



# Weekly Briefing

## **Albania social briefing:**

### **Tourism and Albania in 2023: welcoming, reshaping, projecting**

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# **Tourism and Albania in 2023: welcoming, reshaping, projecting**

## **Summary**

*The beauty of Albania's scenery, the warm hospitality of its people, and the affordable prices made it a must-visit destination. In 2023, the tourism industry reached new heights with an estimated 7.2 million visitors in the first nine months of the year. While official figures are yet to be released, locals have noticed a surge in foreign tourists exploring not just the popular landmarks but also lesser-known attractions. The tourism sector is a vital contributor to the Albanian economy, and an increase in tourist numbers means more revenue and job opportunities. Besides the short-term benefits nationally, this rise in tourism numbers serves mostly the Albanian society and its communities in the long run, by overcoming some decades-old stereotypes.*

## **Introduction**

Albania has set its sights on welcoming an impressive 10 million tourists in 2023. In the past months, tourism has significantly increased, garnering attention from national and international media outlets across the globe, from the United States to Italy, France to Germany, Spain to China, and more. From the mesmerizing coastline to the majestic mountains and everything in between, Albania has it all, and in the summer of 2023, visitors from around the world were able to witness its wonders firsthand making it a tourist hotspot. The diversity and intensity of tourists have never been higher before, deserving the title of a “tourist boom”.

## **A trend felt before the high season**

Even before the summer, there was a growing excitement about Albania's potential in the tourism sector. In the first six months of this year, the number of visitors entering the country increased exponentially compared to the previous year. This created a buzz on mainstream media and social media alike, anticipating an influx of visitors, but no one expected the sheer number of tourists that arrived during the summer. September also recorded some of the highest numbers ever witnessed; indicating that the tourist season is far from over.

The movements of foreign citizens according to the purpose of travel, monthly

Description	2023-01	2023-02	2023-03	2023-04	2023-05	2023-06	2023-07	Total
<b>TOTAL: Arrivals of foreign citizens</b>	377,211	309,325	384,028	614,256	705,079	1,007,033	1,770,724	5,167,656
<b>I. Personal</b>	369,606	300,913	372,090	604,116	692,313	994,713	1,757,528	5,091,279
1. Holidays, visits to relatives, etc.	352,752	286,283	354,429	572,670	640,717	959,520	1,672,318	4,838,689
2. Health treatment	115	40	25	15	155	12	130	492
3. Religious	21	37	22	43	33	27	73	256
4. Tranzit	16,718	14,553	17,614	31,388	51,408	35,154	85,007	251,842
<b>II. Business and professional</b>	7,605	8,412	11,938	10,140	12,766	12,320	13,196	76,377

Source: INSTAT<sup>1</sup> (own graphic elaboration)

During the seven months of 2023, the number of arrivals of foreign citizens in the territory of Albania is 5,167,656. This number has increased by 30.6 %, compared to the same period of 2022. If we compare monthly rates for example, in July 2023 the number of total arrivals (foreigners and Albanians) has increased by 39%, compared to July 2022. Still, in July, the number of total nights spent increased by 48.2%, compared to July 2022.

As per the table below, Europe remains the largest source of vacationers for Albania, but the largest yearly increase goes to “East Asia and Pacific” with an increase of about 172%.

<sup>1</sup>Tourism figures, database. <https://www.instat.gov.al/en/themes/industry-trade-and-services/tourism/#tab2>

## Arrivals of foreign citizens by region

Description	January- July 2022	January- July 2023
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,957,080</b>	<b>5,167,656</b>
<b>I Africa</b>	2,119	6,534
<b>II. America</b>	98,960	131,236
<b>III. East Asia and Pacific</b>	12,657	34,372
<b>IV. Middle East</b>	22,459	25,907
<b>V. South Asia</b>	5,588	7,794
<b>VI. Europe</b>	3,488,209	4,949,604
- Central /Eastern Europe	203,367	313,851
- Northern Europe	144,294	193,063
- Southern Europe	2,836,852	3,945,789
- Western Europe	253,153	377,527
- East/ Mediterranean Europe	50,543	119,374
<b>VII. Other countries not specified</b>	327,088	12,209

*Source: General Directorate of State's Police, INSTAT calculations*

Furthermore, the tourists visiting Albania are staying longer in the country compared to prior years. According to the data published by Eurostat on the net stays in tourist accommodations (which include hotels, or other short-term accommodations for tourism with campsites), the European Union increase in 2023 was 12.9%. On the other hand, net stays in tourist accommodation in the first 6 months of 2023 in Albania increased by 44.1% compared to the same period a year ago.<sup>2</sup>

**The Italian element:** Italy and Albania share a long and intense history, especially in the past three decades. As per estimations,<sup>3</sup> about half a million Albanians live in Italy, and throughout the years, this community not only integrated into the neighboring country but they became great ambassadors for the homeland. The tourist boom has been dubbed "The Year of the Land of Eagles" by an Italian publication, and Italian travelers were clustered into popular spots like the Southern Riviera's beaches, Gjirokaster, Berat, historic sites, the authentic bazaar in Korça, agro-tourism, and protected areas. The Minister of Tourism has emphasized the

<sup>2</sup> Albania record in tourism, Eurostat: The best performance in Europe for 2023. <https://euronews.al/shqiperia-rekord-ne-turizem-eurostat-ecurine-me-te-mire-ne-europe-per-2023/>

<sup>3</sup> Albanians In Italy. Encyclopedia, Science News & Research Reviews. <https://academic-accelerator.com/encyclopedia/albanians-in-italy#:~:text=As%20of%202019%2C%20441%2C027%20Albanians,various%20forms%20of%20non%2Dreligion.>

government's dedication to bolstering the tourism industry and has plans to expand upon it in the future.<sup>4</sup> Many called it jokingly a “Second Italian Invasion” (Italy invaded Albania in 1939), but never before has there been such a large number of Italians visiting the country. The geographical and cultural closeness combined with the increased inflation in Italy, made for a match of convenience and comfort. In addition, most importantly, Italians besides being famous for traveling are quite able in their “storytelling” capabilities. Indeed, there were hundreds of Italians promoting Albania, particularly on social media, which attracted even more foreigners to visit Albania.

**The social media impact:** particularly TikTok played a significant role in boosting the tourism industry in Albania. With a presence in 160 countries and over 1.1 billion users, TikTok became the most downloaded app globally, including in Albania. The platform's promotion of Albania's attractions, affordability, and wonder proved to be highly effective, especially among young people. This led to an increase in flights, ferries, and other transportation options, as Albania's popularity grew online. To this popularity, there was an “added bonus” with celebrities of Albanian origin (such as Dua Lipa, Rita Ora, and Bebe Rexha) who promoted Albania on their social media, so that tens of millions of their followers could also see the country.

### **Seeing is believing: when people know each other, stereotypes vanish**

Tourism earnings are extremely important in a developing economy. Data from the Bank of Albania show that in the first six months of 2023, the expenses of foreigners who traveled to Albania reached a total of 1.55 billion euros. This is the highest figure ever recorded after the 1990s and reflects the return of Albania to a favorite tourist destination this year.<sup>5</sup> Expenditure by foreigners on travel has increased by 37% compared to the same period a year ago. It is expected that by the end of 2023, the total amount will be 4 billion euros.

Besides the economic element, perhaps the most important of all is the fact that through these millions of foreigners visiting the country, the perception of Albania and Albanians is being reshaped to a fairer and less stereotypical one. The media, movies, politicians, populism, and more, for the past decades, have been portraying Albanians through a lens that does not properly fit the reality. The country and its citizens have been the target of numerous misconceptions and false beliefs that have taken root in the minds of people. These beliefs are

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<sup>4</sup> Tourism Minister Kumbaro: “Bloggers, events, festivals and zero promotion. Now Albania is trendy”. [https://www.repubblica.it/esteri/2023/08/08/news/albania\\_intervista\\_ministra\\_turismo\\_kumbaro\\_blogger\\_sa\\_gre-410368406/](https://www.repubblica.it/esteri/2023/08/08/news/albania_intervista_ministra_turismo_kumbaro_blogger_sa_gre-410368406/)

<sup>5</sup> Tourists brought in a record 1.55 billion euros in the first 6 months. <https://www.monitor.al/turistet-sollen-nje-rekord-prej-1-55-miliarde-euro-ne-6-muajt-e-pare-shqiptaret-lane-jashte-gati-1-miliarde-euro/>

often based on stereotypes, biases, political events, popular culture, and historical occurrences. Sadly, one of the most widespread and unfair stereotypes about Albania is that it is an unsafe country plagued by crime and instability.<sup>6</sup> However, this stereotype is completely unfounded and unfair to the Albanian people. It is unjust to judge an entire nation based on the actions of a few individuals, and Albania should be known for its rich history, unique culture, natural beauty, and much more.

Albanians are quite used to hearing the same old stereotypes about their country, and their fellow citizens, at home and abroad. Films and television, action movies types of portrayal fall into the entertainment category, but they have a real-world impact on how Albanians are perceived by the rest of the world. They also perpetuate harmful stereotypes that have no basis in reality. The reality is that these stereotypes are not only inaccurate but also harmful because they contribute to discrimination and prejudice.

Perhaps the biggest service that this tourist boom can do to Albanian society, in the long run, is to overcome Albanian stereotypes because it promotes positive representations of the culture, history, scenery, and more.

It is welcome to see that Albania attracted a different type of attention and headlines during the past months. Some examples from the travel journalism phrasebook: the more a destination is referred to as a “different/special” place, the more of a holiday hotspot it becomes. The New Croatia, the Maldives of Europe, the Caribbean of Europe, and the Next Greece are some headlines portraying Albania in 2023.<sup>7</sup>

## **Conclusion**

While Albanian authorities are hailing this extremely successful tourist season as a sign of the hard work and policies implemented, citizens are hoping that this year is not just a casualty or exception to the trend. Albanian society needs these kinds of interaction with the world as much as the rest of the world needs to see the other, true side of Albania. Albanian hospitality services, cities, and communities learned plenty during these past months, and so did the foreigners visiting the country. Beyond the prior media narrative, the stereotypes, and biases, the ones visiting Albania in 2023 discovered that the country has much more to offer than the preconceived notions.

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<sup>6</sup> Mythbusting Albania. <https://thebalkanista.com/2023/03/30/mythbusting-albania-2/>

<sup>7</sup> How Albania became 2023’s summer hotspot. <https://theface.com/society/how-albania-became-2023-summer-hotspot-tourism-dua-lipa-tories-xenophobia>