

# ALBANIA

## Geography

- Albania is located just north of Greece.
- It is surrounded by the countries of Montenegro, Kosovo, Serbia, and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.
- This region is known as the Balkans.



## History

- Albania was a communist country from 1944 to 1990.
- Since 1990, the government of Albania has been democratic.
- Immigration waves happened around 1944 when Albania became a communist country and again in 1967 when religion was outlawed.
- The majority of the Albanian immigrants who came to the US after 1990 from Albania came to escape the political unrest and instability of their country.
- In the year 2000, 113,661 people in the United States reported that they were of Albanian descent. According to the 2000 US census the five states with the highest Albanian populations are:



State	Total Albanian Population, 2000
New York	32,428
Michigan	15,343
Massachusetts	10,594
New Jersey	7,336
Connecticut	7,200

## Language

- Albanian is the official language of Albania. Albanian is an Indo-European language, and is spoken in countries such as Kosovo, Macedonia, and Greece.
- The two principle dialects of the Albanian language are *Gheg* in the north and *Tosk* in the south.
- There is a good chance that most Albanian students in American classrooms are bilingual in both Albanian and English. This is true if they are first or second generation Albanians in the United States.

## Religion

- Many of the Albanians that immigrated after 1990 lived their lives in a society that did not permit religion. Even so, most Albanians in the United States still affiliate themselves with Muslim, Roman Catholic, or Orthodox Christian religions even if they are not active practitioners. Albanians are renowned for their religious tolerance.
- Albanian Orthodox Church
  - Name Days – on the feast day of the saint after whom the person was named, the family has an open house. Refreshments of pastry and beverages are preceded by the serving of *liko*, fruit preserves; birthdays are not celebrated.
  - Funerals – special memorial services for the departed on the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup>, and 40<sup>th</sup> days after death; repeated on the 6<sup>th</sup> month, 1 year, 2 year and 3 year anniversary of the death. A tray of *grure* (boiled wheat) mixed with sugar, nuts and raisins is placed on a tray at these services. Wheat symbolized the reality of the resurrection of the dead just as the grain when buried sprouts and rises to new life. The sugar symbolized the sweetness of the blessedness of the future life.

- Feasts – 12 major feasts celebrated in the Albanian Christian year.
- Fasts
  - four main periods of fasting: Christmas fast of 40 days (Nov. 15-Dec.24); Feast of the Apostles fast of one to six weeks (eight days after Pentecost and ends June 29); Assumption fast of two weeks (August 1-14; Great Lent fast of seven weeks before Easter.
  - Wednesdays and Fridays are also fast days
  - Fasts are traditionally very rigorous but not always followed. Fasts include abstaining from meats, all animal products (butter, eggs, milk, cheese, fish), fish and olive oil.
  - Great Lent fast is taken seriously even in U.S. and people plan a Lenten regime to follow.

## Culture

- Albanian family bonds are especially strong. It is not uncommon for generations of a family to work together in a family-run business. Many extended families live together and care for each other. Often adult children live with their parents, or several generations live under the same roof.
- Family events, such as engagement parties and weddings are important social events in the Albanian communities. Preparing and sharing food are central to Albanian life.

## Birth and Name Day Celebrations

- Within three days after the birth, the family makes *petulla* (fried dough or fritters) and distributes them to friends and family.
  - A hot sweet bread (*buevale*) may also be prepared for guests who visit the mother and child. A celebration is usually held on the third day where friends and relatives bring *petulla* and other gifts.
  - Infants are especially vulnerable to the "evil eye" and many Albanian mothers will place a *kuleta* (amulet) on a new-born child. For Christians, the *kuleta* may be a small cross, and among Muslims, it may be a small triangular silver form (*hajmali*).
  - Garlic may also ward off evil.
- Name days on the feast day of the saint after whom the person was named, not birthdays, may be celebrated. The Orthodox Christian family may serve guests fruit preserves (*liko*), pastries (*te embla*), Albanian whiskey (*raki*), and coffee (*kafe*). Guests would be formally served in the reception room (*ode*) or the living room (*vater*).



## Food

- Albanian dishes have been heavily influenced by Turkey, Greece, Armenia, and Syria.
- Recipes have often been adapted and altered to suit American tastes.
- Albanians enjoy a variety of appetizers, soups, casseroles, pilaf, pies, stews, and desserts. Salads (*sallate*) are made with cabbage, lettuce, onions, peppers, olives, and feta cheese. *Sallate me patate* is a potato salad.
- Soups are made with a variety of ingredients such as beans, chicken, lentils, and fish. *Pace*, a soup made with lamb's tripe, is served at Easter.
- Bread consumption is unusually large in Albanian diet. The Albanian word for break is the normal word for "meal."
- Lamb rather than beef or pork is a staple Albanian dish, as well as, *pilav*, which is stuffed grape leaves, and baklava. Other Albanian specialties are *lakror*, a dinner pie filled with cheese and vegetables, and *petulla*, a dessert similar to fried dough.
- Desserts include milk puddings, honey cakes and ice cream, as well.
- Albanian food is strongly influenced from Turkish Food. In Albania, the lunch represents the most important meal of the day. It consists of soups, main dishes that are based on meat, salads that are served along with the meat dishes and desserts.

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- Coffee is preferred thick and strong and coffeehouses are popular. The beverage that made Albania popular at least all over Europe is the traditional brandy. Besides that, other famous Albanian beverages are *raki*, the beer and the several varieties of red and white wine.

### Food Preparation and Customs

- The Albanian food preparation methods are similar to the ones from Greece: boiling, frying, steaming, seasoning, salting, smoking and grilling. Each of these methods is used on the ingredients, until a certain effect appears.
- Albanians are exceptionally generous and hospitable.
- A person invited to dinner will be given enough to "feed an army," even though the host may go hungry the next day.
- Meals for guests or for ceremonial occasions such as weddings usually involve copious amounts of meat, washed down with Albanian *raki*, an alcoholic beverage.

### Communication

- Albanian social cues tend to be more physical than American cues. It is very common for Albanians to hug and kiss hello. Also, the head nods for "yes" and "no" are reversed from the American ones.
- An elaborate protocol of greeting exchanges occurs entering the home of an Albanian family.
  - After first being served a "treat" along with a drink or Turkish coffee by the hostess or another female member of the family the visitor would enquire about the health of each member of the hostess' family in a careful and deliberate manner.
  - Afterwards, the hostess would inquire about the health of each member of the visitor's family.
  - Only after this procedure is completed, would people relax and begin normal conversation.
- Albanians are very expressive people, using their hands, eyes and bodies to reinforce their statements.

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