

# THE KILIM OF KUKËS: NATURE'S KNITTING, HISTORY AND CULTURE





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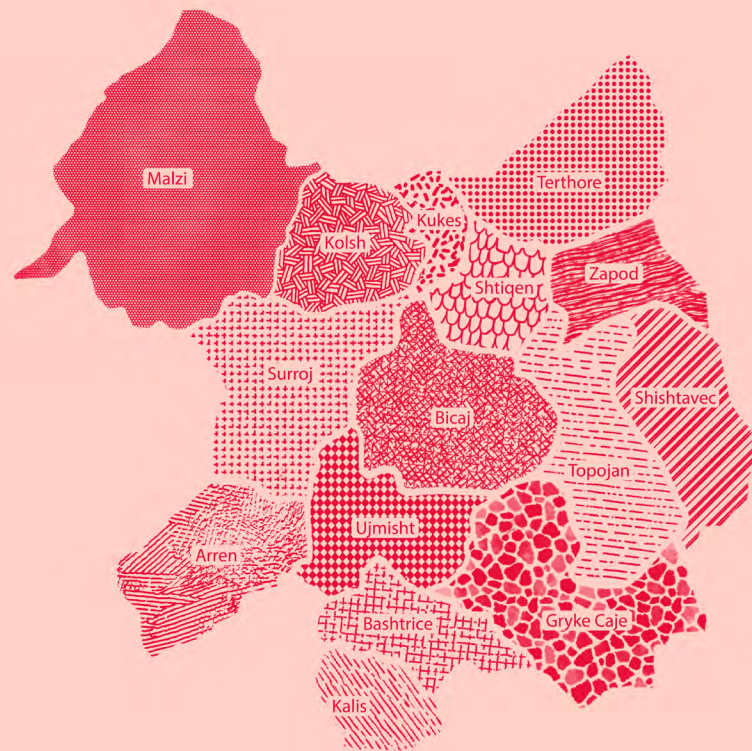
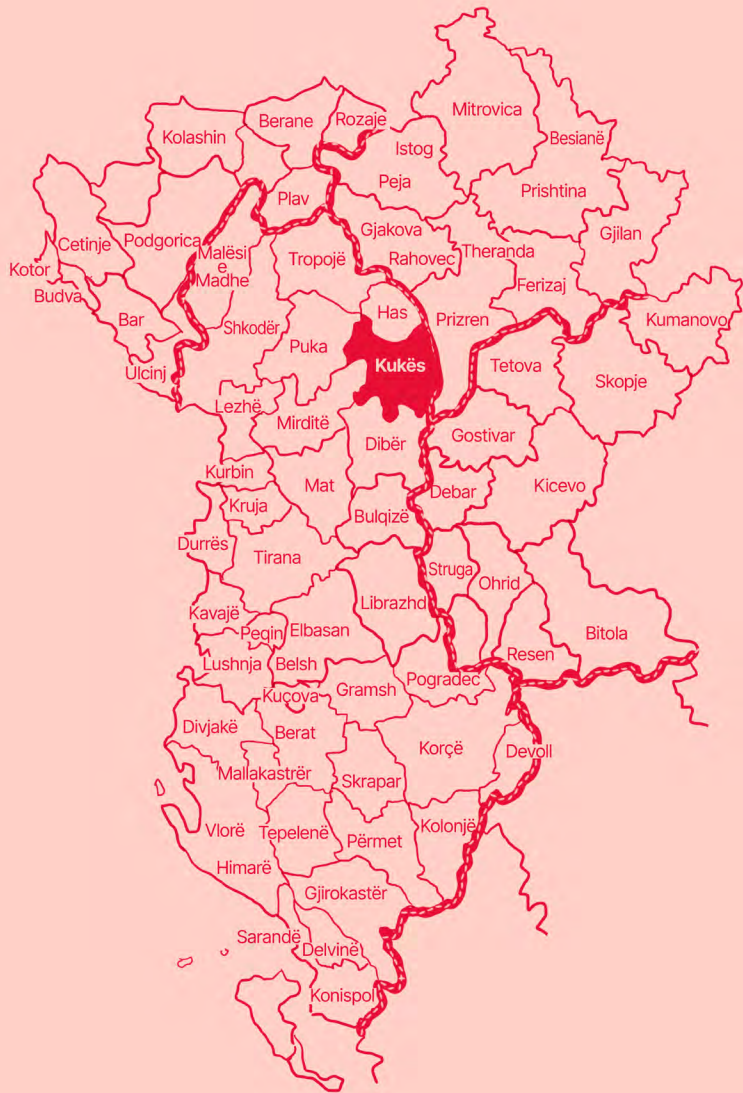
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Tirana, 2023

## EXPLORE KUKËS

Discover the hidden beauties in this unforgettable destination, from the heights of mountain peaks to the depths of ancient traditions, where nature and culture stand together. The guide leads you on a rich and brief journey through the history and unique features of Kukës, highlighting every detail that makes this region extraordinary.





Administrative map of Kukës



Tregtan

Pusi i Thatë

Gjinaj

Domaj

Morinë

Bardhoc 1

Myc-Has

Drini i Bardhë

Bardhoc 2

Stanet e Bardhosit

Kodër-Lumë

Gjegjan

Breg-Lumë

Pobreg

Stanet Hallaci

Kalimash

Kolsh

Drinas

Myc-Mamëz

Lumë

Gryka e Vanave

Stanet Hallaci

Mamëz

Gostil

Shtiqën

Belje

Zapod

Fusharë

Shtiqën

Lojme

Orcikël

Cinamak

Krenze

Gjallicë

Cernalevë

Bushat

Nangë

Nimçe

Drini i Zi

Kolesjan

Tërshërë

Brekije

Shishtavec

# CONTENT

History .....	14
Geography and Climate .....	30
Biodiversity .....	42
Culture .....	54
Explore Kukës' newest hiking trails .....	68
Tour Guides .....	98
Public Transport .....	96

# HISTORY



## The Bronze Age

Evidence of human habitation in present-day Kukës stretches back to the Bronze Age, a time when early civilizations such as the Illyrians, the Dardanians, and the Romans founded settlements in this region. Various Illyrian cemeteries have been discovered in the vicinity of old Kukës, in the villages of Kënetë and Kolsh, which date back to the Neolithic period.<sup>1</sup>

## Neolithic Period

## 1978

Old Kukësi has been continuously populated from that ancient period up until 1978, when the communist regime of that time decided to build the Fierza dam, flooding old Kukësi under the waters of the lake. In times of drought and low water levels, a part of the old Kukës can be seen with the naked eye. The New Kukësi was populated in 1978, although the constructions began in 1962.

## Now

Kukësi now tells its own story, blending historical legacy with modern developments. Lying under the waters of the lake, the old Kukësi brings the sentiment of a lost city, while the new Kukës, with its network of tunnels, offers an engaging experience for modern-day visitors.

## 2000 Nobel Prize

In 2000, the city of Kukës was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize after hosting 450,000 Albanians from Kosovo, who moved to Kukës due to the Serbian genocide.

*Photography CRISTINA GARCÍA RODERO, 1999, Kukës*



# Urban Planning

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Old Kukës



Old Kukës

*Image Source: Safet Dokle*

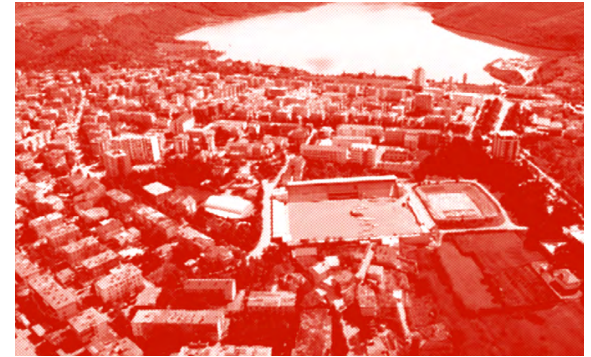


New Kukës,  
in the beginning

*Image Source: Vox*

New Kukës

*Image Source:  
Shutterstock*



New Kukës  
Year 1987

*Image Source:  
Ramadan Dokle*



New Kukës  
Year 2000



## TUNNELS

Beneath the streets of Kukës lies a chapter of Albania's history: the tunnels constructed during the communist era. Initiated in 1970 and abandoned with the regime's fall, these tunnels stand as relics of the era's efforts to strengthen the nation's defenses and reflect the fear of invasion that characterized communist paranoia.

The 30-meter-deep tunnels showcase advanced technology for their time, designed to offer protection against chemical and nuclear threats. Spanning 7 kilometers, these tunnels are reinforced with concrete walls approximately half a meter thick and equipped with efficient ventilation systems, ensuring safety and air quality.

A visit to these tunnels takes you on an interesting journey, where you can see how a complete underground settlement was organized. Designed to sustain 16,000 people for six months, the tunnels' intricate layout featured essential facilities like a bakery, school, hospital, maternity ward, prosecutor's office, police station, and even a radio station and printing press used for communist propaganda.

Within these tunnels, you'll find areas set aside for a range of activities, including educational spaces for children and training areas for both male and female military personnel. Additionally, the tunnels were equipped with strategic locks to block unauthorized access during invasions. This underground network was a key component of Albania's fortified defense system, regarded as the country's most robust protection at the time. To integrate this extensive network with the city above, the tunnels were linked with vertical wells in various neighborhoods, ensuring convenient and secure entry points for the residents of the city above.<sup>234</sup>

## Underground Kukës

*Image Source:  
Urban Research  
Institute, 2023*



# The Timeline of Kukës

**1571**  
Kukësi consisted of 12 houses, referred to as the village of Nahije of Luma

**1912**  
The inhabitants of the city were massacred by the Serbian forces

**1925-1930**  
Hundreds of families from Gjakova and Prizren migrate towards Kukës

**1949**  
The branch of the State Bank is established

**31 March 1962**  
It's decided to be flooded  
The Old Kukës

**1978**  
The entire population had moved to New Kukës

**2000**  
Nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize

**1610**  
Known as Coccus, it consisted of 50 houses

**1922**  
Until now it was included in prefecture of Kosovo

**1935**  
Rebellion anti-Zogist run by Muharrem Bajraktari

**1954**  
The cinema was built

**December 1990**  
demonstrations of Anti-Communist

**2010**  
The National Road is opened

**1689**  
The plague brought the abandonment of Kukës

**1923**  
Elections are won from the left group, lead by Avni Rustem

**1940**  
Creation of the road way with Shkodra

**1958**  
The water supply system was built

**31 March 1991**  
The first democratic elections are held

OLD KUKËS

**1869**  
Appears under the name Kukusa

**December 1924**  
Retaken by the forces government of Muharrem Bajraktari

**September 1943**  
Kukësi is freed from Italian occupation

**1960**  
The Puppet Theater was built

**12 March 1997**  
The population leaves the city after the news that it would be attacked by the Serbian army

NEW KUKËS

**XVIII Century**  
Kukësi was repopulated, appeared under the name Drinbardh

**16 JUNE 1924**  
Attacked by insurgent forces of Bajram Curri

**1940**  
Anti-fascist resistance in Kukës led by Muharrem Bajraktari

**1960**  
Creation of Radio Kukës

**11 March 1997**  
Armed gangs take control of military weapons depots

**1633**  
Archbishop P. Mazrek mention Vau e Kuk

**1923**  
It becomes a provincial center with 28 houses and 186 inhabitants

**14 April 1939**  
Occupied by Fascist Italy

**1956**  
The high school was built

**5 January 1991**  
The branch of the Democratic Party is created

**Neolithic**  
The earliest signs of habitatin

**1912-1920**  
Occupied by Serbs, Bulgarians and Austrians

**August 1925**  
Is announced as the center of the prefecture

**1946**  
The city is supplied with electricity

**22 July 1962**  
The works for the construction of New Kukës began

**Prill 1965**  
The population of New Kukës began

**1999**  
Kukës shelters 450,000 Albanians from Kosovo

**August 1988**  
Havzi Nela the poet, is killed in the center of the city

**2006**  
The construction of Kukes Airport is completed

# Historical Landmarks

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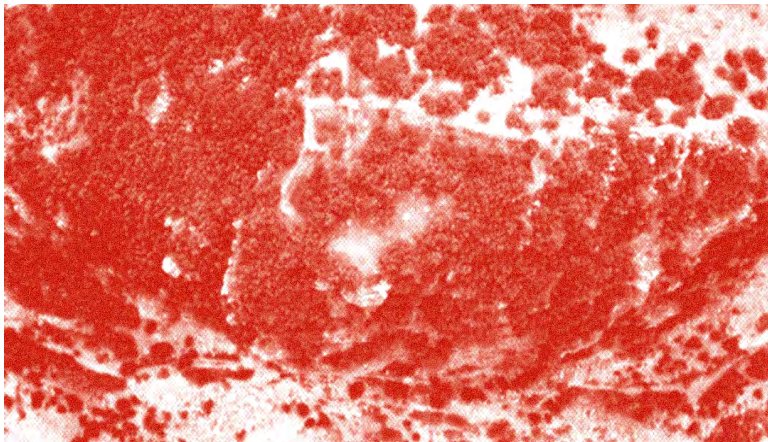
## Shëmrisë Castle

The Shëmria Castle, positioned at a location known as the “Neck of the Town,” stands on a conical hill. This castle is encircled by a wall that closely follows the contours of the hill.

## Domaje Castle

The Domajve Castle, often referred to as ‘Cape of the Castle’, is situated in the Ujmishti region. Its walls, built with high-quality stones, are similar to those found in other nearby castles. Archaeological digs at this site have uncovered fascinating artifacts, providing insights into the history of both the castle and its surrounding locality.

*Photo from “Late antique castle of Domaje, Luan Perzhita”*

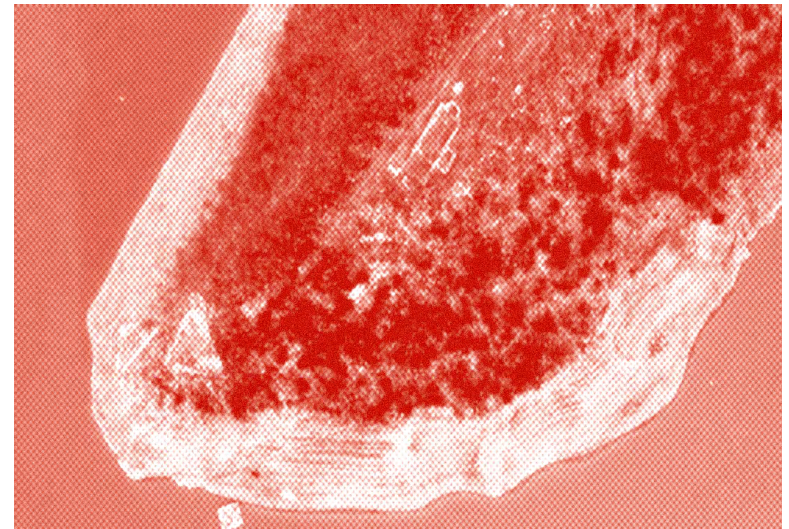


## Peca Castle

Peca Castle is situated where the Drini i Bardhë and Luma rivers intersect, located on a hill known to locals as “Kodra e Peca”, “Castle Stone”, among other names. Positioned on rugged terrain, it occupies a strategically vital location, controlling access to the Dardanian plains through the Lisus-Naisus route. The castle’s design is irregular, adapting to the landscape, and encompasses a perimeter of 445 meters over an area of 1 hectare.

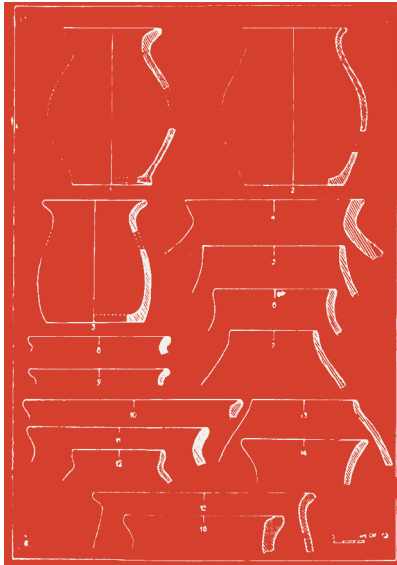
The castle’s wall is constructed from limestone cemented with mortar, and the roofs of the houses within were covered with tiles. The living quarters were designed in an “alpine” style, featuring walls that do not exceed 1.5 meters in height.

*Photo from Arkeoal, 2020*

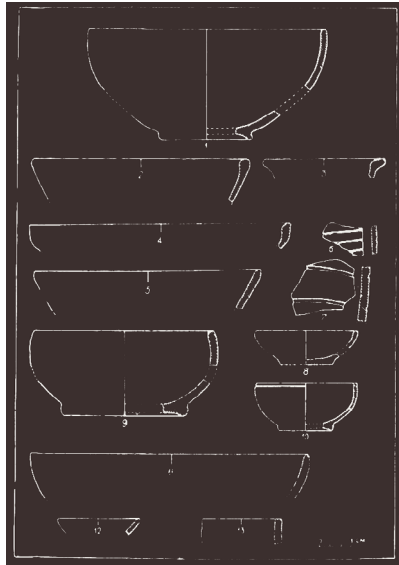




Sketch of the surrounding walls, Peca Castle, Luan Përzhita, 1990<sup>5</sup>



Sketch of the types of vorbes discovered by the excavations, Luan Përzhita, 1990<sup>6</sup>



Sketch of the types of vorbes discovered by the excavations, Luan Përzhita, 1990<sup>7</sup>



Photo Urban Research Institute, 2023

This castle's history encompasses four distinct eras:

6<sup>th</sup> - 5<sup>th</sup>  
century BCE

The earliest period dates back to the 6<sup>th</sup> - 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE. Archaeological excavations from this era have uncovered ceramic artifacts, such as bowls with inwardly folded rims, semi-spherical bowls adorned with unique lines, and vessels featuring short necks.

3<sup>rd</sup> - 2<sup>nd</sup>  
century BCE

The second historical phase of the castle is marked by remnants of the perimeter walls dating from the 3<sup>rd</sup> - 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE. Archaeological investigations indicate the growth of residential areas during this time, with only the red clay flooring remaining today. The ceramic ware characteristic of this period comprises vessels like loom-less called "vorba", which are short and cylindrical in shape.

red  
ceramics

The third historical phase is distinguished by the presence of light red ceramics with a slight sheen. Archaeological digs have brought to light different shards of cups, bowls, amphorae, and oenochoes from this period.

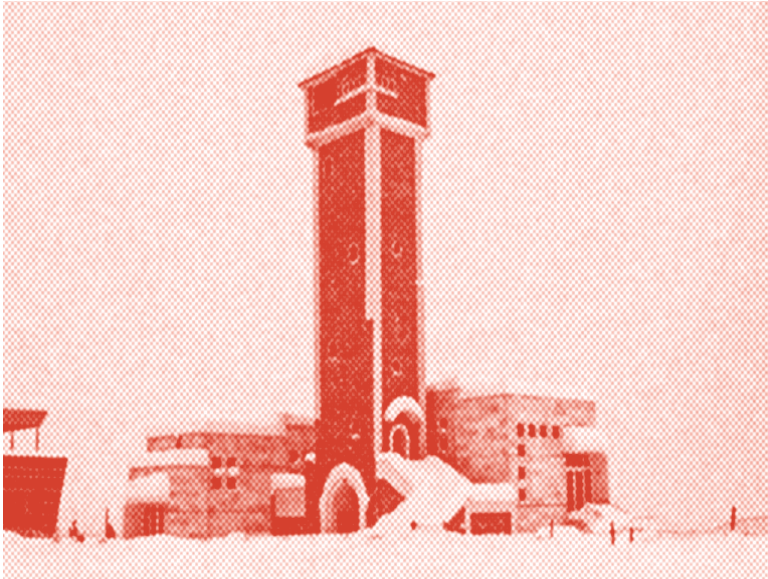
3<sup>rd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup>  
century C.E

The fourth period is the most prominent and correlates with the construction of the castle's architectural complex. Key features from this era, dating to the 3<sup>rd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> century C.E, include the encompassing walls, a basilica, stairways, and various structures. The residential buildings from this time are rectangular, with thick walls made of stones bonded by mud. The castle's entrances are broad and situated on the northern side. Additionally, several pithos (storage jar) have been discovered, with seals inscribed around their openings bearing the inscriptions: OUEIKEIS (UIKIS) and QUEKEIS (KUIKS).

## Kosovo Tower

This structure, a present from Kosovo to Kukës, was constructed in 2009. It stands as a tribute to the Kosovo Albanians who sought sanctuary in this city in 1999. The interior displays a collection of photographs depicting the reality of that period.

*Photo by Lori Elezi, 2014*



**The Museum** Located in the city center, the museum is a new and simple building. It offers a wealth of information about the area's history, ethnography, and biodiversity.

**The Gjegjan Mine** In the Gjegjani mine, initial evidence of copper mining activities dates back to the Bronze Age, approximately 3000 years ago.



The sculpture of Mercury, known as the god who safeguards travelers and merchants, was discovered in Brut, serving as evidence that Kukës was a significant trade route.

## Etymology of the Name

The name of the city Kukës is thought to come from the Latin word "Quercus" (kurkus), which in Albanian translates as "bungajë" meaning oak. This is the main theory for the etymology of the city's name.

# GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE



## Geography and Climate

Spanning  
933.89  
square  
kilometers

Spanning 933.89 square kilometers, the district of Kukës boasts a diverse landscape featuring high mountains and lower regions within the Kukës basin and the river terraces along the Drin. Elevations range from 250 meters above sea level to the district's highest peak at 2,496 meters, the top of Gjallica. To the northwest, Kukës adjoins the Albanian Alps, home to the Gjallica, Koritnik, and Pashtrik mountains, whereas to the southeast, it links with the Korabi and Sharri mountain ranges.

The geological makeup of the land is predominantly karstic, creating a complex network of caves, sinkholes, subterranean watercourses, as well as distinctive landforms. This intricate system enhances the value of the water systems present in Kukës. It is in Kukës where the intersection of the Black Drini and White Drini occurs, supplying the Fierza artificial lake and giving rise to the Drin River. As Albania's longest river, the Drin River stretches for 280 kilometers, that flows into the Adriatic Sea.

Mediterranean climate

Kukës is located in the sub-mountain and mountain Mediterranean climate zone. The region's geographical diversity also gives rise to distinct micro climates within Kukës itself. The average annual temperature registers at 11.8°C, while the annual amplitude is 21.5°C. Precipitation patterns show a higher concentration on the western and southwestern slopes of the mountain ranges compared to the eastern slopes. The majority of rainfall, about 70%, occurs during the autumn and winter months.

## Morning Stone

Located in Shishtavec's southern area, the Morning Stone is a remarkable geological structure. Known historically for its navigational importance, it receives its name from the unique light halo formed by the morning sun's rays. Positioned at an altitude of 1900 meters, it is near the Kosovo border.

*Photo by Trivet, 2021*



## Gjallica Mountain



Photo by Visar Kola, 2012

## The Shkalla e Keqe Canyon

The Shkalla e Keqe (Cursed Stairs) canyon is situated on the southern slopes of Mali i Gjallica. This canyon boasts an impressive depth of approximately 1000 meters, while its entrance is remarkably narrow, measuring just 3 meters in width.

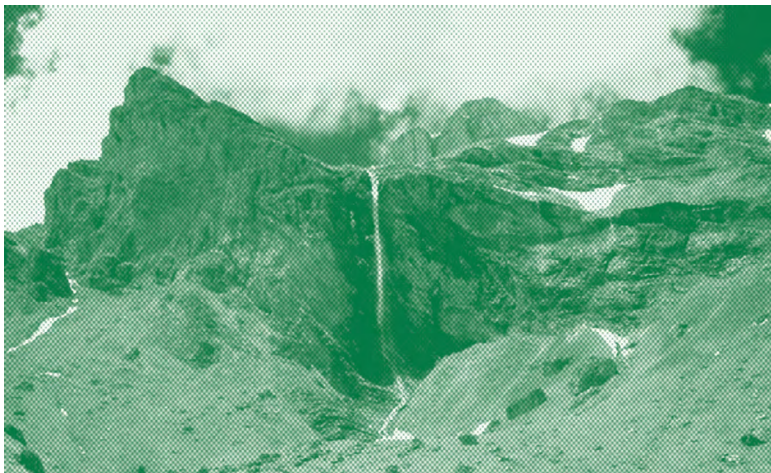
Gjallica Mountain, towering at 2,489 meters above sea level, stands as the tallest peak in the Kukës district, forming part of the Dinaric Alps. Located southeast of Kukës city, Gjallica presents an impressive view, visible from every corner of the city and offering a stunning backdrop. The mountain's summit features a prominent, sharp ridge that dominates the skyline. Its slopes are notably steep and rugged, showcasing distinct tectonic formations. Shaped like a massive, northeast-southwest oriented oval, Gjallica resembles a colossal pyramid rising majestically above the Luma Plain. It spans a base of approximately 11 kilometers with an elevation rise of over 2,100 meters. To the northeast, the "Gryka e Vanave" gorge separates Gjallica from the neighboring Koritnik Mountain. In the southwest, the Bicaj Canyon, also known as 'Shkalle e Keqe', meaning the 'Cursed Stairs', cradles the flowing Sheja Stream.

Mali i Gjallica boasts a diverse array of natural wonders, including a rich variety of flora and fauna, stunning landscapes, and numerous water sources. It is home to four renowned springs: Kroj i Kuq (Red Spring), Kroj Lanës, Kroj i Kishës (The Church's Spring), and Kroj Tanzot (The Spring of All Gods). Each spring is unique, offering its own distinct quality and beauty.

The Feast of Gjallica, a holiday with pagan roots, is celebrated on the first Thursday of August, aligning with midsummer. Two springs, Kroj i Kuq (Red Spring) and Kroj Tanzot (The Spring of All Gods), play significant roles in this festival. Around Kroj Tanzot, the highest spring on Gjallica mountain, the community gathers for prayers and rituals to honor the mountain. This spring's name stems from a legend that it required the combined powers of all gods to bring forth its water.

After paying respects at Tanzot Spring, festival participants make their way to the Red Spring. Here, they indulge in traditional foods, enjoy raki, and engage in various activities including games and singing. The festivities are further enlivened with folk dances and music, creating a vibrant celebration of their heritage.

## Koritnik Mountain



*Photo by Faton Haxhiavdyli, 2018*



*Photo from Pikellima, 2015*

Mount Koritnik, a prominent feature in the Kukës region, reaches its highest point at Maja e Pikëllimës (Peak of Sorrow), standing at 2395 meters above sea level. Notably, the mountain's Peak of Sorrow has acquired a pyramidal shape due to two glacial cirques. It is situated between Gryka e Vanave and Zëhra of Prizren. The mountain's southwestern side, marked by steep terrain near Gryka e Vanave and the village of Bele, contrasts with its more gradual northeastern descent into Kosovar territory.

The biodiversity on Mount Koritnik is remarkable. As a part of the Korab-Koritnik Nature Park, which also forms a segment of the European Green Belt, the mountain is known for its ecological significance. It has been internationally recognized as an Important Plant Area by Plantlife. Among its 37 mammal species is the critically endangered Lynx subspecies (*Lynx lynx balcanicus*).

### Lynx (*Lynx lynx balcanicus*)



The plant life on Mount Koritnik is varied and lush. The southeast slope is dominated by hemlock trees (*Pinus heldreichii*), while oaks and beech trees cover the northwest slope at elevations between 1800 and 2000 meters. Above these altitudes, alpine pastures unfold.

The local villages celebrate a unique holiday known as 'Të Qethmes' or 'The Shearing.' This tradition, deeply rooted in the community, occurs on the second Thursday of September. Villagers gather the livestock in the fields for a communal sheep-shearing event. The ritual includes the sacrifice of a sheep and extends into a three-day celebration with locals and their friends. This event offers tourists a rare glimpse into local customs and an opportunity to partake in an authentic cultural celebration.

**Albanian Lillys**  
(*Lilium albanicum*)



**Pine**  
(*Pinus Heldreichii*)



## Fierza Lake



Photo by Lapsi.al, 2023, Fierza Lake

**Year of creation:** 1978

**Length:** 70 kilometers

**Surface:** 7 thousand hectares

**Altitude above sea level:** 167 meters

**Depth:** 128 meters

**Volume:** 2,7 billion cubic meters of water

## Hydrography

Kukës' hydrography is a natural marvel, characterized by the Black Drin and White Drin rivers along with their tributaries, including the Luma River and the Bushtrica River. The region is also enriched by numerous underground streams and springs. A key feature of this hydrographic network is the Fierza Artificial Lake, created in 1978 for the Fierza hydroelectric plant by utilizing the Drin River bed.

Spanning 70 kilometers in length, Lake Fierza covers a maximum area of 7,000 hectares. It stands at an elevation of 167 meters above sea level and reaches a maximum depth of 128 meters. The lake holds an impressive volume of water, totaling 2.7 billion cubic meters.

Lake Fierza hosts an abundant variety of fish, including species like bream, carp, and zander. Following the basin's flooding, the lake's fauna expanded significantly as various fish species were introduced into the environment. While the creation of the lake led to the extinction of some fish species found in the Drin River, it has simultaneously boosted the lake's fish population.

Among the indigenous species found in the lake are 'guicaq', 'mylshi', 'njila', barbel, white bream, eel, lake trout, black skirt and 'sharmak'.

For tourists, Lake Fierza presents an opportunity to immerse in nature, offering activities such as canoeing and fishing for a memorable experience.

# BIODIVERSITY



# Biodiversity

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Kukës district is a hub of rich biodiversity, showcasing a variety of ecosystems including lakes, rivers, wetlands, caves, as well as Mediterranean shrubs, and forests of oak, beech, and pine. It also features alpine and sub-alpine pastures and meadows. The region's flora is diverse, boasting not only a wide range of plant species but also unique endemic plants like the Albanian violet, the Albanian lily (*Lilium albanicum* Griseb), and the Albanian tulip (*Tulipa albanica*).

The vast vertical range of the territory allows for distinct vegetative zones, such as the shrub zone, oak zone, beech zone, and the alpine pastures

The fauna of Kukës includes typical Balkan species like bears, wolves, foxes, and wild boars, as well as unique autochthonous species. Notably, the region is home to the *Lynx lynx balcanicus*, a rare subspecies of the European lynx, with an estimated population of fewer than 50 individuals. In the 'Kënetë e Kashtës' Straw Swamp, located just 5 kilometers from Kukës city, around 17 different bird species thrive, including the white heron (*Egretta alba*) and the marsh heron (*Ardeola ralloide*).

The cave ecosystems in the area, largely unexplored, are believed to harbor a diverse array of species characteristic of such environments. These may include specific types of spiders, insects, and other invertebrates, along with several bat species. Intriguingly, the *Proteus anguinus*, also known as the 'fish-man,' is thought to reside in these caves.



*Proteus anguinus*

## 750 type of medicinal plants

The area is renowned for its abundance of medicinal plants, with over 750 types identified, including wild tobacco, black juniper, and salep.



Wild Tobacco



Black Juniper

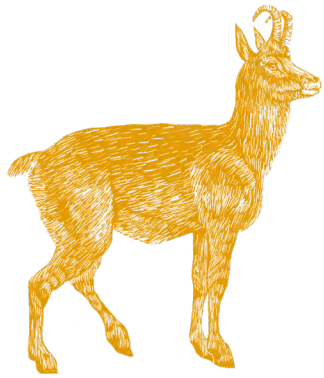


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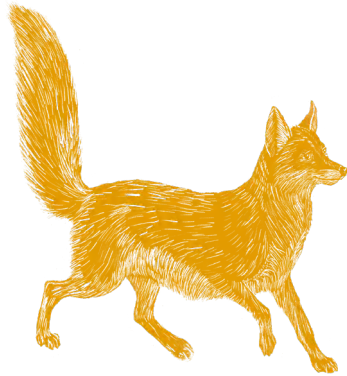
# Fauna

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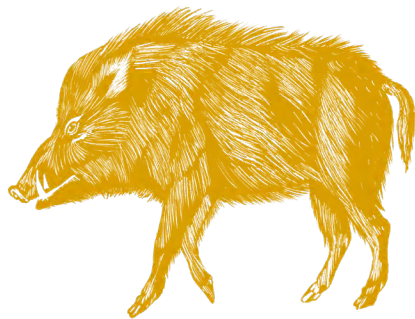
Explore the captivating wildlife of the Korab-Koritnik Nature Park, a gem within the European Green Belt, through illustration. This protected natural park, renowned for its rich biodiversity, showcases an array of animal life in artistic depictions.



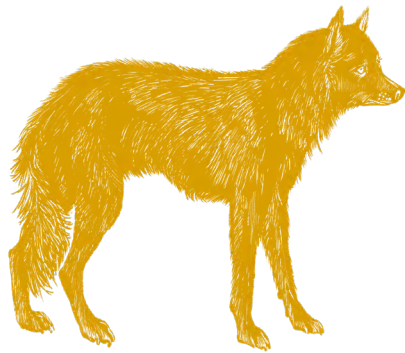
Chamois  
(*Rupicapra rupicapra*)



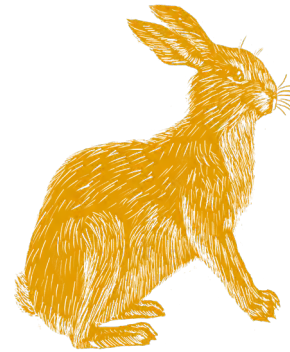
Red fox (*Vulpes vulpes*)



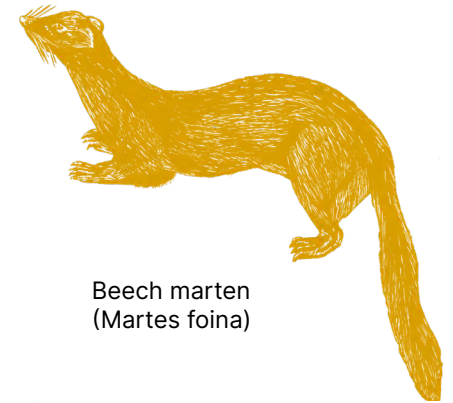
Wild boar (*Sus scrofa*)



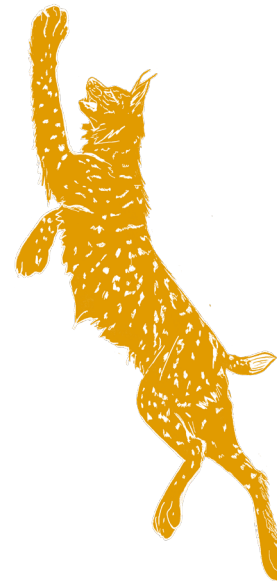
Grey wolf (*Canis lupus*)



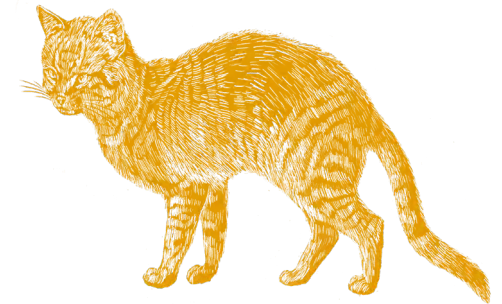
European hare  
(*Lepus europeus*)



Beech marten  
(*Martes foina*)



Lynx (*Lynx lynx*)



Wildcat (*Felis silvestris*)



# Flora/ The Flowers of Kukës

## **Narcissus Flower** (*Narcissus poeticus*)

A stunning and fragrant flower, *Narcissus poeticus* thrives in the Novosej area. Meadows in Recica are adorned with these flowers during their blooming period.

## **Magnificent Carnation** (*Dianthus superbus*)

Known for its beauty and sweet nectar, *Dianthus superbus* grows in the alpine pastures of Shishtavec near Guri i Mengjësit. Its nectar is edible and can be used in tea.

## **Troll** (*Trollius europaeus*)

This herbaceous plant, found in the meadows of Kallabak, blooms from May to July. Exercise caution, as consumption of this plant can be toxic.

## **Sharr's Saffron** (*Crocus scardicus*)

An endemic plant to the Korab-Sarakol and Kallabak area, *Crocus scardicus* requires specific conditions for growth.



Sharr's Saffron  
(*Crocus scardicus*)



Magnificent Carnation  
(*Dianthus superbus*)



Troll  
(*Trollius europaeus*)



Narcissus Flower  
(*Narcissus poeticus*)

**Little Primrose**  
(*Primula minima*)

A vibrantly colored herb blooming in June, found in the Sylbicë-Dobërdol mountains, often at the foot of bushes and in rocky environments.

**Albanian Lily**  
(*Lilium albanicum*)

*Lilium albanicum* is a special lily, endemic to the highlands of Albania. It grows in high areas, such as the mountain of Pashtrik, the mountains and meadows of Sharr.

**Haller's Primrose**  
(*Primula halleri*)

Similar in beauty to the little primrose, it is found from the plains of Korab to its peaks.

**Bog Asphodel**  
(*Narthecium ossifragum*)

This plant, with its yellow star-shaped flowers, is used as a saffron replacement in many Balkan countries. It is prevalent in the mountains of Dobërdol and the peaks of Korab and Kallabak.



Albanian Lily  
(*Lilium Albanicum*)



Bog Asphodel  
(*Narthecium ossifragum*)



Little Primrose  
(*Primula minima*)



Haller's Primrose  
(*Primula halleri*)

**Kukës Tulip**  
(*Tulipa*  
*Albanica*)

A rare, bulbous plant that displays yellow and red colors. It is endemic to the Kukës mountains and is considered endangered.



**Trail of  
Colors**

The 'Shtegu Ngjyrave' or 'The Trail of Colors' stretches for 13 kilometers, beginning in Shishtavec and culminating in Çajë. During the period from May to July, when the ice melts away, this trail transforms into a breathtaking landscape, awash with vibrant, colorful flowers.



# CULTURE

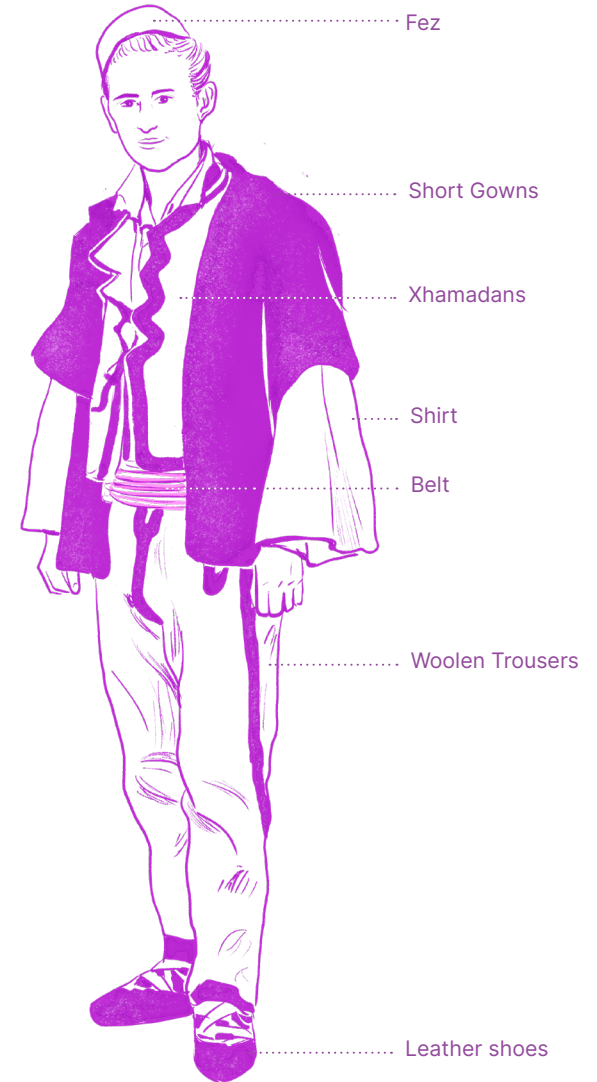
# Ethnography

## Man's Traditional Attire

### Lumë

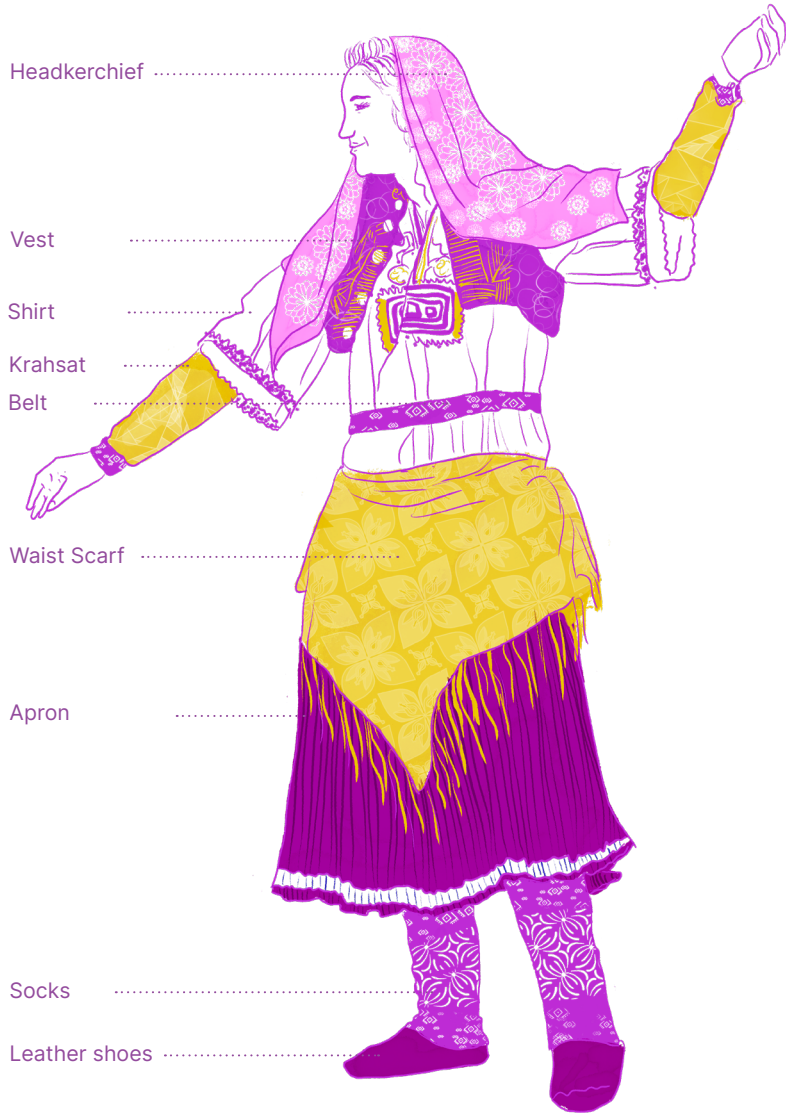
Kukësi encompasses three ethnographic provinces: Luma, Gora, and Malziu, each boasting its own unique traditional clothing that mirrors their rich histories and distinct cultures. The accompanying illustrations depicts the attire typical of men and women from the Luma region. A notable distinction in Luma's clothing lies in the 'tirqis' or pants, which are characteristically simpler, made of thinner material, and feature just one or two decorated pleats.

Regarding the 'mbështjellak' or 'wrap', a side-open skirt often adorned with numerous small folds, there is a variation in color and material across regions. In Malzi, it is typically red, while in Gora, the wrap is white and crafted from wool



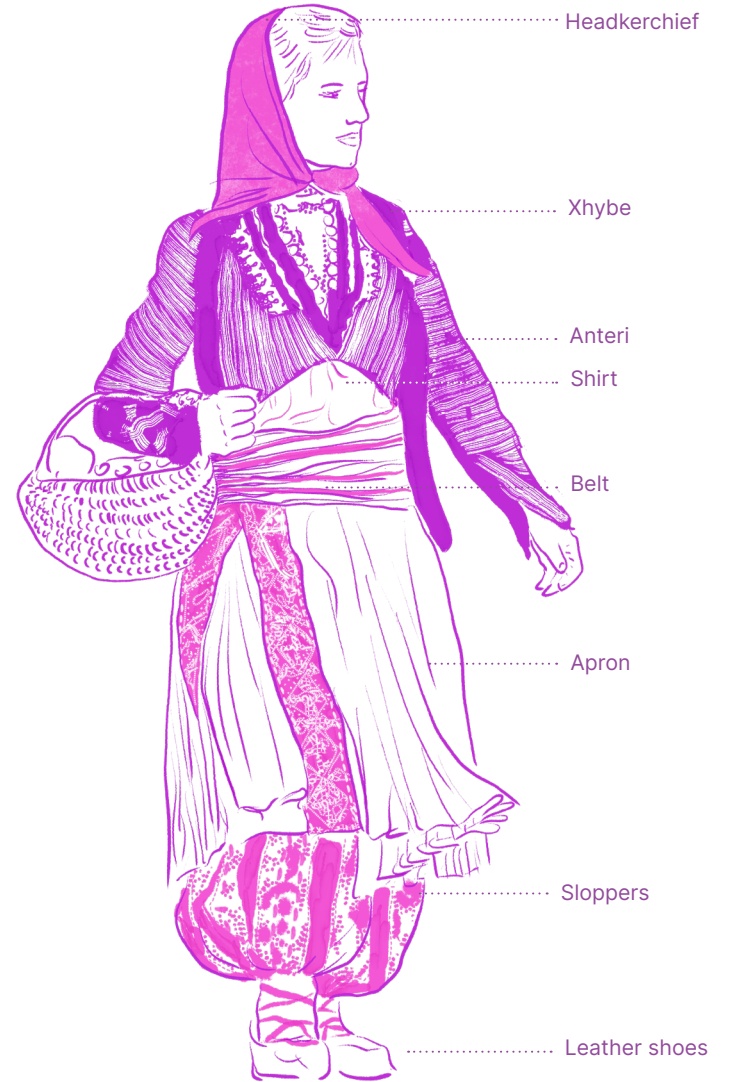
Woman's Traditional Attire

Shëmri



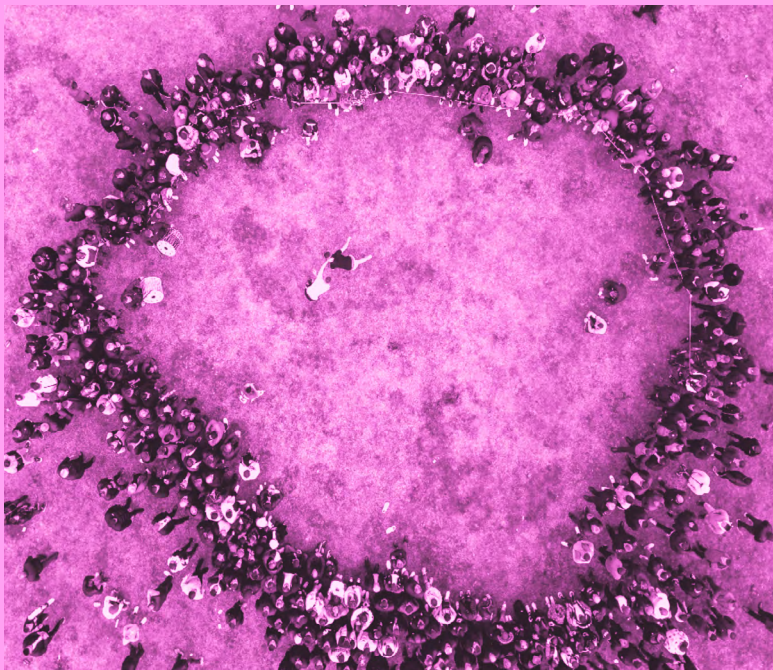
Woman's Traditional Attire

Lumë



## Wrestling

Wrestling is a notable sport among the residents of Kukës, especially in the Gora area. This sport has been traditionally passed down from generation to generation, often featured as a special event at weddings. Today, Kukës is recognized for producing many accomplished athletes in this discipline.



# Traditional celebrations

In Kukës, several local holidays celebrate the region's traditions and culture:

**Saint George's Day** Taking place in the first half of May, this day marks the end of winter and the arrival of spring.

**Dunmet** Celebrated in Surroj on September 20, Dunmet signifies the return of cattle and the shepherd to family farms from summer pastures in the mountain plateaus.

**The shearing** Held in the Tërthora area on the second Thursday of September, this festival is associated with sheep shearing.

**Gjallica** Celebrated on the first Thursday of August, Gjallica is a pagan holiday honoring the protection of Mount Gjallica.

**Summer Day** Celebrated across the region on March 14, this holiday welcomes the sun.

**Runa** Celebrated in Malzi on July 1, Runa is a pagan holiday where people pray for the mountain's strength.



# Artisanship

Kukës has a rich history of artisanship, deeply rooted in ancient wool-working traditions. This expertise is particularly evident in the production of essential household items like clothing and kilims (rugs). The rugs and tapestries from this region are distinguished by unique folk motifs, showcasing exceptional artistic flair.


In the 1960s, specifically in 1963, a significant development occurred with the establishment of a handicraft enterprise in Kukës. This enterprise primarily focused on export production and provided employment to hundreds of workers. However, the shift in the political landscape during the 1990s led to the closure of these artisanal enterprises, resulting in a substantial decline in local handicraft production.

Despite these challenges, a dedicated group of artisans continues to uphold these traditions. They persist in crafting kilims, tapestries, and folk clothing, keeping the region's rich artistic heritage alive.

## Traditional Clothing Kukës

Mimoza Rata, an artisan from Kukës, has a shop where she displays traditional clothing created with passion. Her creations are sought after internationally. With love and dedication, she is trying to pass on the craft to her daughters.



Scan 



Mimoza Rata




+355 684536877




## Crafts "HM"



Scan 



Scan 

It is a continuation of the old tradition in the production of carpets and rugs on the loom in Kukës. The Hate Ora Craft has grown in an environment where all the women in the family worked on looms for rugs, carpets, various bedspreads, clothing, and other accessories. In the early 1980s, Hate was employed in the Kukës craft enterprise, where rugs were produced for export. Within a few months, it was recognized as one of the best workshops in production and repair. After the closure of the craft enterprise in Kukës, Hate kept this tradition alive, initially working in her home and later establishing one of the most well-known workshops in Kukës. Today, the workshop is managed by her daughter Mikaela, who inherited the craft and also serves as a school for those interested in this craft.



Mikaela Lala



University Street, Block 1, Building 1, Kukës.



+355 696654094





## Bee - Beekeeper Bleta



Scan



Scan



Bee offers a wide range of folk clothing, souvenirs and personalized gifts, which reflect the heritage, culture and beauty of Kukës.

📍 Street 'Nënë Tereza',  
Neighborhood 5, Kukës

☎ +355 693231957



## Handmade Works from Wool



Scan



The artisans of Shajaku return to the scene with their unique works made from sheep wool. Liria Kotarja, following the tradition learned from her mother, uses both old techniques and innovation to create traditional and valuable works. From carpets and rugs to modern accessories, sheep wool finds wide use in her creativity. The processing and coloring process adds value to the works. Special works, preserved with enthusiasm for over 50 years, showcase the richness of the heritage of Shajaku's artisans, making this workshop an attractive destination for buyers who want to have a piece of this tradition in their homes.

📍 Street Ushtarakëve, Kukës

☎ +355 682509631

✉ [ermenitakotarja@outlook.com](mailto:ermenitakotarja@outlook.com)



# Cuisine

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The cuisine of Kukës is characterized by its simplicity and rich variety of tastes, with a focus on the flavors of local products. Traditional foods include fish from Lake Fierza and fli, a type of pie cooked in a 'saç', a traditional cooking tool, often a large metal lid shaped like a shallow bell. It is used to cover bread dough or various dishes for baking. Ashes and live coals are placed over the saç, allowing the food underneath to cook evenly, retain its juiciness, and develop a rich flavor. Also notable are potatoes cooked in embers, offering a unique taste. Another distinctive dish is çorba, made from a dried and fermented mixture of yogurt and flour. Water is added to this mixture to create a soup, which is often enriched with additional yogurt or milk.

In addition to these dishes, the tables in Kukës usually feature pickled vegetables, peppers stuffed with cottage cheese, and fresh tomatoes, adding to the diversity of flavors. The cuisine also includes various dishes, such as beans and dried meat, where the dried meat may be used to flavor the broth.

As for beverages, Kukës is known for its homemade raki and boza, a drink made with corn flour, providing a glimpse into the traditional beverage-making practices. Pear juice, served as syrup, and thana juice are also popular, alongside 'hoshaf', made from sun-dried plums and apples that can be served as raisins or used in compote.



*Process of making fli*



*Corn bread with leeks*

# NEW TRAILS IN KUKËS

# THE NEWEST HIKING TRAILS IN KUKËS

Discover the newest hiking trails in Kukës, opened in 2023 by the Urban Research Institute in collaboration with the Municipality of Kukës, as part of the project ‘Eco-Tourism Routes in the Cross-Border Area for the Promotion of Alternative Tourism’, within the third Call for Project Proposals for the Cross-Border Program IPA II CBC Albania - Kosovo 2014-2020, co-financed by the European Union. The opening of the trails has involved cleaning, marking, and equipping with signage and informative boards, offering a rich experience in the beautiful nature and traditions of the Kukës region.



TRAIL 1

BELE WATERFALL

ZBINEC

QAFA E ZBINECIT



## Trail of 'Bele Waterfall - Zbinec - Zbinec Pass'

### Information on the trail

Length: 8 km

Technical difficulty: Moderate

Travel: Out-and-back

Duration: 4 hours

Max elevation: 1271 m

Min elevation: 453 m

Access: Spring - Summer - Autumn

The trail "Bele Waterfall - Zbinec - Zbinec Pass" is a hiking trail that combines nature walking with exploration of the authentic tradition of the Kukës area. The trail starts at Bele Waterfall, a waterfall with clear blue water and ends at the Zbinec Pass, from where you can see a wonderful view of the city of Kukës and the mountains that surround it.

The trail 'Bele Waterfall - Zbinec - Zbinec Pass' offers a charming hiking experience where you can enjoy nature and discover the local traditions of the Kukës region.

### Bele Waterfall

Starting at the scenic Bele Waterfall, where crystal-clear blue waters falls down a high, steep cliff, the journey continues with a backdrop of gray stones, lush trees, and green grass. This beautiful spot is a natural monument in the Korab-Koritnik nature park. The 15-meter waterfall sets the stage for an exciting adventure.

### Ježina Cave

Deep into Vana Canyon, near the village of Bele, lies the mysterious Ježina Cave. As night approaches, local legends tell of lights in odd, unexplained shapes that add a mystical feel to the gorge. Positioned at an altitude of 850 meters, the cave is home to four rare Balkan bat species, offering a stable environment where summer temperatures hold at 15 degrees Celsius and drop to 12 degrees in winter. The cave's large, 10-meter-high entrance showcases beautiful stalactites and stalagmites, as well as a year-round spring. This spring, a mysterious hole in the cave floor, never dries up no matter how much water is drawn from it, and its depth remains unknown.

### The Village stream

After the waterfall, the path follows the village stream, which feeds the cascade. The trail leads up to the traditional village of Bele, known for its welcoming people and unique stone houses that look like towers. This village, part of the Zapod administrative unit in the Municipality of Kukës, offers a peek into local life and is a starting point for exploring the surrounding mountains and natural beauty.

### The Village of Bele

## The Mountain of Zbinec

The trail then winds through Zbinec Mountain, an area known for its farming heritage. Historically, before the 1990s, Zbinec had two large stables that bred around 800 goats and 100 cows. There was also a bustling center for milk processing and dairy production during that time. The climb from Zbinec to the Zbinec Pass takes just 10 minutes, but it offers hikers a stunning panoramic view of the city of Kukës and the vast river plain below.

## Zbinec Pass

With the beauties of the mountains and the rich nature of Kukësi also surprises with its vegetation, the area is known for sage and thyme which the residents of the area collect during the summer season.

Other activities that can be done on this trail include motocross, camping, exploring nature and beautiful scenery, and photography.

*This medium-difficulty trail demands good physical condition and essential mountain equipment—hiking shoes, backpack, wetsuit, sunglasses, sunscreen, a minimum of 1 liter of water, daily sustenance, walking sticks for ease of climbing, lighting, and a mobile phone. Beyond hiking, the trail beckons with possibilities for motocross, camping, nature exploration, and capturing the stunning scenery through photography.*



Image source: Trivet, 2021

## Shtegu Ujëvara Bele, Zbinez, Qafa e Zbinezit

Trail of Bele Waterfall, Zbinez, Zbinez Neck

- 1 Ujëvara e Beles**  
Bele Waterfall
- 2 Përroi i Fshatit**  
Village Stream
- 3 Fshati Bele**  
Bele Village
- 4 Shpella e Jezinës**  
Jezinë Cave
- 5 Zbinez**  
Zbinez
- 6 Qafa e Zbinezit**  
Zbinez Neck

### Informacion mbi shtegun

**Akresi: Pranverë - Verë - Vjeshtë**  
Access: Spring - Summer - Autumn

**Shkalla e vështirësisë: Mesatare**  
Technical difficulty: Moderate

**Rrugëtimi: Vajtje - Ardhje**  
Travel: Out-and-back

**Kohëzgjatja: 5 orë**  
Duration: 5 hours

### Information on the trail

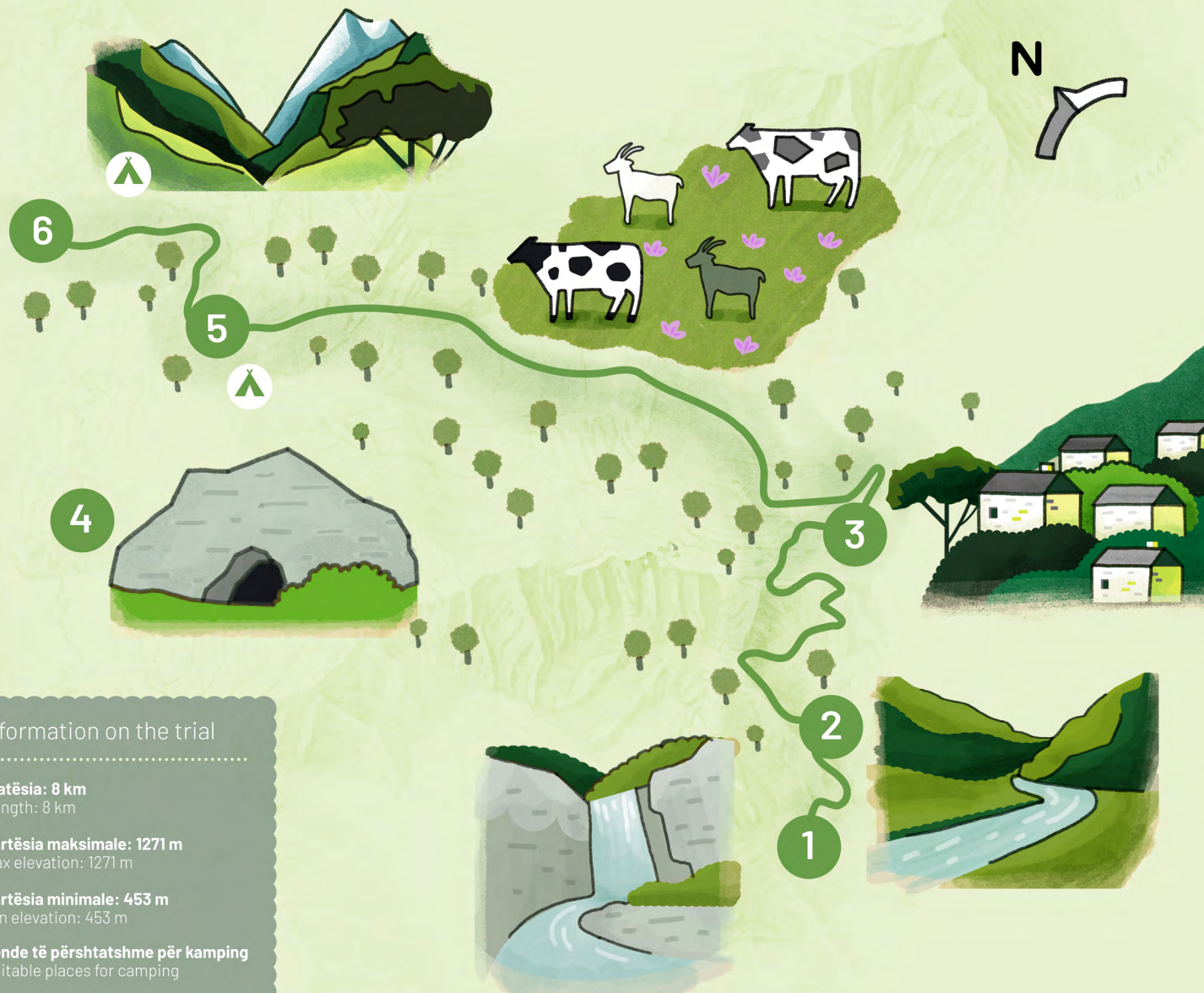
**Gjatësia: 8 km**  
Length: 8 km

**Lartësia maksimale: 1271 m**  
Max elevation: 1271 m

**Lartësia minimale: 453 m**  
Min elevation: 453 m



**Vende të përshtatshme për kamping**  
Suitable places for camping





**TRAIL 2**

**ZBINEC**

**BOZHOLAZI FOREST**

**POBREGU MEADOWS  
AND BARNs**

**GJEGJAN BARNs**

**KINZA FOUNTAIN**

*Photos from the Urban Research Institute, 2023*

## Trail of 'Zbinec - Bozholazi Forest - Pobregu Meadows and Barns - Gjegjan Barns - Kinza Spring'

### Information on the trail

Length: 6 km

Technical difficulty: Moderate

Travel: Out-and-back

Duration: 4 hours

Max elevation: 1779 m

Min elevation: 1281 m

Access: Spring - Summer - Autumn

The trail "Zbinec - Bozholazi Forest - Pobregu Meadows and Barns - Gjegjani Barns - Kinza Spring" is nestled in the beautiful nature of Kukës and offers an unforgettable journey for all nature lovers and adventurers. The trail begins at Zbinec mountain, winds through the Bozholaz forest, and culminates at Kroin e Kinza, a site of historical and natural significance.

### Zbinec

At the trail's start in Zbinec, visitors can take in the stunning village views and the lush Bozholaz forest. Here, you'll also find the "border clone," a relic from the communist era. This was a formidable barrier of barbed wire, standing over two meters high on reinforced concrete pillars, not exactly on the border but set back on Albanian soil near the border markers with Kosovo. Flanking the clone was a "soft belt," a 4-meter wide strip of freshly turned soil designed to capture the footprints of anyone attempting to cross the border.

### Border Clone

### Pobregu Meadows and Barns

The path continues through the forest and meadows, passing by the stables of Pobregu and Gjegjan, which offer wonderful views of this area, and where you will have the opportunity to see the stables and a large number of cattle that clearly characterizes it as a livestock area. During the Kosovo war, many of the meadows in this part of the trail were used as camps by Kosovo Liberation Army brigades to prepare themselves for war, coordination or stockpiling weapons.

### Kinza Spring

Continuing the trail, we will reach the Kinza Spring, a spring built to supply water to cattle. It is located at the foot of the Koritnik mountain and is the only source of water in a wide area. This fountain is a work of artisanship, with tree trunks carefully carved from the inside to act as water reservoirs. The trunks descend towards the ground and form a long line, storing a large amount of water. Kinza Spring is located at an altitude of about 1800 meters above sea level and is surrounded by meadows with flowers and greenery.

## Padina Meadow

If you decide to follow the path to the end, you will reach the meadow of Padina, the common mountain meadow of Kosovo and Albania. Padina is also the highest point of this path, from where you can see the city of Prizren and its surroundings, but also a wonderful panorama of Koritnik mountain.

The area is also known for primrose, a herbaceous plant which is characterized by pink to purple color and blooms mainly in the period of June. It is known as a plant that flourishes in the Balkans and goes all the way to Italy, Lombardy Trentino area. Due to its fragility, it is considered a very beautiful and special flower.

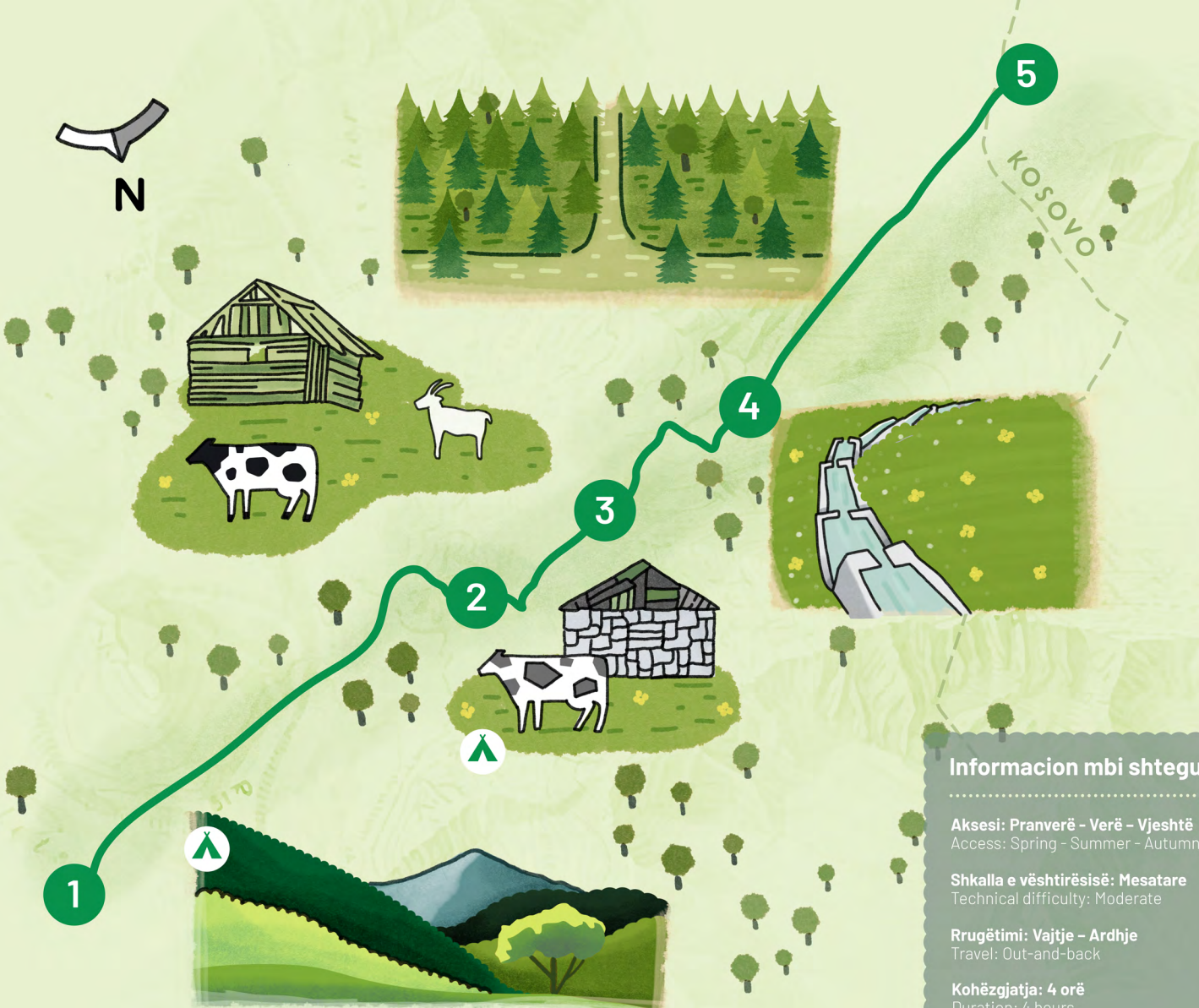
Other activities that can be done on this trail include motocross, camping, exploring nature and beautiful scenery, and photography.

*It's crucial for trail-goers to equip themselves adequately, given the medium level of difficulty. Essential mountain gear, including hiking shoes, a backpack, wetsuit, sunglasses, sunscreen, a minimum of 1 liter of water, daily sustenance, walking sticks for ease of climbing, lighting, and a mobile phone, ensures a safe and enjoyable journey."*



Image source: Trivet, 2021





## Shtegu Zbinec - Kroi i Kinzës

Trail  
Zbinec - Kinza Fountain

- 1 **Qafa e Zbinecit**  
Zvinec Neck
- 2 **Stanet e Pobregut**  
Pobregu Barns
- 3 **Stanet e Gjeganit**  
Gjegjan Barns
- 4 **Kroi i Kinzës**  
Kinza Fountain
- 5 **Padina (Kosova)**  
Padina (Kosovo)

### Informacion mbi shtegun

Information on the trail

**Akresi: Pranverë - Verë - Vjeshtë**  
Access: Spring - Summer - Autumn

**Gjatësia: 6 km**  
Length: 6 km

**Shkalla e vështirësisë: Mesatare**  
Technical difficulty: Moderate

**Lartësia maksimale: 1779 m**  
Max elevation: 1779 m

**Rrugëtimi: Vajtje - Ardhje**  
Travel: Out-and-back

**Lartësia minimale: 1281 m**  
Min elevation: 1281 m

**Kohëzgjatja: 4 orë**  
Duration: 4 hours

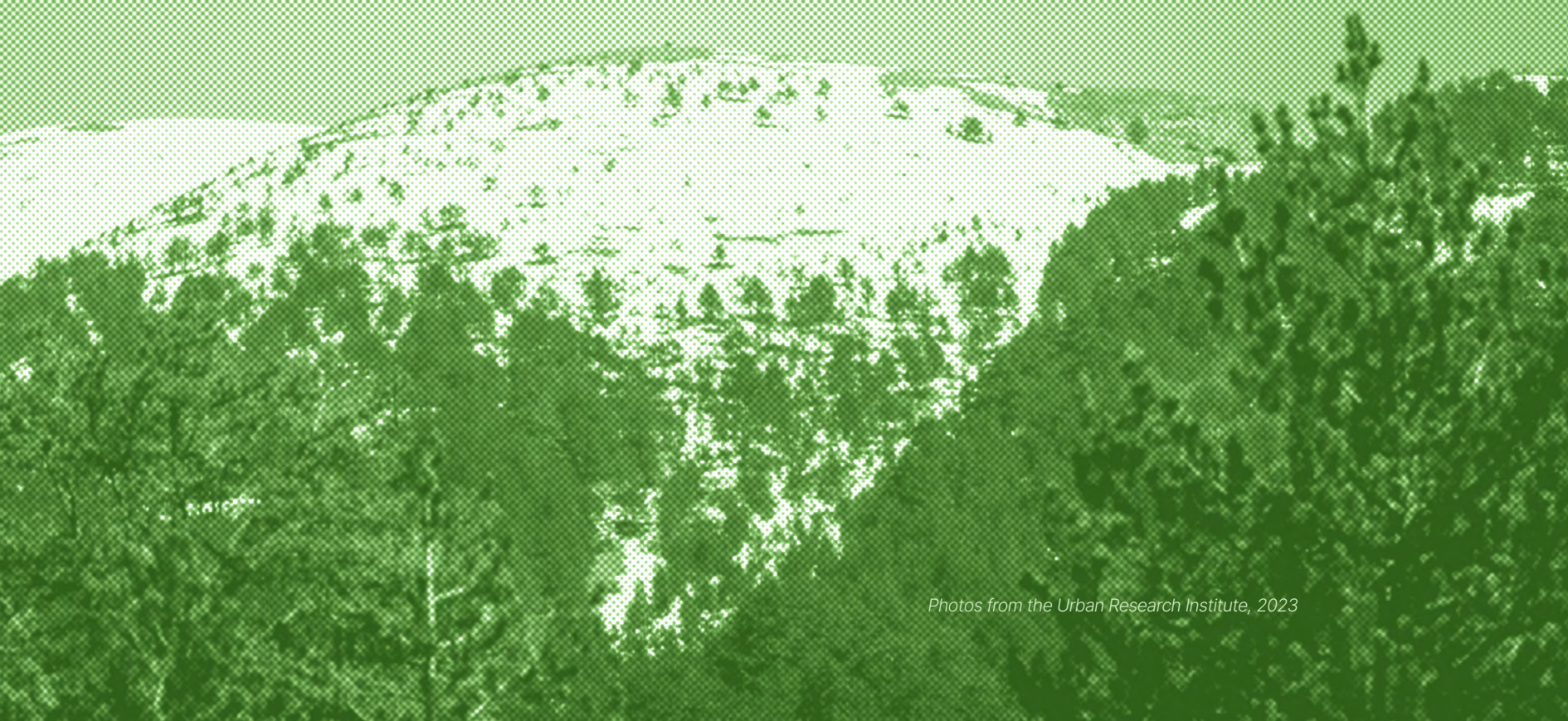
 **Vende të përshtatshme për kamping**  
Suitable places for camping

TRAIL 3

GJEGJAN

ZBINEC NECK

ZBINEC



*Photos from the Urban Research Institute, 2023*

## Trail of 'Gjegjan - Zbinec Neck – Zbinec'

### Information on the trial

Length:	6 km
Technical difficulty:	Moderate
Travel:	Out-and-back
Duration:	4 hours
Max elevation:	1273 m
Min elevation:	453 m
Access:	Spring - Summer – Autumn

The 'Gjegjan - Zbinec Neck – Zbinec' trail offers a captivating four-hour hike through the Kukës region. This moderately difficult hike takes you through beautiful landscapes and past historical sites, giving you a glimpse into the area's rich history.

### Gjegjan

Starting from the village of Gjegjan in the Terthorë area of Kukës Municipality, the trail opens with a striking view of the Gjegjan pine. This tree, over 400 years old and planted during the Ottoman era, it stands as the sole survivor among three such trees planted in Tregtan i Hasi, Gjegjan, and Morinë . It used to be a backdrop for the lively 'The Shearing' festival, where locals celebrated with three days and nights of eating, dancing, and singing.

### The Old Pine

### Camps of Pobregu

The trail leads through peaceful meadows to the Pobregu Barns, a spot known for its beauty and historical importance. In the years 1998-1999, the Pobregu Barns served as the logistics base for Brigade-125-Z.O.P - The Kosovo Liberation Army. Here, barns and numerous cattle define the landscape, marking it as a traditional livestock area.

### The Pobregu Pass

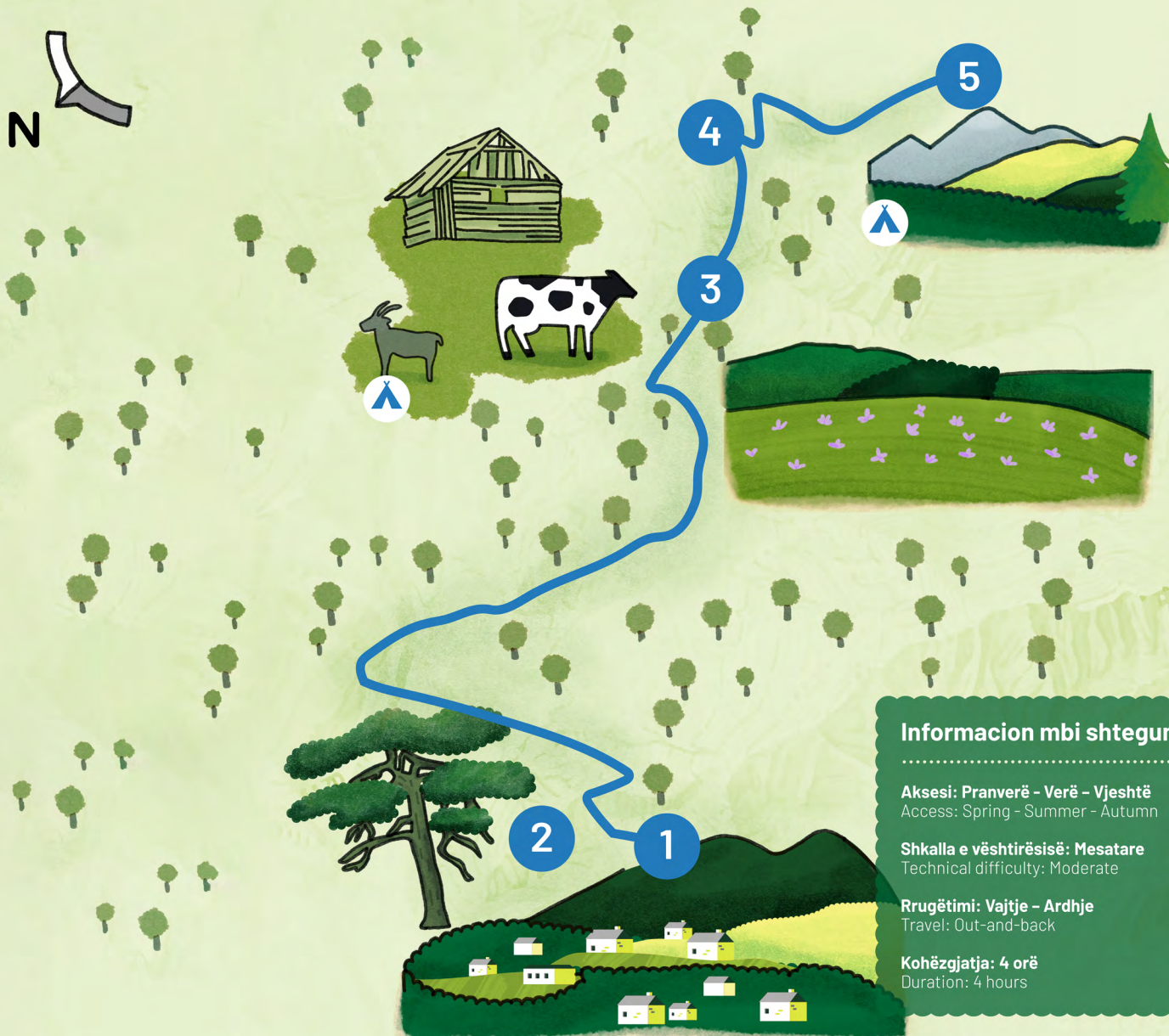
As hikers reach the Zbinec Pass, they are greeted with a stunning panoramic view of the northern Albanian mountains. The trail ends in Zbinec, a calm area perfect for a relaxing picnic surrounded by nature..

The trail offers not just a journey through stunning landscapes but also an encounter with a variety of wildlife. Brown bears (*Ursus arctos*), wild cats (*Felis silvestris*), wild boars (*Sus scrofa*), wolves (*Canis lupus*), roe deer, wild hares, eagles, hawks, and more are present in the region the trail passes through. The Balkan lynx (*Lynx lynx balcanicus*), a rarity in nature, has been captured on film within the Korab-Koritnik Nature Park, part of this trail.

Beyond the immersive wildlife encounters, the trail offers a spectrum of activities, from motocross and nature exploration to capturing the picturesque scenery through photography.

While the trail is rated easy to medium in difficulty, ensuring a rewarding experience, it necessitates good physical condition and proper mountain equipment. Hiking shoes, a backpack, wetsuit, sunglasses, sun cream, a minimum of 1 liter of water, daily sustenance, walking sticks for climbing ease, lighting, and a mobile phone are among the essential gear to make the most of this captivating journey.





## Shtegu Gjegjan - Zbinec

Trail  
Gjegjan - Zbinec

- 1 Gjegjan**  
Gjegjan
- 2 Pisha e Gjegjanit**  
Gjegjan Pine
- 3 Livadhet**  
Meadows
- 4 Stani i Pobregut**  
Barns
- 5 Qafa e Zbinecit**  
Zvinec Neck

### Informacion mbi shtegun

Information on the trail

**Aksesi:** Pranverë - Verë - Vjeshtë  
Access: Spring - Summer - Autumn

**Gjatësia:** 6 km  
Length: 6 km

**Shkalla e vështirësisë:** Mesatare  
Technical difficulty: Moderate

**Lartësia maksimale:** 1273 m  
Max elevation: 1273 m

**Rrugëtimi:** Vajtje - Ardhje  
Travel: Out-and-back

**Lartësia minimale:** 453 m  
Min elevation: 453 m

**Kohëzgjatja:** 4 orë  
Duration: 4 hours

 **Vende të përshtatshme për kamping**  
Suitable places for camping

# Tour Guide

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In Kukës you can experience an extraordinary trip using the services of national and local guides who are not only professional but also certified. These qualified guides will offer you a unique experience exploring the beauties of Kukës.

## Afrim Cenaj

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Local Guide    afrimcenaj12@icloud.com    +355 685520330  
reniscenaj111@gmail.com    +355 676653708

## Liridon Kastrati

---

National Guide    liridonk341@gmail.com    +355 684491695

## Alban Xhaferri

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Local Guide    albanxhaferri93@gmail.com    +355 684491695

## Labinot Gjana

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Local Guide    gjanalabi@gmail.com    +355 693786161

## Ijaz Gjana

---

Local Guide    iljazgjana2@gmail.com    +355 692286688

# Essential Services

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## Postal code:

8501, 8502, 8503



## Police:

129



## Firefighter:

128



## Ambulance:

127



## Emergency Service:

112





# Transportation

## Via Bus



The unofficial bus station in Kukës is located near the former Hotel Parku. For trips in and out of the city, regular bus lines are available to destinations such as Tirana, Peshkopia and Bajram Curri.

Buses from Tirana operate every hour, from 06:00 to 19:00. If you want to plan your bus trip, you can use the service of the online platform [www.travel.gjirafa.com](http://www.travel.gjirafa.com), where you will find detailed information and options for organizing your trip. In addition to buses, it is also possible to use vans, which offer different travel schedules to Kukës.



## Via Car Rentals

Another way to travel to Kukës is by rental car. This option provides users with an independent and personalized means of exploring the area comfortably.

### Europcar

Kukës International Airport +355 45800600  
[info@europcar.com.al](mailto:info@europcar.com.al)

### Albania Airport Rent a Car

Kukës International Airport +355684011010  
[info@albaniaairportrentacar.al](mailto:info@albaniaairportrentacar.al)

### Rent a Car Mara

Kukës International Airport +355 693282233

### Enterprise Rent-A-Car

Kukës International Airport +355 676018857  
[info@albaniacarrentals.com](mailto:info@albaniacarrentals.com)

### AutoUnion

Kukës International Airport +355 694040042  
[info@mbrentacar.com](mailto:info@mbrentacar.com)

### G Rentals

Kukës International Airport +355 684099933  
[kontakt@grentals-ks.com](mailto:kontakt@grentals-ks.com)

### 3 Elezi Agency Rent a Car

+355 683931155

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 **ECO-ROUTES**

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