06. ALBANIA, RELEVANT FACTS AND DATA

In the process of narrowing down to a shortlist of potential pilot area’s, our desk research has resulted in some key facts and data that is partially documented in the following pages.
An analysis of seven Albanian tour operators shows a focus on the coastal areas both in north and south and on the heritage sites, that are located mainly in the south. The daily distances covered are relatively large and tours often cover the entire country, with relatively few stops. Qeparo is passed on almost every tour and no tour operator stops there or even stays over night.
Dutch Agencies

The routes of five Dutch Tour organizations, operating in Albania shows that there is a strong focus on the south of the country, that is the traditional holiday destination, also for local tourists. Rather than focusing purely on the coastal areas with strong cultural heritage, the mountainous areas are increasingly accessed under the umbrella of outdoor tourism. The relative weight on the Hinterland is also partially explained by the popular access through Ochrid Airport in Macedonia. It can also be observed that Dutch tour operators have a more varied choice in locating overnight stays. Especially along the Riviera many more towns and villages are accessed.

Qeparo, again, is basically always passed through but never stopped at.
Accessibility

International & National

One of the most important criteria of choosing a tourism destination is the accessibility of that area. While Qeparo is located along virtually all routes of local and international tour operators and thus enjoys a high visibility with group travellers, it is relatively difficult to reach for individual travellers. As shown on the map below, Tirana is the only international airport in Albania. A 5 hour drive follows to the final destination: Qeparo.

There is a vision to build a second international airport in Saranda. This would allow much easier access to the southern coastal area and would make Qeparo viable as a main destination and not only as a "passing-through" visit.

International: Distance by car from airports to Qeparo
International: Cruise ships
A new national road has been planned that ends, or begins, in the centre of Qeparo. This means accessibility will improve for Qeparo, leading it to be a destination which is easier to reach, for holidays but also for shorter stay as day trips.

As such Qeparo will also become a ‘gateway’ to the Riviera. It will be the place where the coast is first accessed coming from the capital.

Assuming that the Airport in Saranda will be made available for international flights and the new bypass road from Vlora would make Qeparo perfectly accessible, Qeparo would still be just off the ‘beaten track’ of destinations less than 1.5 hours away from an airport (the criteria usually considered by large and all-inclusive resorts).
Tourism Potential

Activities in Nature

Albania boasts a multitude of literally untouched nature, hard to find in a comparable extend in Europe. The difficult accessibility may be a downside for mass exploitation but still reserves a very adventurous experience for the visitors who dare to enter and/or reach out for local guides.

The Adriatic and Ionian Coast are obviously the main attraction, especially for regional tourists, but increasingly the mountainous have become a destination for adventure tourism including rafting, mountain-biking, snow shoeing, and paragliding.

National Parks

Although Albania in general has many pristine natural features, relatively few are currently defined and protected as National Parks. The most notable ones are Karavata Karaburun around Divjake, Butrint Lagoon, and the area around Thath Valbona, Valbonë Valley National Park.

Closest to Qeparo are the National Park of Karaburun (Vlorë).
Albania has a rich ancient history and many discovered and even more undiscovered monuments from different periods. Most notable are early Greek and Roman Settlements (eg. Butrint), Orthodox churches and monasteries (Dhermi etc.).

Qeparo is located in the vicinity of three UNESCO World heritage sites: Butrint (2h), Girokastra (2,5h) and Berat (1,5h). Porto Palermo Bay, just next to Qeparo is ranked as first among 15 Undiscovered European Destinations for 2014 by Huffington Post.
Albania has a diverse range of agriculture. Vegetables and fruits are mostly processed in the west where the climate is most suitable, while cattle herds are held mostly in mountain areas for grazing. Wild and seeded herbs are most likely to be found in mountain areas because of the suitable climate.

From soil and climate research, we can conclude that grapes for wine could be grown all over Albania. Yet data maps show wine production in just a few places in Albania. One reason for the discrepancy between suitable growing conditions and the amount of wine produced may be the lack of history of wine culture and production. The strength of knowledge about wine production is therefore fairly low.

Citrus fruits, various mountain herbs, and different types of cattle such as goats and sheep, are currently the main agricultural products in and around Qeparo.
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