

# UNKNOWN PATHS AND LONELY PLACES IN THE BORDER AREA BETWEEN MONTENEGRO AND ALBANIA



Nine hikes in a wonderful and untouched mountain  
world and cordial encounters with the hosts



## Introduction

The nine-day trekking route submitted here is meant to be an enhancement to the well visited long-distance hiking trails “Peaks of the Balkans (PoB)” and “Via Dinarica”. We will show you some lesser known shepherds' tracks and rarely visited accommodations that will make your visit more enjoyable.

The starting and finishing points are in the northern Albanian region of Kelmend. This area includes the deeply carved valley of the Cem river (Montenegrin: Cijevna), the valleys of Vermosh and Nikč/Vukël, as well as the surrounding mountains. To the west, north and east, the Kelmend region is bordered by the neighbouring country of Montenegro.

This region literally forms the gateway to the wild mountain areas of Prokletije/Bjeshkët e Nemuna. The route leads from Kelmend across the border to Montenegro and from there along the Albanian-Montenegrin border over the ridges between the Prokletije and Valbona national parks. Here, some sections of the Peaks of the Balkans or Via Dinarica trail can be easily integrated. We continue through the Albanian-inhabited Vusanje in Montenegro and the wild mountain valley of Grbaj. Hikes over two passes lead back to the Albanian Kelmend, first to Lepushë and then on to Nikç. This village is secluded at the back of a valley basin. From there, a gravel road and a footpath lead back to Tamarë. The trail ends in the beautifully situated guesthouse Grabom on the Cem river.

Like many mountain areas, the Kelmend region is particularly affected by emigration. Despite increasing tourism, many young people no longer see their future in their home villages and use the opportunity to emigrate, mainly to the US, to live with relatives who already live there.


In this guide, rarely visited guesthouses (Albanian: Bujtina) with committed welcoming hosts are highlighted. The inhabitants of these guesthouses, which are mostly open all year round, are traditionally self-sufficient. Tourism therefore offers a welcome source of income and a fresh perspective. In addition to the opportunity to earn money, the hosts are motivated and encouraged by their guests' appreciation and interest. Women and young people are the “driving force” in some of these guest accommodations. We hope, additional offers from the guesthouses will inspire you to stay longer and add a day of rest in a beautiful setting.

## General information about the hiking guide

### Suitability

The tours are suitable for individual guests and smaller groups (the accommodation capacities are to some extent limited). Adventurous families with children aged approximately 7 years or more can, depending on their wishes, take rest days at individual locations, choose simplified variants or hire an additional horse, to enable the children to have some respite.

### Use

-With the help of this guide and your own mountain experience, you can plan and walk the tours by yourself. The stages with the corresponding map sections can be downloaded via the online platform Outdooractive.com 

-If you don't have much time for planning and organising or if you prefer to be accompanied by a guide, you can book a trek adapted to your wishes through us: whether 'self-guided' (we take care of all the logistical matters, such as: reservations, luggage transport, transfers and border permits) or with a guide. For more information contact us on [info@balkantour.ch](mailto:info@balkantour.ch)

-The stage elements can be individually arranged, shortened or combined with routes along the PoB or Via Dinarica towards Valbona, Theth or Kosovo. Suggestions for shortened trekking variants can be found below.



## **Level of difficulty**

The hiking routes listed are classified as technically easy to moderately difficult, but require stamina and physical fitness on individual stages appropriate to the distance and altitude information. Some slightly exposed sections are mentioned in the text. Orientation skills and hiking experience in the mountains are required, especially for self-guided tours. The routes are marked and maintained to varying degrees.

## **Guesthouses**

This guide deliberately includes smaller, family-run accommodation facilities. Some hosts have only rarely had the opportunity to host guests. Their lack of experience is compensated for by their authenticity, effort and warmth.

## **Knowledge of foreign languages**

The older generation usually speaks only Albanian (or Montenegrin). Young people can usually communicate more or less competently in English.

## **Costs/Services**

Overnight accommodation with breakfast and evening meal, as well as provisions for the road usually costs €25–30 per person. There is often a discount for children (usually 50% for children aged 6–12 years). Fresh bed linen and towels are provided. Toilets/showers are either separate or shared with hosts, depending on the guesthouse.

## **Luggage transport**

On request, a horse or mule can be booked at the accommodation for transport of luggage or as an option for carrying tired children (with accompanying person). Cost per animal: €50 per day – one animal can carry up to approximately 60 kg. Waterproof and tear-proof bags for luggage are recommended.

## **Local guide**

Most hosts know the trails in the area very well and are happy to accompany guests (depending on the location, €30–50 euros per day). It should be noted that most hosts are not trained guides and often have no knowledge of foreign languages.

## **Power supply and reception**

Mobile phone reception is not guaranteed everywhere. The hosts can usually tell you where you can find reception nearby or they are happy to provide access to their Wi-Fi. The power supply is not guaranteed in some alpine settlements (partly powered by solar). It is advisable to take a power bank with you.

## **Best time of the year**

Depending on weather and snow conditions, from early or mid-June to mid-October.

## **Border permits**

For crossing the green borders from Montenegro into Albania (stages 4 and 7, option 9) and from Albania into Montenegro (stage 6), a border permit must be obtained from the local border police at least 2 weeks in advance. Further information contact [info@balkantour.ch](mailto:info@balkantour.ch)

## **National park entrance fees**

For the Prokletije National Park in Montenegro, an entrance fee of €1 per person must be paid directly on the spot, depending on access.

## **Emergency numbers**

Montenegro: emergency switchboard 112, ambulance 123, police 122, fire brigade 124

Albania: ambulance/emergency 127, police 129, fire brigade 128.



## Suggestions for shortened trekking routes

**3-day trek:** - Stage 1: Selcë–Mreg

- Stage 2: Mreg–Lëpushë (see variant)

- Stage 8: Lëpushë–Nikç

**5-day trek:** - Stage 1: Selcë–Mreg

- Stage 2: Mreg–Vermosh

- Stage 7: Vermosh–Grebaj (transfer)–Lëpushë

- Stage 8: Lëpushë–Nikç

- Stage 9: Nikç–Grabom



Important terms on the maps:

**peak:** Maja (Albanian), vrh (Montenegrin) ; **alpine pastureland:** bjeshkë (Alb.), katun (Mont.) ;

**pass:** qafa (Alb.), prevoj (Mont.) ; **guesthouse:** bujtina (Alb.)



## Journey to Kelmend



*View from the pass toward Kelmend*

Until 2015, the journey to the Albanian region of Kelmend in the deeply cut valley of the Cem river was an extremely time-consuming, bumpy and sometimes even dangerous drive. This made Kelmend a region isolated from the rest of Albania. Since 2016, Kelmend has been accessible via a well-developed, asphalted road. What remains are the many curves, steep slopes and, after heavy rain, roads that are prone to falling rocks, which still give the journey a touch of adventure.

Getting to Kelmend is possible from Podgorica in Montenegro via the border crossing in Božaj/Han i Hotit or via the town of Shkoder in northern Albania: In both cases, the journey leads along Lake Skadar.

At a roundabout near the border crossing, a road leads through an underpass in the direction of Kelmend.

A huge cross, made of bright stones on the mountain, shines from afar - an indication that this region is strongly Catholic. As the road bends, it leads up the mountain to the pass near Rrapsh. Shortly afterwards, we will be greeted with a breathtaking view of the valley of the Cem river (Montenegrin: Cijevna) and the mountains of Montenegro and Albania. It is worth stopping at the lookout point! The road winds its way over numerous, tight curves towards the valley floor. In August 2021, the border crossing in Grabom on the Cijevna/Cem river was opened. The road leads from Podgorica or Tuzi along the Cijevna river to the border crossing near Grabom. This cuts the travel time from Podgorica to Tamarë by almost an hour.

Tamarë is the main town in the Albanian region of Kelmend and has been restored over the last few years with international support. The pretty village square invites us to stop for a coffee. In the small shop next to an information office, regional products are sold (herbs, tea, blueberry products, etc.). Slightly below Tamarë, a bumpy gravel road would lead us into the side valley of Nikç /Vukël. But we continue up the valley along the Cem river. After passing the village of Selcë, the valley narrows and the road winds up high above the river to the Bordoleci Pass at 1350 meters above sea level. Immediately afterwards, there is the village of Lëpushë. A narrow road leads downwards through a valley. Close to the Bashkim Canyon on the left, the wide Vermosh Valley can be seen. Beyond the bridge on the right, there is the border crossing Grnčar/Bashkim that leads to Montenegro with the villages Gusinje and Plav.





## Stage 1

## From Selcë in the valley of the Cem River to the Alp of Mreg



2:45 h → 4.5 km ↑ 850 m ↓ 150 m

*Sllapi waterfall in spring*

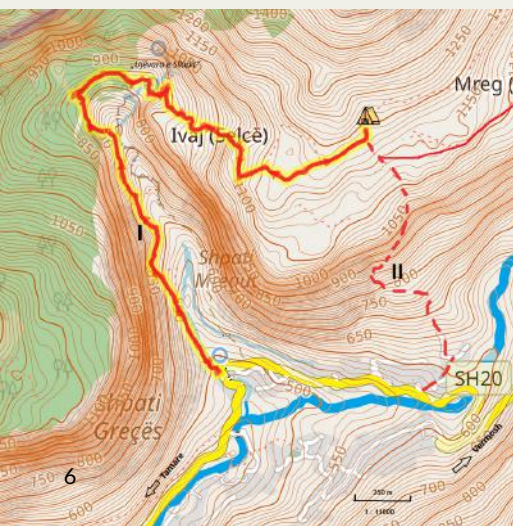
Our first destination, Mreg, is located on a terrace with an overwhelming view, high above the valley of the Cem river. This wonderful, year-round inhabited alp is only accessible by foot or horse. The longer route leads through a side valley to a lovely waterfall and on to Mreg. The shorter mule track leads up in serpentines and over a rocky cliff.

From Tamarë, the leading village in the Kelmend region, the road leads through a more and more desolate stoney desert until the first houses of Selcë appear. They are surrounded by green gardens and fields where mainly corn, beans and potatoes are grown. The village stretches from the first hamlet to the school, on to the church, then up the steep mountain slopes. The restaurant “Selca Cem”, located between the street and the river, invites us to stop on the cozy terrace where they serve fresh trout, and we can enjoy the swimming spot on the river below the restaurant.

Today's destination, Mreg, is located on a terrace with an amazing view, on the right side of the valley, approx. 700 m above the village of Selcë.

Two marked paths lead there:

**Option I :** This path is longer and leads past the waterfall “Ujëvara e Sllapit” to Mreg. We start shortly behind the school in a sharp right-hand bend and climb up the slope, first along the stream, then through steep gravel fields. The path then, which is slightly exposed in some places, leads along a level ledge while a mountain stream rushes far below. In a wide arc, we walk towards the waterfall, where a small bridge leads over the stream. In spring and after heavy rains, the waterfall plunges powerfully over the cliffs, and we can even feel the spray on the path.



The small trail next leads uphill through the forest in serpentine fashion until we reach the terrace of Mreg. The area becomes flatter, and beautiful meadows lie in front of us where the panorama of the surrounding mountains of the Cem valley opens up.

**Option II :** This path starts further up in the valley near the church of Selcë. The mule track leads steeply uphill over serpentine and rocky steps to the terrace of Mreg. (1:45 h, up 600 m)

When the temperatures in the valley are warm, the pleasant mountain air and the fresh green of Mreg will be a surprise. Pjeter Tinaj's accommodation can be recognized by the bright glamping tents.




## "Guesthouse Camping Mreg" - Adelina Tinaj



 16 Prs

 +355 69 768 38 95

 andelinatinaj@gmail.com



*"Guesthouse Camping Mreg"*

### Location:

Mreg is a pleasant place to stay and rest: Meadows, fruit trees and the wonderful view invite us to enjoy it all. Spending the night in a glamping tent offers privacy and a touch of adventure.

**Hosts:** The Tinaj family lives year round in this wonderful, remote place that can only be reached on foot. Pjeter and Age Tinaj are self-sufficient as they run the small mountain farm.

Daughter Adelina is the driving force in the guest business and is very committed to accommodating guests and generating additional income for the family. The youngest daughter of the family is still attending school and three other daughters are married.

### What's available:

Two glamping tents with 4-8 beds each. Shower and toilet are inside the house. If necessary, there is additional sleeping space in the small neighboring house. Meals consist almost exclusively of in-house products from the garden and the farm. They are professionally prepared and very tasty. Luggage transport with horses. Local guide available. Open year-round. We experience warm hospitality here. Communication in English is possible through the daughters of the host family.

### Activities:

Mreg is well-suited for a day of rest. Here we can refresh and strengthen ourselves for new exertions waiting for us the next day. Day hikes are also possible in the area. Depending on the route, Pjeter's guiding is highly recommended, as the paths are often barely recognizable and not marked.

*Flowering spring meadows on the plateau of Mreg*



*Adelina's parents*





## Stage 2

## Mreg - Alp Jeshnicë - Vermosh



7 h → 17.5 km ↑ 830 m ↓ 980 m

*Hike over the mountain crest Greben*

From Mreg, a panoramic high-altitude hike leads up the valley to the beautiful Alp Jeshnicë and on to the Metohisë pass. Alp Greben can be reached comfortably through meadows and forest or via a more strenuous but very panoramic high-level hike. From here, a steep descent takes us to the next stage destination in Vermosh.

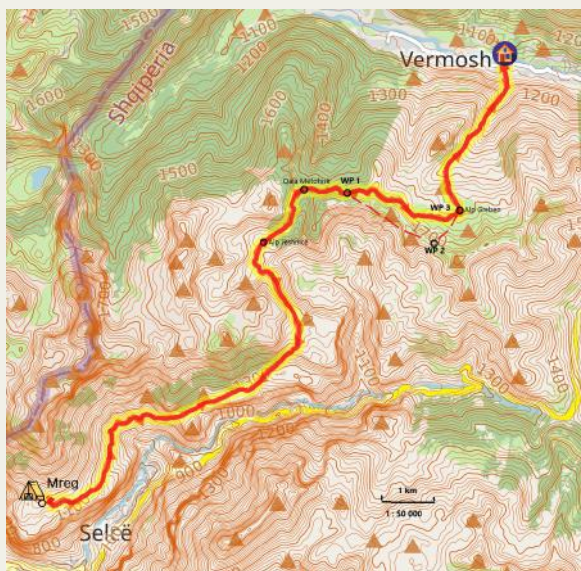
From Mreg, the path first leads leisurely over beautiful alpine meadows past some houses. After crossing a gully, in a short ascent we reach the hamlet of Javor, which is also inhabited all year round. (From here, it is possible to descend into the valley „Fushë Lloj“). The path continues leading up the valley over barren grass and scree, and continues slightly uphill along the mountain slope. After a beech forest and about four hours of hiking, a wide area opens up to the Alp Jeshnicë. Scattered alpine huts, isolated trees, streams with pools and small waterfalls, as well as a beautifully situated chapel, invite us to linger. The panorama of the surrounding mountains far across the valley of the Cem river is uniquely enchanting.

Unfortunately, this beautiful alpine place is only used by a few shepherds during the summer.

The path leads uphill in a northeastern direction through a forest aisle to the pass „Qafa Metohisë“ at 1670 m. From the pass, we continue east through a narrow forest path. After approx. 600 m, an old marking indicates the direct descent to Vermosh. However, this path is difficult to walk due to fallen trees and bushes, and we keep straight ahead. After about 500 m, the path forks again at WP 1:

**Option I:** The path marked on the left leads gently up and down the slope, over open terrain and through beech forest, up to Alp Greben with its scattered alpine huts.

**Option II:** The longer (+ 1 hour) and more strenuous path turns from WP 1 to the southeast and leads over grassy slopes without paths, then heads steeply up to the mountain crest. From the peak Maja Cakone (1819 m), the trail takes us up and down over the mountain crest Greben. Sometimes the slope drops steeply to the south, but these places can easily be avoided. The view is just wonderful - it stretches from the rock massiv of the Komovi in Montenegro to the border mountains towards Kosovo, and eastward to the wild rock pinnacles of the mountain range Prokletije. On the horizon in the southwest, the coastal mountains of Montenegro can be seen.





From the small pass Vushmaqë (WP 2) below the peak Maja Haramis (sometimes also called Maja Grebenit), a path leads through a grass slope in a southeastern direction to Lëpushë. Our path leads north over alpine meadows (blueberries!) down to Alp Greben and meets the hiking trail to Vermosh at WP 3. The path leads directly to our stage destination in the hamlet of Mernacaj.

Even more than other villages in the Kelmend region, Vermosh has been affected by emigration. Every year, some young people move away, many of them to the United States to live with relatives. A vivid example of this is the impressive church which was constructed after the end of the communist regime. At that time, it hardly had enough space for all the believers, but now it is much too big for the few remaining residents. In recent years, a lot has been invested, and, similar to Tamarë, the village centre has been renovated.

In the hamlet of Vermosh Qendër, there is a bar and a small village shop, about 1 km from our accommodation.

During the summer months, this part of our trek can be divided by adding an overnight stay on Alp Jeshnicë: from June to September, Zef Bunja from Mreg offers a simple overnight accommodation and meals in an alpine hut. Contact: +355 69 633 11 73

### "Highlander House", Vermosh - Mark Nacaj



12 Prs.



+355 69 533 53 53



highlander.house@yahoo.com



**Location:** Mernacaj District, on the valley floor, 1 km from the centre of Vermosh, a quiet location with lots of greenery around the house.

**What's available:** The former family house is rented out as a holiday home – 3 bedrooms on two floors with a total of 12 beds, 1 kitchen and 1 living room. Meals can be prepared by yourself or ordered from the host family. Ideal also for families staying several days. Luggage transport with horses and local guide. Open all year round.

**Hosts:** For a few years now, the Nacaj family has been running the village bar and a small shop in the centre of Vermosh. From summer 2021, the family will offer their converted family house as a holiday home. The driving force here is the son Mark, who, unlike most of his colleagues, sees his future in Vermosh. Having completed his studies, he is now working as a teacher at the small village school in Vermosh. The sister Arjeta and parents Prel and Gjyste are all involved in the business. Mark speaks English.

**Activities:** Mark and his father accompany tourists on tours in the region as guides.



*Alp Jeshnicë*

*Mark and Father Prel in front of the village pub in Vermosh*





## Stage 3

From the Albanian Vermosh to the Alp Bajrovića  
katun in Montenegro

4 h → 8 km ↑ 700 m ↓ 100 m

We transfer by taxi from the Albanian Vermosh to the valley of Babino Polje in Plav. From Gradine we hike uphill at first on the PoB route, then continue in a leisurely walk through beautiful forest areas and over the Alps to Bajrovića katun.

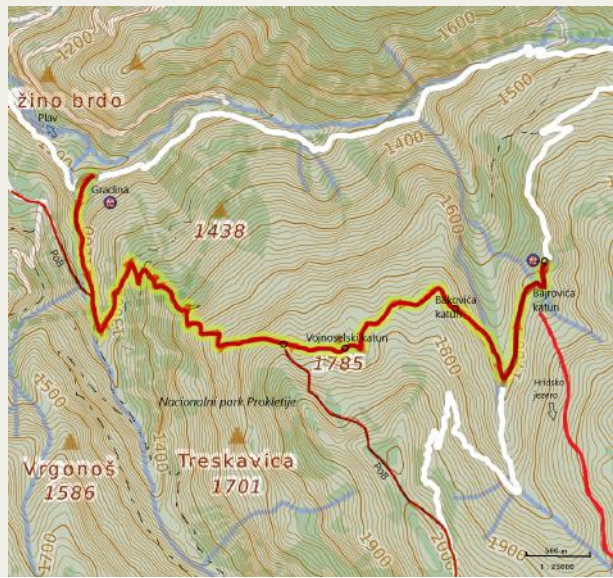


We take a taxi from Vermosh via the border crossing Grnčar-Bashkim to Plav in Montenegro (24 km, shopping facilities). A narrow road that is only partially asphalted leads further into the Babino Polje valley. After about 7 km, in a sharp left turn, there is a bridge over a side stream. Immediately afterwards, a sign post points upwards to the right to the Katun-Kamp „Gradine“ (accommodation and meals in beautiful bungalows in a green environment). After a small refreshment, we continue on foot. Along the stream, a gravel path leads into a side valley. After approx. 1 km, we come across the PoB sign.

We follow the nature trail to the northeast in the direction of the Veliki Hrid ridge, a path that serpentine and brings us to Alp Treskavica which is open to guests in summer.

Drinks are always available for purchase; food must be ordered in advance (Elda +382 (0) 67 019 601).

From Treskavica, we follow the marked path in the forest to WP 1 at 1750 meters above sea level. We then leave the PoB route to the east. At about constant elevation, a small path leads through beautiful forested areas to Alp Vojnoselski, which is idyllically surrounded by forest.





We cross the meadow below the huts and follow the tracks that lead above a secluded forest meadow with a stream in a north-easterly direction to Alp Bakovića katun. On the following gravel path we keep to the left, and after about 15 minutes, we reach the beautifully situated Alp Bajrovića katun, which is today's destination.

### Transfer Vermosh-Plav-Gradine

Must be organized the evening before at the latest!

- "Gradine katun kamp" - Labud Turković  >20 Prs.  +382 67 528622 

The well-kept bungalows are also recommended for overnight stays, for example as an alternative to stopping in Vermosh or after a day of rest in Plav.

- Bimber Jadadić, Plav : +382 69 035 894

### "Samelova koliba/Samels Cottage", Bajrovića katun - Ermina Redžematović

 24 Prs.  +382 68 380 335  samelovakolibahrid@gmail.com 

**Location:** The panoramic alpine pastoral settlement is situated high above the valley of Babino Polje at 1,700 m above sea level and can be reached by car from the valley on a gravel road towards Hridsko Jezero (Lake Hrid).

**What's available:** Specialties with products from the alpine settlement and from the house garden on the terrace with distant view and evening sun. Overnight stay in bungalows, toilet/shower. Open from June to the end of September/middle of October (depending on the weather).

**Hosts:** Family business. The hostess Ermina Redžematović runs the farm with dedication and passion, pampers her guests, looks after the livestock and makes cheese. The husband and son Samel travel back and forth between the farm in Plav and the alpine farm in Bajrovića Katun. The son Samel is still attending high school and would like to continue to run the farm later. He speaks English.

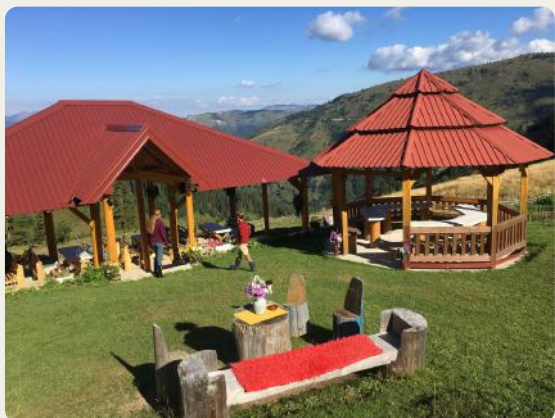
**Activities:** Well suited for a stay of several days, and also for families. The surrounding forests invite you to explore and play in them. The day hike to Hridsko jezero with picnic and swimming is very nice and entertaining.

If you wish, you can return from there to Bajrovića Katun in a circular hike: take the PoB route via Veliki Hrid towards Plav and follow the markers for stage 3 at WP 1 above Treskavica via Vojnoselski and Bakovića Katun back to the starting point.

*Upper part of Bajrovića katun*



*Ermina's terrace*





## Stage 4

## From the Montenegrin Alp Bajrovića katun to the Albanian Alp Dobërdol



4:30 h → 10.5 km ↑ 500 m ↓ 400 m



In the first part of today's journey, we follow the PoB route through a beautiful mountain forest to Lake Hrid (Montenegrin: Hridsko Jezero). We continue on a panoramic high-altitude hike on the Albanian-Montenegrin border near the mountain Tromeđa which forms the tri-border region between Montenegro, Kosovo and Albania. After a steep descent, we reach our first destination on the beautiful Alp Dobërdol.

The PoB route leads from Alp Bajrovića katun through secluded forest passages to Lake Hrid (Montenegrin: Hridsko Jezero), an idyllic mountain lake in the middle of a mountain forest, a beautiful place to rest and swim. Along the lake we have to walk around some boulders.

After a steep ascent up the slope we reach a gravel path with signposts (WP 1). We follow this path to the southeast in the direction of Dobërdol, and after about 2.5 kilometers, we reach a beautifully situated ruin with a sunken roof: an abandoned border post (Montenegrin: karaula) from the Yugoslav era.

Here we keep on hiking up a valley to the left which leads us to a small pass (WP 2). A path now leads to the southeast in a panoramic, high-altitude hike along the Albanian-Montenegrin border with a view of the green ridges of Babino Polje and the steep Albanian mountains on the other side. At WP 3, a marker indicates the junction to Dobërdol. The small path leads through gravel a few meters up to the ridge, from where we can see the alp directly below us. We reach the alp via a steep descent through grass and gravel.

*Descent from mountain Tromeđa with a view of the Babino Polje valley*






**Option 1:** From WP 3, the high-altitude hike can be continued to the small pass at WP 4. From there, the peak of the Tromedja/Trekufi can be climbed in about 20 minutes. This is where the borders of the three countries of Montenegro, Albania and Kosovo meet. The view is spectacular and extends from the mountain ranges and valleys in the mountain area of Kosovo and Montenegro towards Valbona and the Prokletije mountains. On the same path we get back to WP 3.


**Option 2:**

Starting from WP 4, there is a promising high-altitude hike on the PoB route to the pass Sedlo Zaboј (descent to valley Babino Polje) or further towards Guri Kuq and Rugova in Kosovo.

### Guesthouses

In Dobërdol, from mid-June until mid-September there are various accommodations to choose from, as the alp is a popular destination on the PoB route. Two examples of beautifully situated guesthouses:

**"Bilbil Vatnika Guest House"** is located by the stream, in the immediate vicinity of small swimming areas. Breakfast can be taken on the bridge over the stream. ☎ +355 69 789 63 70 

**Bujtina "Leonard"** at the lower edge of the Alp near the stream, consists of several alpine huts with a large outdoor area. ☎ +355 68 676 76 06 

### Ammenities and activities:

Dobërdol is well-suited for a day of rest on the alp or a stay of several days if you are travelling with children. Alpine life on Alp Dobërdol is brisk and influenced by both tradition and modernity. The residents come mainly from Bajram Curri and Tropojë

The alpine meadow is spacious and is crossed by a beautiful stream with several bathing pools. Various hiking destinations beckon in the area: for example, the turquoise-blue mountain lake Liqeni i Dashit or the highest peak in Kosovo, the Gjeravica.

Most accommodations offer luggage transport with horses and will make arrangements for local guides.



Mountain lake Hridsko jezero



Guesthouse Bilbil



## Stage 5

## Dobërdol - Balçinë



3 h → 6 km ↑ 270 m ↓ 210 m

Relaxing high-altitude hike over alps with spectacular views and through fragrant mountain forest to the shepherds' settlement of Balçinë



Alp Balçinë



Today's journey is relatively short and therefore provides the opportunity to take it easy or to linger a bit in Dobërdol before setting off. Our hike follows the PoB route towards the village of Çerem, then leads up high above the wild and almost inaccessible Gashi valley along a steep slope below the „Rock of Wolves“ (Kerrshi i Uikes). We continue over beautiful alpine meadows with a view back towards Dobërdol. On the way, we come upon improvised alpine huts. Their residents mainly collect and dry blueberries for sale. Often in late summer, we run into a group of adults and children with blue-dyed lips and hands, with a horse carrying the filled containers. Now the path goes up through groves and a small valley with some streams of water. In some places we come across a newly laid gravel road. (Please pay attention to the markings!)

In a forest clearing, drinks are offered near a log hut. With little change in altitude, the small path continues through a fragrant mountain forest to the shepherds' settlement of Balçinë. This place is often used for lunch breaks when hiking on the PoB route on the journey from Çerem to Dobërdol. But as for us, we enjoy the unique evening atmosphere of this secluded alp. Most of the inhabitants of Balçinë come from the Tropojë region. Here as well, most of the residents are busy picking blueberries in addition to keeping cows and sheep.



We spend the night in a simple wooden hut in order to be rested for the longer journey the next day. The tinkling of the bells of the returning sheep and cows and the evening hustle and bustle from the alp takes us into a self-sufficient world. We can watch the milking and enjoy a simple, but tasty dinner in front of the hut with a view over the steep and inaccessible mountain slopes of the wild Gashi valley.



*Returning from picking blueberries*



*Qamile preparing her tasty pita bread*

### "Guesthouse Balçina" - Jetmir Sali Mulkurtaj



12-14 Prs.



+355 68 260 77 90



jetmirsalihi826@gmail.com



**Contact:** Jetmir Sali Mulkurtaj (speaks little English)

**Location:** In the upper part of the hillside shepherds' settlement of Balçinë – beautiful views.

**What's available:** Two simple wooden huts with a total of 12–15 beds. A simple toilet/shower for guests. Tasty, traditional alpine food (e.g. especially tasty pita/burek with wild spinach). Luggage transport with horses. Local guide. Jetmir organises transfers to Balçinë from Lake Koman, Valbona, etc. in his all-terrain vehicle.

Open from 10 June to early October, depending on snow and weather conditions.

**Hosts:** Family business run by Sali and Qamile Mulkurtaj, and their son Jetmir, his women Gjyke and their two children.

**Activities:** Picking blueberries with the hosts, helping to prepare meals or milking.

*Jetmir in front of his guesthouse*



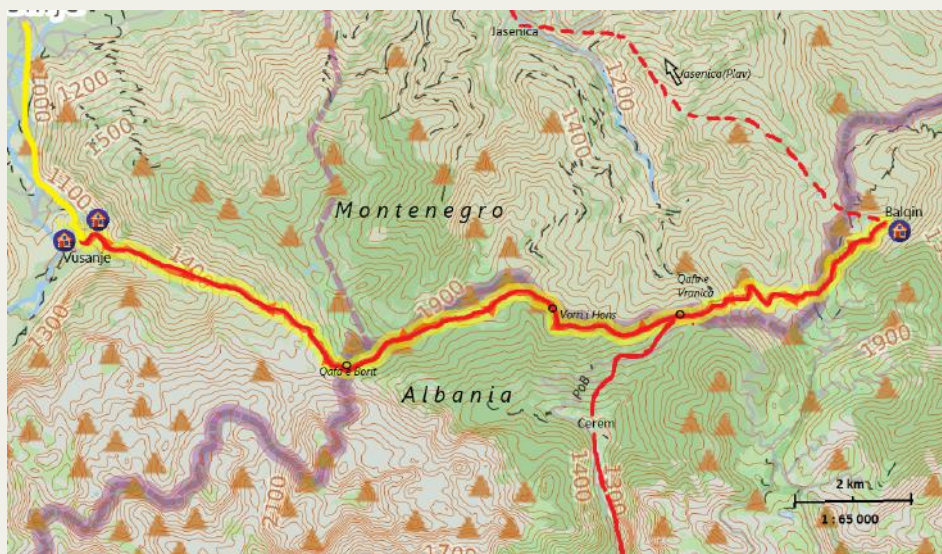


## Stage 6

## Balçinë - Vusanje (Montenegro)



7 h → 19 km ↑ 500 m ↓ 1300 m



**This beautiful and panoramic mountain hike, high above Valbona National Park, follows little-used paths along the Montenegrin-Albanian border. Its distance and the long descent to Vusanje demand good endurance.**

First we follow the PoB route for a good hour to Vranica Pass. A pyramid-shaped border marker has been erected here.

Part of the following section is via along barely visible trails through forests and over abandoned alpine pastures, ascending westwards. The view sweeps over the rocky peaks of the Valbona Valley, and the wild Kollata massif lies in front of us. Orientation skills are an advantage despite the recently installed trail markers. In one meadow we come across the Vorri i Hons grave monument, a pleasant resting place with a great view. From here we follow well-trodden shepherds' paths on the south side of the mountain range, with beautiful views of the Valbona Mountains, while below us we can see isolated alpine huts. Near the Qafa e borit (Bora Pass) we again come across improvised alpine huts – the roofs are covered over in the winter because of the snow. The inhabitants mainly collect blueberries. We leave the pass itself on the left and keep northwest, descending on a well-marked path through the Zarunica Valley to Vusanje, with the wild peaks of the Prokletije Mountains in front of us. In the Fush Sirma alpine pasture, there is a stop for refreshments (drinks, traditional pastries) open throughout the summer. The small village of Vusanje (Vuthaj in Albanian) at the entrance to the impressive Ropojana Valley is located in Montenegro, but the population is Albanian. Almost every family has relatives who have emigrated to the USA. In addition to the old houses, the American influence is visible in the architectural style of some of the newly built houses.

**Variants:** - From the Vranica Pass, there is the option of descending on the PoB route southwest to Çerem, or north through the long Trocus Valley to Plav.

- Directly from Balçinë, trails lead via Horolac/Hoti to Plav (a guide is recommended).

- From the Bora Pass, a marked trail leads east to Çerem. - To the west, a path leads over Katun Grlata through the wild high valley below Mt. Zla Kollata to the Persillopi Pass and on to Kukaj near Valbona.



## "Guesthouse Moonlight", Vusanje



>20 Prs.



+382 69 450734



**Contact :** Beni Dedushaj

**Location:** In the village of Gornje Vusanje (Vuthaj e sipërm in Albanian).

**What's available:** Comfortable accommodation with lots of wood, each room with its own shower and toilet. Very good and rich cuisine from own production. The son Beni offers driving services in the surrounding area with his minibus (with limited off-road mobility). Open all year round.

**Hosts:** The parents and the son Beni Dedushaj have been running this accommodation for a few years with great success and often host groups.

## "Bujtina Dedushaj"- Vusanje



12 Prs.



+382 69 611 621

**Location:** In the upper part of the village, a few minutes from Moonlight Guesthouse.

**What's available:** The house offers simple shared rooms with a beautiful view, 3 toilets/ showers and a covered outdoor terrace. They own several horses for luggage transport or accompanied riding.

**Hosts:** A family business, run by grandparents and parents with three small children, farm.

### Activities:

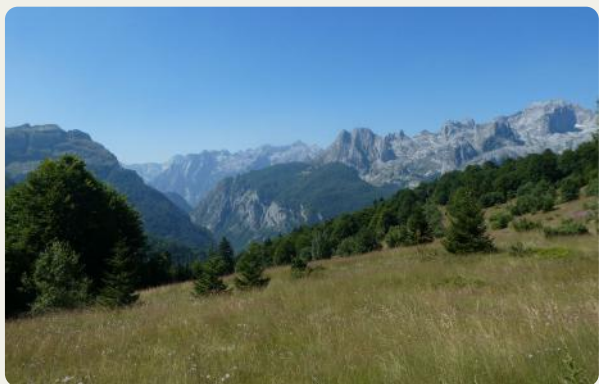
Vusanje is well suited for a rest day or a stay of several days: it is worth visiting the impressive karst phenomena in the surroundings. Just below the village of Gornje Vusanje, Grlata Stream plunges into the depths of a rocky gorge and winds in a narrow canyon towards the hamlet of Gerane. An unmarked path leads above the Grlata (or easier access via a little road) over the bridge to the hamlet of Gerane and from there further on to the Ali Pasha Springs, where many springs well up from the ground and form an idyllic water landscape amidst lush greenery.

A walk along the bottom of the impressive Ropojane Trough Valley leads to Syri i kalter (Oko/Mountain Eye): the ice-cold turquoise-blue water comes out of the rocks underground and creates a wonderful water basin. Nearby is Lake Plav.

Vusanje is also a good starting point for longer and slightly more demanding hiking and mountain tours.



*The village of Vusanje at the entrance to the Ropojane valley*



*Hiking high above the Valbona valley*



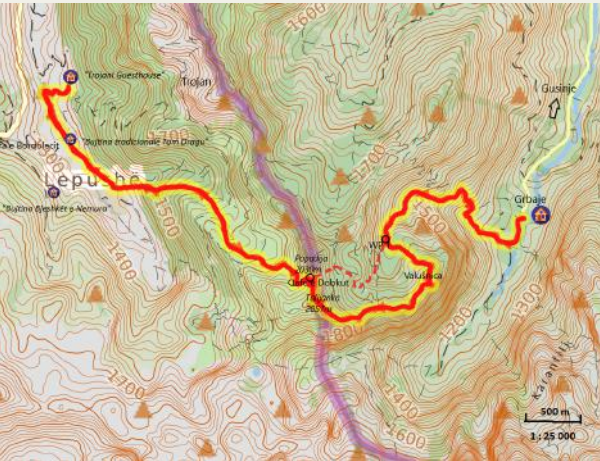
## Stage 7

## Back to Albania - from Grebaj to Lëpushë



6 h → 9 km ↑ 1000 m ↓ 840 m

The beautiful trough valley of Grebaj, formed long ago by a glacier, is surrounded by rugged mountains. A steep ascent through mountain forest leads us to the Alp Valušnica and on to an impressive ridge hike, under the spell of the wild rock pinnacles of the Karanfil mountain peak. From the peak of the Talijanka at 2057 meters above sea level (Albanian: Vajushë), the view opens into the valley of Lëpushë, which is our next destination in Albania.



From Vusanje, we travel by taxi to the town of Gusinje (shopping facilities) and further to the beautiful side valley of Grebaj (a total of 12 km). The steep, marked ascent begins at the Maja Karanfil guesthouse. The trail takes us through beech forest up to the Alp Valušnica. From there, a small valley leads southeast to the mountain peak of Maja Çan. The Grebaj valley lies directly below us. As the impressive wild Karanfil mountain peak hovers above, we continue on a very beautiful, sometimes challenging hike over the ridge of

Valušnica to the summit of the Talijanka (2057 m above sea level). The panoramic view is overwhelmingly beautiful, and extends from the mountains towards Kosovo over the peaks of Prokletije, Lëpushë, Komovi and Greben.

**(Option:** In order to avoid the ridge hike, when exiting the mountain forest at WP 1 towards the southwest, we can aim for the Dobku pass, partly without a path, across the alp.)

From the Talijanka, the path leads us along the ridge a few meters down to the Dobku pass and over steep slopes down to Alp Dobku. There is a beautiful stream with water safe for drinking. Then we descend on a marked path through a steep mountain forest to the village of Lëpushë.



Like many places in northern Albania, Lëpushë also consists of several hamlets and scattered groups of houses. The bright shining red roofs of the houses are surrounded by green meadows and fruit trees, and in the background, the wild peak of Bjeshkët e Nemuna looks on majestically. The center is the pass Qafa e Bordoletit at 1355 meters above sea level, where a church, a school and two bars are located - the meeting point of the region. Here the road from Tamarë to Lëpushë and Vermosh reaches its highest altitude. Due to its beautiful location, Lëpushë is well suited for a stay of several days. The surrounding area can be explored on many walks and hikes. There are several guest accommodations to choose from: three smaller, family-run accommodations are described here in more detail:



### "Trojani Guesthouse"-Lëpushë



14 Prs.



+355 67 676 36 49

**Location:** When descending from Mt. Talijanka, follow the path on the right side of the valley, after the Pepushaj Bungalows located by the stream, keep slightly upwards for about 700 m towards the edge of the forest. Coming from the Bordoleci pass, a marked trail towards the Trojan mountain leads down to the stream. On the other side of the stream, a gravel path leads up to the Trojani guesthouse. A quiet location on the edge of the forest.

**Hosts:** The family will offer rooms for guests in their newly renovated house from 2021. The parents Lin and Gjeline Çekaj, two sons Valerjan and Nua and the little daughter Suela work in the business. The son Nua speaks English.

**What's available:** 4 rooms with a total of 14 beds. Two toilets & showers for guests in the house. Well-suited for guests (also families) who appreciate a quiet location. Catering is from the family's own produce. Transport on horse. Local guide. Open all year round.

**Activities:** 'Farm holidays' with many animals: sheep, cows, chickens and horses. Guided rides in the surrounding area for children. Insights into life on the farm (milking, looking after animals, cheese production).

A little more professional and less personally guided:

### "Bujtina tradicionale" Tom Dragu- Lëpushë



20 Prs.



+355 69 331 09 13



bujtinatradicionale@gmail.com



**Location:** The stately, traditional house stands on a hill with a beautiful view of Bjeshkët e Nemuna.

**What's available:** 4 rooms with a total of 20 beds, traditionally and lovingly furnished. Each with its own toilet/shower. Three newly built bungalows.

Garden seating area and well-equipped dining room. Communication in English possible.

### "Bujtina Bjeshkët e Nemura"- Lëpushë (Contact: Ilir Grishaj)



26 Prs.



+ 355 69 747 86 22



grishaj@libero.it



**Location:** Beautifully situated at the valley floor, at the end of the descent from Mt. Taljanka. Beautiful view of the mountains. Garden sitting area.

**What's available:** 6 rooms with toilet/shower, 4 rooms with 2 communal toilets/showers, a total of 26 beds. Local products for sale.

Communication in English, Italian and Montenegrin possible.

Both accommodations offer traditional home-made dishes and are open all year round. Guide, luggage transport and transfers can be arranged. From Friday to Sunday, guests from Tirana often stay in these accommodations and it is accordingly lively.

*Ridge hike towards mountain Taljanka*

*"Trojani Guesthouse"-Lëpushë*





## Stage 8

## Lëpushë - Nikç



5:30 h → 12 km ↑ 500m ↓ 1200 m

A hike from the alpine Lëpushë to the Jamë pass which offers a great panoramic view. When the weather is good, we can even see a part of Lake Skadar. A long descent over alpine meadows and through forest into the southern-looking high valley of Nikç which seems to be located at the end of the world.

The marked hiking trail to Nikç starts at the Bordoleci pass and leads south-east uphill through meadows and beech forest. After about an hour we reach a beautiful stream in the forest and soon step into open and wide alpine terrain with scattered alpine huts. Berizhdoll mountain is visible in front of us, with an incision to the left and right of it. Our path leads up on the left to the Jamë pass (1820 m above sea level) which draws us close to the mighty and inhospitable rocks of the Prokletije mountain peak. In the distance, a part of Lake Skadar and the coastal mountains can be seen from the pass when the air is clear.

**Alternative option:** Whoever wants, can reach the peak Maja Berizhdollit (1979 m above sea level) over the ridge in just under half an hour. There the view extends from the rugged rock peaks far to Montenegro, Kosovo, to Lake Skadar and the coastal mountains. We return the same way back to the Jamë pass (a total of 2.5 km, 180 m!).

A steep path leads through gravel and scree down to Alp Berizhdoll. In early summer, this plateau is covered with flowers. We keep to the left where the stream forms a small canyon. The plain that we reach may be covered by water after heavy rainfalls or in spring - this temporary lake can be bypassed on the left at the forest edge. In the following beech forest, large boulders bear witness to a landslide in the past.

While we continue descending in the forest, the path is partly hidden under leaves or under fallen trees. As we enter open terrain, it becomes noticeably warmer. And as we reach lower altitudes, the vegetation, much as it is in the South of Europe, is dominated by juniper bushes, blackberries and hornbeams along the way. On a plateau high above the valley floor, we come across some houses, some of which are still inhabited. Here, a fresh water spring invites us to take a break. Far below on the valley floor, the red roofs of the houses and a church shine in the midst of fields and gardens. This green oasis is located in the middle of a stony and rocky desert, surrounded by steep mountains; it seems to be at the end of civilization.

The descent over the last stretch for today leads partly on a footpath, partly on a newly built gravel road. Our accommodation is among the first group of houses and is recognizable by its blue color. After the strenuous descent, the shady pergola invites us to relax with a cool drink.





Bujtina / Guesthouse \*Maja e Shnikut", Nikç



14 Prs.



+355 69 371 01 32



mirelaturkaj@gmail.com



*Guesthouse Maja e Shnikut at the end of the valley*

**Contact:** Gjon and Lina Turkaj

Their daughter Mirela Turkaj speaks English.

**Location:**

Nikç is, so to say, at the end of the world, at the far end of the valley, and can be reached via a bumpy gravel road from Tamarë. (14 km)

**Host:**

Family business, run by Lina and Gjon Turkaj.

The family farm is self-sufficient, growing corn, beans and potatoes, and they keep a few cows, sheep, pigs, chickens and horses.

Their youngest son is still in school, and the older daughters are married or studying.

**What's available:**

3 nice rooms with good beds in the house; Shower and toilet; Large multi-bed room in the adjoining building with shower and toilet; Pergola and terrace with a view of the mountain world; luggage transport with the horses: They organize the travel back to Tamarë. The property is available year round.

**Activities:**

Despite the language barrier, Lina likes to give insight into her life and everyday work.

Horse-riding in the area

Lina and Gjon are very familiar with the area and can show hidden paths leading into the surrounding mountains.



*Descent from the Jama pass*



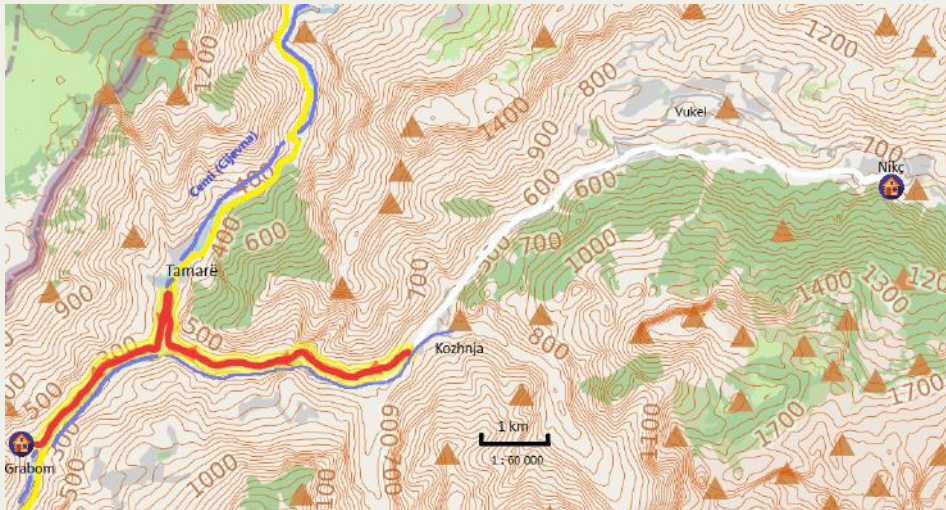
*View from the Jama pass towards the rugged rocky desert of Bjeshket e Nemuna*



## Stage 9

Nikç-Tamarë-Grabom  
Farewell to the mountains

3 h → 8 km ↑ 0 m ↓ 250 m



**On foot or by all-terrain vehicle, we leave the secluded mountain world of Nikç towards the Cemi Valley. Hiking along the turquoise-blue River Cemi, we reach the beautifully located Grabom Guesthouse, where our trekking ends.**

The side valley of Nikç and Vukël is only connected to the main valley by a bumpy dirt road. During renovation of the area's roads in 2016, this access road was not asphalted, and so the people in the valley continue to live in isolation and seclusion.

The upper part of the valley is wide, with houses dotted here and there along the way. From the hamlet of Vukël Muriq onwards, the previously dry riverbed starts to carry water and the valley begins to narrow. After the village of Kozhnja, the track leads up along a deep gorge towards the Cemi Valley. The hosts can organise a taxi on request (Kozhnja €20, Tamarë €30). For the bumpy ride, a vehicle with some off-road capability is an advantage.

The almost 10 km to Kozhnja can also be covered by foot along the road – there is hardly any traffic. In this way, traces of settlements and the remoteness of this region can be experienced at first hand. Shortly after the school in Kozhnja, there is a wooden cross at the side of the path and the trail lead down to the river, where a rickety wooden footbridge (without railings) leads over the wild mountain stream. On the righthand side of the valley, high above the gorge, an impressive path leads out of the valley. Again and again, beautiful views open towards the turquoise-blue water below us and the dizzying rocks high above our heads. Some short sections cross over steep scree slopes. Once in the valley, we walk uphill along the road for about 10 minutes and cross the River Cemi over a bridge just before the village Tamarë.

A narrow path leads above the right bank of the River Cemi down the valley. Some places are slightly exposed and demand some concentration or, for children, a helping hand. Along the way, we can glimpse caves in the rock, which were once inhabited by shepherds and their flocks.



Six kilometres after Tamarë we reach the guesthouse of Zef Pllumaj in Grabom, a beautiful place to take a break and relax or to spend the night. Near the house, we will have the opportunity to take a swim in the ice-cold River Cemi or to play and relax on beautiful meadows under fruit trees. From the guesthouse, the main road towards the Božaj/Hani i Hotit and Grabom border crossings can be reached in a few minutes via a suspension bridge.

**Option:** A footpath leads along the Cemi across the 'green border' to Montenegro. There are several nice bathing places along the way. The border is crossed after about 7 km at a small stone wall. At the first house on the Montenegrin side, steps lead down over a rock to a beach with a nice bathing pool. Transfer by taxi towards Podgorica (26 km).

The official path is partly overgrown, but these sections can be avoided via paths across open meadows. We recommend being accompanied by Zef Pllumaj.

### "Guesthouse Zef Pllumaj"- Grabom



8-10 Prs



+ 355 69 25 34 001

#### **Location:**

Idyllically located on the banks of the river Cem, the accommodation can be reached in just five minutes from the road: a suspension bridge leads over the river, we climb up a rocky step using a staircase and stand in front of the imposing, traditionally built house which is surrounded by meadows and fruit trees.

#### **Host:**

A family business, consisting of the parents Zef and Marija, their daughters as well as the grandmother and Zef's sister. The income from the guest accommodation is a welcome addition to their self-sufficiency from agriculture.

#### **Offer:**

3 guest rooms with a total of 10 beds ; Shower / toilet in the house ; Marija is a good cook and prepares varied dishes with her own products - with love and attention ; Zef is a certified guide and knows the area very well ; Luggage transport by car

The daughters speak English

#### **Activities:**

Hiking along the river Cem towards the Montenegrin border. Ascent to the historic church ruin of Pshtan. Swimming in the crystal-clear but icy cold pool of the river Cem

*Path along the Cem river*



*"Guesthouse Zef Pllumaj"- Grabom*





## Epilogue of the authors

**BalkanTour** is a Montenegrin–Swiss family business and offers hiking and trekking tours for small groups in various countries in South-East Europe, including in the border region between Montenegro and Albania. From our home in Montenegro, we can see across Lake Skadar to the mountains of this wonderful region: a very different, yet familiar world.

Due to the coronavirus crisis in 2020/21, our business suffered a complete collapse. As is the case with many other local individuals and companies active in tourism, the situation has seen a complete loss of earnings and great uncertainty.

In this respect, it is an opportunity and a pleasure for us, with the support of the **Deutsche Gesellschaft für internationale Zusammenarbeit GIZ**, by means of this travel guide to present the wonderful mountain world between Montenegro and Albania and its genial hosts.

We hope that this guide will inspire you, the reader, to have enriching experiences and encounters, and thus enable the people living there to have more guests visiting them.

**Liability:** The descriptions and data collection for this walking guide were done to the best of the authors' knowledge and beliefs. Use of this guide is at the user's own risk and the authors in no way accept any liability resulting from its use.

**Cartography:** Openstreet Map, scales as specified on the individual maps.

**Images:** Most pictures were taken by the authors, some were provided by hosts.

**Translation:** Ullrich und Elisabeth Drechsel and Porta Aperta



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