>129</b>	Traffic police:	<b>126</b>

# POINTS OF INTEREST IN MIRDITA:

## 1. INFOKULLA - TOURIST INFORMATION OFFICE & MUSEUM

The aim of Infokulla is to develop tourism in the region and improve the socio-economic indicators of the population by attracting visitors to the natural, cultural, and historical features of the region. It encourages curiosity and interest in getting to know the place and its people through direct contact.

Various installations, photographs, and ethno-historical exhibitions present a comprehensive view of the special significance for the region. Infokulla – the tourist information office is located a few kilometers away from the town of Rubik, on the national road. Infokulla is considered the most active and highest-quality office compared to others in Albania, not only because of the variety of information it





provides but also due to the tireless dedication of its employees/specialists. The tireless work of foreign partners in partnership with municipality employees has made it a reference point for travelers who want to visit Mirdita.

In addition to tourist information that visitors can obtain from Infokulla through brochures, interactive maps, or guides, every visitor can also learn about the history, traditions, material and spiritual culture of the Mirdita region.

A rich ethnographic collection, gathered thanks to the contribution of ethnologist Marianne Graf, is displayed appropriately and plays the role of a small museum, valuable for anyone who wants to learn about the culture and history of Mirdita.

Infokulla is a private initiative and a gift from the "Albanian-Austrian Partnership - Marianne Graf (AAP)" to the Municipality of Mirdita. The Municipality of Mirdita manages Infokulla – the tourist information office with full responsibility and authority, in collaboration with the support of Marianne Graf. It develops various activities, including initiatives in ecotourism.

Infokulla serves as a comprehensive exhibition of the cultural and ethnographic heritage of the region, highlighting the architectural features of the towers, the ethnographic identity of the area, and the distinguished historical and religious figures that have supported the development not only of the region but have left traces in Albanian history.





## 2. MONASTERY CHURCH OF RUBIK

Situated on a prominent rocky terrain above the Fan River, the medieval monastery strongly influences the routes connecting the coastline with Arbanon up to the heights of Orosh, including what is otherwise known as the L'itinerarium Lissus - Naissus route.

Once Franciscan, part of the dioceses of Lezhë and Rubik, it dates back to 1166. Despite radical restoration phases over the years, the frescoes displayed on the eastern facade reveal an inscription dating from 1272, while Bishop Benedetto Orsini of Lezhë cited it in 1269. The inscription presented by Abbot Innocent in 1272 documents the text of the epigraph painted on the right side of the portico. The church has been declared a Cultural Monument.





The Church has undergone several re-constructions since its first mentioning in 1166 and lately reconstructed under "EU4Culture Programme", financed by EU and implemented by UNOPS in cooperation with the Ministry Of Culture of Albania.

Since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century until the early years of the 2nd millennium, interventions have completely altered the original appearance of the building.

On the other hand, these transformations allow the distinction of the few surviving medieval phases integrated into the new structure.





### 3. RUBIC PICTOGRAMS

The Rubik's pictograms are located 3.5 km west of the town of Rubik, on the outskirts of the Upper Bulshiza village, in a place called Gryka e Gjëdhezhës.

The Rubik's pictogram was made on the shelter of a rock positioned from the southeast. The non-flat rock surface has conditioned the creation of the pictogram on two platforms. On the left side (A - 1m<sup>2</sup>), elements such as the cross, anthropomorphic figure, and two sun circles in the west (cross inscribed in a circle) dominate. An anthropomorphic figure stands shifted to the left side of the composition, with a pointed head, on which rests an arc, while on both sides of the body, 12 small irregularly shaped circular or square divisions are drawn,

each with a dot in the middle. Another symbol of the cross is positioned next to it, presented with equal arms, three of which end with a rounded tip, and the lower arm ends with a triangle.

On the right platform (B-0.5m<sup>2</sup>), three figures are drawn close to each other. In the center is an anthropomorphic figure with a head in the form of a large dot covered by an arc line, which joins two small circles with a dot in the middle. The arms are given with a long and thick line, ending with two arcs, which also have a dot in the middle of the divisions. Based on comparisons with the case of the Written Cave of Lepenica, Korkuti has dated this rock pictogram to the Late Neolithic period.



## 4. MATRIZA CASTLE IN RUBIK

The Byzantine historian of the 6th century, Procopius of Caesarea, informs us that Justinian I (527-565) built or rebuilt 58 fortifications in New Epirus and 36 in Old Epirus, a good part of which are located in our country. In the book "On Buildings," he mentions, among other things, "castrum Matris," as one of the castles built in the early 6th century by Justinian I in New Epirus to defend against barbarian invasions.

Matriza Castle guards the gorge of the small river called Rubik, which originates in the Zhupa mountain and flows into the Fan River in the town of Rubik. The castle is located on the northern bank of the river. On the southern bank, at almost

the same height, another medieval fortress guarding the river gorge is found. Therefore, the ancient road that passed through here, connecting Lezhë with the interior of Albania towards the east, up to Prizren and beyond, was fortified.

Based on historical sources, Matriza Castle in Rubik served as a crucial supporting point in Skanderbeg's military operations in this area during the medieval period. Matriza Castle had both defensive and control functions, as in the river valleys extending to its east, numerous villages with a dense population for the medieval period were settled.





## 5. CHURCH OF SAINT MARY (NDËRFANËS), GZIQ

The Church of Saint Mary, also known as the Ndërfanës Church (Gziq), holds historical and cultural significance not only for the residents of Mirdita but also for the history of the entire country. Damaged and rebuilt over the years, the church is situated on a small hill to the west of the village of Gziq.

The first archaeological data were obtained in 1901 by the medievalist Theodor Ippen. Among other findings, particular attention was drawn to a single-headed eagle carved on a marble slab, rightfully identified as heraldic. It was precisely here that the Principality of Arbër, or as otherwise known in historiography, the Principata e Arbërit, was first established. Albanian scholars and

Professor Dhimitër Shuteriqi in 1966 discovered 19 carved stone fragments with inscriptions in Latin. From them, it was learned that the area was known as Trafandina and later Albanianized as Ndërfandë (modern Mirdita). From the inscription on another, albeit heavily damaged, plaque written in Latin, researchers concluded that the Principality of Arbër was established in the year 1191, with its first ruler being Progon.

In historical documents, the monastery of Saint Mary is referred to as "S. Marie de Tre-fandena, Arbanensi diocesis." The emblem of the Principality of Arbër found in the Ndërfanës Church is now the emblem of the Mirdita region.



## 6. CHURCH OF SAINT ALEXANDER (SHËN LLEZHDRIT), OROSH

The Seat of Orosh, isolated in those mountains and somewhat neglected by the nearby villages, has close by, visible from the church, only the cemeteries.

It has been established during the Ottoman period and the abbots were no more than village priests, under which were the communities of Orosh and Spaç. Their income was derived from the few remaining lands of the Abbey and donations from the Propaganda Fide, which also appointed the abbots.

After a tiring journey through steep paths filled with hospitality but also surprises, Edith Durham feels at home in Mirdita. Their first stop is made at the Holy Mountain, where the ruins of the ancient Benedictine monastery still stand. Afterwards, they descend to Orosh, where the abbey and the House of Captain (Kulla e Kapedanit) MarkaGjoni were located. "The abbot knows many things," writes Durham, "among other things, he knew how to build his seat in one of the most beautiful places in Europe, the brain of Mirdita, perhaps the strongest personality in all of Northern Albania.

The abbot was Preng Doçi, a very interesting figure. Born in 1846 and educated in Shkodra and Rome. He had served as a parish priest in Mirdita during the 1879s. A determined opponent of the Ottoman occupation, he had entered into an agreement with the Montenegrins, which led to his expulsion from Mirdita. Propaganda Fide in the Vatican sent him as a missionary to Newfoundland in the USA in 1881. He is believed to be the first Albanian to have lived in America.

Later, he served for several years as the secretary of the apostolic nuncio in Calcutta, precisely where Mother Teresa would later establish her famous mission.

Preng Doçi was allowed to return to Mirdita only in 1888. A year later, he was consecrated abbot of the Abbey of St. Llesh in Orosh, a position that allowed him to become one of the leading figures in Mirdita.



## 7. SPAÇ PRISON RE-EDUCATION UNIT 303

Mining operations in Spaç continued to extract pyrite and copper. The mine was primitive, equipped only with some wooden structures. According to the security scheme, Spaç was a surrounded camp in a challenging terrain, guarded by 30 sentry points with soldiers and four military units ensured its security.

Despite harsh conditions, inmates were allowed 15 kg of supplies from their families, two monthly 15-minute visits, and the ability to send two letters per month. They could also subscribe to newspapers and write letters to various authorities.

In May 1973, a three-day revolt, known as the Spaç Revolt, took place, during which inmates took control of the prison, demanding their human rights.

Conditions in Spaç were extremely difficult, with prisoners not receiving adequate nutrition and facing daily violence. Working in the mine was considered hazardous, and accidents were frequent.

In 1981, an average of 1,056 prisoners were present exceeding the capacity of 504. In March-April 1981, 18 deaths were reported in Spaç.

The prison was permanently closed in 1995, and from 1995 to 2012, Spaç Prison was abandoned and gradually dismantled for scrap. In 2007, the August Tete Mining Company obtained permission to exploit the Spaç mine.

In December 2007, Spaç Prison was declared a cultural monument of the second category. In October 2007, there was a request for Spaç to be declared a "cultural monument," a protected area.





## 8. STONE HOUSE OF ZEF NDOCAJ IN KODËR SPAÇ VILLAGE

Zef Ndocaj's house was declared a Cultural Monument by the Ministry of Education and Culture in 1973.

Similar to other houses in the Mirdita region, it possesses distinctive features that are precisely the clear protective characteristics and the way they are implemented.

The primary goal, ensuring a protected lifestyle, subjects everything: the land, the compositional scheme of the house with turrets placed at heights, the external architectural formulation with enclosed masses, the placement of stairs inside, the door, the roof, etc.

Fortified houses are usually built in defended positions, while typological, functional, and architectural construction and decorative elements are similar to those of the fortified houses in Mat. Some peculiarities are presented by the fortified buildings in other "bajraks" (districts) of Mirdita, Orosh, and Spaç, respectively: Zef Ndocaj's stone houses and tower in the village of Kodër Spaç, and Prend Lleshi's stone house in the village of Mashtërkor, where the tower did not penetrate the other layers of the village. They are mainly built by powerful families.

The most common floor plan of fortified houses in Orosh and Spaç is the one with corners, formed by attaching an annex to the main volume of the house. In the corners of the annex, the sanitary knots of the floors are placed.

The fortified houses of Mirdita are equipped with "çikma," unlike those of Mat, which have windows but only loopholes. It seems that the "çikma" of Mirdita has lost its seating function and has turned only into defensive elements.





## 9. THE AQUEDUCT OF DOMGJON

The fortified settlement, known locally as “Qyteza,” was situated in the present-day village of Domgjon, in the western part of the Little Fani Valley.

According to the researcher A. Baçe: The construction of residential centers in the first centuries of our era, on flat terrains, the use of bricks, and hydrolyzing mortar gave impetus to the construction of aqueducts. The aqueduct of Domgjon starts at Mount Munella, where water, collected from a small spring, flows into an underground channel. In the middle of the aqueduct, there was a control well, into which water was directed from above through a small gate.

The cylindrical well, 12 meters deep and 2.5 meters wide, is constructed with stone masonry. A set of helical stairs lead to the pit at the bottom, through which one could access the interior of the aqueduct, also built with stone masonry. The aqueduct was constructed with complete technical knowledge. Its passage through open tunnels in the rock and the construction of the control

well clearly demonstrate the experience of working in rocky terrains, highly valued in the ancient world.

It is believed that the aqueduct and the fortress of Domgjon were built in the late antiquity, at the beginning of the 6th century. Apparently, the fortification of Qyteza was built on the traces of an earlier settlement, during the time of Justinian I, who, during the Slavic invasions, constructed or reconstructed a series of fortifications in the Illyrian territories.

Considering the construction technique and architectural features of the aqueduct, specialists have assessed it as one of the rarest in our country. The aqueduct has remained almost undamaged until today. Archaeological expeditions are needed to provide a clearer profile of the fortification, its plan, etc., as well as restoration and conservation interventions.

Since 1984, the Aqueduct of Domgjon have held the status of “Cultural Monument of the First Category.”





## 10. “KANTINA ARBËR” WINNERY

Albanian Wines and the Mirdita Region. Albania has one of the oldest traditions of winemaking in Europe, dating back to the Bronze Age. During the Roman and Byzantine periods, wine production in the country increased significantly, although it experienced a decline under Ottoman rule. During the communist dictatorship, there were several wineries and grape cultivation places that were exclusively managed by the regime (not private owners). The most common varieties of indigenous Albanian grapes are: Kallmeti, Shesh, Debin, Vranac, and Vlosh.

In Mirdita, vineyards are cultivated in the mountainous terrain of the region, mainly in the Bukëmira area and in some less industrialized areas of Rubik, which provide a suitable environment for grape development—soil rich in minerals, north-south oriented hillsides facilitating soil drainage, and the necessary temperature range.

Kantina Arbri is a well-known winery for wine production in the Mirdita region of Albania. It is located in the village of Gëziq, at an altitude of around 500 meters above sea level, covering an area of 100 hectares. Kantina Arbri specializes in the production of red Kallmet and white Shesh wines with high quality. Part of the winery's production also includes traditional rakia and a recently experimented sparkling wine.

Kantina Arbri employs traditional winemaking methods, combining them with modern technology to ensure an excellent product. It has a considerable amount of cultivated land with grapes, planted in favorable areas of Mirdita for grape cultivation.

The wines produced by Kantina Arbri often come from various locally cultivated grape varieties. The winery's most well-known products are Kallmeti (red wine) and Verë Arbri Gëziq (white wine). These wines are known for their smooth taste and rich aroma.

# MIRDITA CULTURAL ROUTE - ITINERARIES

## 1. DISCOVERING THE CHURCHES OF MIRDITA

Mirdita is renowned for its numerous churches scattered across its territory, approximately 200 in total. Few of these churches have been reconstructed and continue to serve their primary functions. This itinerary encompasses elements of religious and historical significance in the Mirdita region, providing visitors with an opportunity to spend a unique day amidst the historical and religious landmarks while enjoying the natural beauty and gastronomy.

The journey begins at the **Monastery Church of Rubik**, strategically positioned atop the Fan River Valley. The trip takes about 1h and 15 min drive from Tirana, along the National Road, leads to the town of Rubik, where the church is located just 4 km above a hill. After an informative visit, delving into its history, frescoes, and important figures from the region's past, the journey continues towards Orosh, only 40 minutes from the Rubik Church.

The passage to the involves a right turn on the National Road, followed by a stunning drive along a lush hillside







treasure trove of local culture and history, is recommended.

The journey continues towards the **Church of St.Mary (Ndërfanës)** in Gziq, also known as the Church of the Principality of Arbër, just 10 minutes from the city of Rrëshen. Its strategic position allows you to observe several surrounding villages, convincing visitors that they are in an area where hard work yields fruitful results in a relaxing and well-maintained environment.

throughout the year. The exhilarating 20-minute climb or hiking for enthusiasts is rewarded with breathtaking natural landscapes, revealing the grandeur of a dynasty. Orosh, known for centuries as one of the prominent and visited regions in the north, holds a special place in history.

Following the visit to the community-funded restored church and the admiration of its architectural beauty, the journey proceeds towards **Rrëshen, the center of Mirdita**, only 20 minutes away from Orosh. A break to savor local dishes at one of the city's restaurants (Arbër Winery) and a short visit to the city's House of Culture, which houses a



**Duration:** This daily itinerary can last from 8 to 12 hours, depending on the visitor's preference.

**Target Group:** Recommended for enthusiasts of religious sites and those who enjoy on-field explorations, including hikes and nature walks.

## 2. AMID RUBIK AND THE OLD VILLAGES

This trip around Rubik and its surroundings calls us to another time. Sweetly located at the height of the hill above Fan, the **Monastery Church of Rubik** is considered an element that cannot be missed by any visitor to this area. The community of the area has such a strong connection with this church, which has withstood many centuries and has been renovated and restored with a new charm, that every passer-by on "Rruga e Kombit" highway is tempted to climb its heights.

To see the church and try to read between the frescoes, it seems as if you are really in the souls of the saints of the time, when they were examples of virtues to follow, protectors against the small and big difficulties of life, and especially against its injustices.

After visiting the church, lovers of history, art and mountain climbing, continue their exploration towards **Rubik's Pictograms**, just 30 minutes away. The elements, symbols, figures and graphics carved into the rock take the visitor to another dimension of time, a time that shows the beginnings of the inhabitants' love for art.



Can such a strategic hill be thought of without a fortress built at the time of Skanderbeg? The **Castle of Matriza**, surrounded by a unique landscape, in which the earth, the sky and the river come together in perfect harmony, is the third point of the route, just 30 minutes from the Monastery Church of Rubik.

**All three of these points make up the historical Rubik's ensemble.**

From this point, the itinerary continues towards the **Old Village (Katundi i Vjeter)**, along a village road under the shade of trees and refreshed by the numerous water sources in the area. Everywhere, you feel embraced by the strong scents of flowers and medicinal plants. You can fully enjoy the journey with a stop at one of several local restaurants, well-known for their traditional cuisine and hospitality culture.

**Duration:** This itinerary lasts about 10 hours, suitable for families and individuals with moderate physical preparation.

**Target Group:** Visitors interested in religious tourism, with an average level of fitness for hiking.



### 3. SPAÇ, A MEMORY THAT CAN NEVER BE FORGOTTEN - 1 DAY

The history of the Spaç prison is a painful memory reflecting the dark times of dictatorship. Through the memories and testimonies of the prisoners, Spaç recalls the hardships of life in this desperate camp, unveiling events that should never be forgotten.

The journey begins with a visit to **Infokulla**, located on the National Road, just 15 km from the Ura e Milotit. After familiarizing themselves with the elements of the area's history, ethnography, culture, and gastronomy, visitors can take artisanal products as souvenirs from this journey.

The journey then continues towards **Spaç Prison**, where the infamous communist-era prison is located, which, during the years 1930-1950, was an active copper and pyrite mine. The trip takes only 20 minutes from the exit of the highway in Reps, through a winding road in the hills of Spaç, which mysteriously hide from each other and seem not to want to reveal the pains experienced over the years. Until 2012, Spaç Prison was abandoned and gradually dismantled for scrap, and in December 2017, it was declared a "Cultural Monument".

A few meters below, another reality becomes part of the itinerary. Two residential objects, the 400-year-old **Guest House and Zef Ndocaj's tower**, suddenly appear and tell a lot about their architectural, human, and historical wealth. The majestic tower preserves within it distinctive elements of the indigenous dwellings of the region. Among them are the heavy metal-worked gates, carved stone, and personal objects of the characters that are now part of history throughout the years.

**Duration:** This daily itinerary can last from 8-10 hours according to the visitor's preference.

**What can be done:** A comprehensive overview of the history of Mirdita. Tourist information, maps, souvenirs, and a mini-museum. Visit to the reeducation ward premises, including the expected transformation of the prison into a museum. Familiarization with fortified houses



## 4. BETWEEN THE CHURCHES OF THE PRINCIPALITY AND THE ARBËR WINERY - 2 DAYS

The churches of the Principality of Mirdita and the tradition of Arbër's wine production represent two significant dimensions of life in this region. Religious heritage and cultural traditions come together in a rich display of Mirdita's identity.

### Day 1:

The journey begins with a visit to **Infokulla**, the local Tourism Information Office and Museum.

A trip to Mirdita is incomplete without visits to religious sites, especially when they are intertwined with history. Therefore, it is suggested to visit **Church of Saint Mary (Ndërfanës) in Gziq**, just 10 minutes away from Infokulla. Known as the Church of the "Principality of Arbër," it is situated on a small hill in the village of Gziq.

The state emblem of Arbër found in the Church of Ndërfanës today is the emblem of the Mirdita region. The church is known for its historical significance and is one of the most visited.

Mirdita is renowned for the quality of its grapes and wines. **Arbër Winery** offers the opportunity to taste and sample not only wine, raki.

Following this experience, head to one of the most visited points in Mirdita, the **Monastery Church of Rubik** is recently reconstructed under "EU4Culture Programe", financed by EU and implemented by UNOPS in cooperation with the Ministry Of Culture of Albania.

As the evening falls, a short trip to the **Old Village (Katundi i Vjetër)** invites you to accommodation in well-known inns, hotels, and campsites in the area.

### Day 2:

Awakening between the gurgling of water and the chirping of birds, a virgin and unique nature, breakfast with traditional products, invite you to spend a day with adrenaline to explore the area or quench your curiosity with other selected points of the eastern territory.

The journey continues towards **Spaç**, where the infamous prison of the communist period is located, which in the 1930s-1950s was an active copper and pyrite mine. After the emotional shock, we visit **Kodër Spaç** for another dimension of culture. A few meters below, another reality becomes part of the route. Two residential buildings, the 400-year-old basement house and the **Zef Ndocaj Stone House** (kulla), suddenly appear and show a lot about the wealth their architectural, human and historical.





## DISCOVERING MIRDITA

By discovering Mirdita, this narrative poses the challenge of deepening the understanding of this region. Through the history, culture, and nature of Mirdita, this journey invites the reader to become acquainted with the depth and often the unknown aspects of this part of Albania.

# EXPLORING MIRDITA – 3 DAYS

This is an itinerary for those who want to enjoy Mirdita in its entire beauty. A slow journey that allows to get as much cultural information as possible, immerse in nature with so much variation and get drunk with the unique wines of the Arbëri Principality area.

## Day I:

The best way to start the trip is a visit at **Infokulla**, the tourist information point that offers a lot of information as well as the taste of the region's heritage in its pavilions. Located on Rruga e Arbri, 15 km from the bridge of Milot and only 500 meters from the city of Rubik.

Just 10 minutes away from InfoKulla, we continue in the direction of the **Church of Saint Mary (Ndërfanës)** -Gziq, which is otherwise known as the Church of the "Principality of Arbër". It holds within it the symbol of the single-headed eagle engraved on a marble slab which the medievalist Theodor Ippen called heraldic (1901) and this emblem today is the emblem of the province of Mirdita.

Around noon, you can stop at the **Arbër Winery** for a lunch with local gastronomy and locally produced unique wines.

After lunch, a walk in the city and this itinerary cannot miss a visit to the **House of Culture, Rrëshen**, where unique specimens of ethnography, folk instruments and traditional clothing are exposed.

## Day II

The next day, the journey continues towards **Gurra of Domgjonit (aqueduct)**, at the foot of Munella mountain and only 40 km from the town of Rrëshen. The well, measuring 12 m and 2.5 meters, was made of stone. Built in the time of Justinian I, the aqueduct has arrived almost undamaged to our days, it is considered one of the rarest in the Balkans.

After returning to the nation's road, continue towards Reps, heading for the **Spaçi Prison**. The journey takes only 20 minutes from the highway exit in Reps, through a beautiful winding road in the hills of Spaçi, which mysteriously hide each other and as if they do not want to show the pain experienced over the years. Nature enthusiasts can hike along the "Rreqebulli i Munellës" trail with wonderful views in every season.

## Day III

The **Monastery Church of Rubik**, is the first point of visit for the 3<sup>rd</sup> day in Mirdita. Located on a prominent rocky terrain, above the river Fan, the medieval monastery strongly dominates the routes that connect the coast with Arbanon to the heights of Oroshi.

Exploration continues with **Rubik's Pictograms**, just 30 min up the mountain. The elements, symbols, figures and graphics carved in the rock, take the visitor to another dimension of time.

The last station, **Old Village (Katund i Vjetër)** which can be reached in two ways. Walking along the paths that go down the hill from Rubik's Pictograms (1.5 hours of normal walking, for hiking enthusiasts) or following the local Rubik - Katund i Vjetër road (6km). There you can enjoy the gastronomy of the area's well-known restaurants under the gurgling water and the freshness of the trees that surround the area.

# USEFUL TIPS WHEN TRAVELING THROUGHOUT MIRDITA:

## 1. MIRDITA IS OVERWHELMINGLY A SAFE AND WELCOMING PLACE FOR TOURISTS.

### Besa

Mirdita represents an array of values, with the "Mikpritja" (welcoming) and "besa" (given word) as the key elements, best described by the famous poet Martin Camaj. Production and playing of Ciftelia and Lahuta were attributes of the region. You will not find a history of hotels/inns in the region as travelers of any kind were hosted in traditional houses.



## **2. BEST TIME TO VISIT MIRDITA**

Certainly, summer is the warmest and driest season in Mirdita. In the town, the average yearly temperature reaches 27 degrees Celsius, even though on certain days, the thermometer surpasses 30 degrees. Specific areas like Katund i Vjetër, Oroshi, and KodërSpaç offer a cooler stay. Some ideal moments to appreciate Mirdita are during the spring months, in April and May, when temperatures are pleasant for exploring the proposed itineraries. The period from September to October is also considered beautiful, where abundant fruit harvests and the autumn colors invite you to savor everything.

## **3. LEK IS THE OFFICIAL CURRENCY, BUT EUROS ARE WIDELY ACCEPTED**

The official currency in Albania is the lek. Although Albania is not part of the EU, the Euro is widely used as well. Lek is common currency in convenience shops, at restaurants and among taxi drivers – i.e. for small purchases. You'll find that most hotels and guesthouses list their prices in Euro, and it usually works out far better to pay for big-ticket items such as hotel bills and rental cars in Euro rather than lek. ALWAYS HAVE CASH ON YOU Lek is a closed currency so you'll have to wait until you arrive in-country to get your hands on some.

## **4. MIRDITA IS EXTREMELY AFFORDABLE**

A generous meal in a restaurant might cost you around 1000 lek per person, while cheap snacks such as burek are perfect for breakfast and will only set you back around 200 lek. Expect to pay 1,600 lek for a local sim card with data and not more than 150 lek for a cup of coffee.

## **5. DON'T PUT YOUR FAITH IN GOOGLE MAPS**

Instead call or visit INFOKULLA for information and if you need professional tour guides in the region.

## **6. ENGLISH IS WIDELY SPOKEN, BUT NOT UBIQUITOUS**

Albanian is the official language in Albania but many people – especially those born after the fall of communism – speak a second language.

English is the most popular second language and is taught in schools.

Here are a few basic words:

Hello	Përshëndetje (per-shen-det-ye)
Bye	Mirupafshim (mi-ru-paf-shim)
Yes	Po (po)
No	Jo (yo)
Thanks	Faleminderit (fal-e-min-der-it)
Cheers	Gëzuar (ge-zu-ar)

# ACCOMMODATION AND GASTRONOMY IN MIRDITA

Mirdita's hospitality is one of the distinguishing values of the area's population. Locals say that in the region of Mirdita there has never been an "inn" as a guest or even a casual traveler was welcomed and sheltered in the houses/towers of Mirdita, offering them not only shelter and food, but also trust and warmth. Therefore, all the early travelers in their testimonies mention the stone houses and the traditional hospitality for the guests.

Recently, due to the increase in the flow of visitors and also the revitalization of the area, the locals have undertaken private initiatives to build hotels, guest houses or restaurants where mainly the products and the traditional cuisine of the area is served. The following accommodation and gastronomy outlets can not be missed during a trip in the region:

Check social media to find more for each outlet and even to book your stay.

ARBËR Winery,  
Rrëshen, Mirditë  
Tel: **+355 69 443 3773**

Eko-Hotel Restorant Marubi,  
Katund i Vjetër, Rubik  
E: [info@hotelmарubi.com](mailto:info@hotelmарubi.com)  
Tel: **+355 682077424**

N'KANÛ, Perlat, Mirditë  
E: [ermal.dukaj@gmail.com](mailto:ermal.dukaj@gmail.com)  
Tel: **+355 682794419**

Bujtina Dini, Katund i Vjetër,  
Rubik, Mirditë  
Tel: **+355 699194399**

Shija e Maleve, Katund i  
Vjetër, Rubik, Mirditë  
Tel: **+355 68 2382718**

Guest House Biba,  
Rubik, Mirditë  
E: [palbiba6@gmail.com](mailto:palbiba6@gmail.com)  
Tel: **+355 692290643**

Bujtina Cupi, Fshati  
Kacinar, Mirditë  
Tel: **+355 685353337**

Bujtina Doda, Malaj, Mirditë.  
Tel: **+355 69 2134079**

Bujtina "Kodra e Mullirit"  
Kolsh, Rrëshen  
Tel: **+355 683902502**

Camping Baven-Toven Natura,  
Katund i Vjetër, Rubik, Mirditë  
web: [baventoven.com](http://baventoven.com)  
Tel: **+355 68 2602066**

Real Park, Ndërfanë, Mirditë  
E: [real.park@gmail.com](mailto:real.park@gmail.com)  
Tel: **+355 683838322**