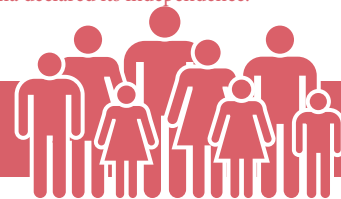




Albania

Albania has long served as a bridgehead for various nations and empires seeking conquest abroad due to its location on the Adriatic and Ionian seas. Albanians believe themselves to be descendants of the ancient Illyrians, who migrated in 2000 BC to Albania from central Europe at the beginning of the Bronze Age. In 1912, Albania declared its independence.



Family Life

In Albania, most households consist of parents (or a parent) and their children. Some households have more than one relative living with the family, such as grandparents, aunts, and/or uncles. Typically in Albania, both parents work and are financially responsible for the family. The roles of women and men are also different in Albania. Usually, the father is the head of the family and makes big decisions, while the mother takes care of the children and the house. Both roles are highly respected. Hiring a housekeeper is not common in Albania; however, in the capital of Tirana, some middle and upper income families can now afford to have a housekeeper. In low and middle income families, the mother does the cleaning; children are required to clean up their own room or help their mothers.

Teen Life: Sharing is common in Albanian families. While siblings should ask each other if they can use each other's personal items, children can use any family item without asking. Teenagers usually ask for money for different activities (ex: cinema, theater, coffee, etc.) and parents provide this money; there are also families that give allowances to their teenage children. Due to a lack of jobs, working part-time as a teenager is not possible.

Responsibilities: Usually Albanian parents like their children to focus only on their studies, and they might give specific chores to their children only during the week-ends. Albanian boys are usually treated differently from girls, as girls have to contribute more to the cleanliness of the house. However, changes depending on the family. Parents encourage children to make responsible decisions (and be responsible for any consequences) regarding things such as saving money and thinking about a future career. Ultimately, the final decision is often left with the teenager, although Albanian parents try to influence their child's decisions, especially as they are related to university studies. Teenagers in Albania are primarily dependent on their parents when it comes to finances. However, they may have the opportunity work during the summer, giving them the chance to learn financial responsibility.

Parental Involvement: Albania is small and it is typical for people to know each other. Parents often spend time with their family members and friends, and they try to socialize their children. Meeting with cousins or friends of the family and their children is normal. Depending on the size of the apartment, teenagers will typically spend time alone in their rooms. Many parents in Albania are often actively involved in supporting or helping to arrange their children's extracurricular activities. Albanian parents are often in frequent, direct contact with their children's teachers at school and are kept aware of their academic progress through regular meetings. Schools have a regular meeting with the parents once every two weeks or monthly. Monitoring what children do online is difficult, especially because a lot of parents do not know much about technology. Parents discipline their children in different ways. It is common for parents to confiscate their cell phones, and restrict computer and video games privileges.

Pets: Many Albanian families have pets, most often cats or dogs. Pets are thought of and treated as members of the family, and often are allowed to go anywhere inside the house. Also, due to the high rate of migration, a lot of elderly people spend their time with their pets. Adopting animals from pet shelters is not common.

School



Classes: In Albania, students stay in the same classroom all day with the same group of students, while teachers rotate to different classrooms. Students only change their classroom if they have to go to a biology/physics laboratory. Students in Albania are evaluated on a variety of tasks: daily homework, class participation, and written and oral exams. Students take 12-13 subjects during the year, with classes meeting for a total of either two hours or three to four hours each week. Generally, all students are in the same classes, though some elective subjects allow students to enroll in advanced math or physics courses. While 10th and 11th grade students can only take two or three elective courses, 12th grade students only have five required subjects, leaving them with seven elective courses.

In public and private schools in Albania, students are not seated separately by gender in class; teachers may also assign seats to the students. In religious schools or in some Turkish colleges, boys and girls are seated separately, or are in separate classes completely.

School Relationships: Student-teacher relationships in Albania are more formal than in the U.S. Students address their teachers by calling them "teacher" before the teacher's first name. It is considered rude to call teachers by solely their first name.

Extracurricular Activities: In Albania, sports and art clubs are not overly popular, but students can get involved in these kinds of activities at school. Throughout the year, students must take a physical education class until grade 12. In this class, students typically do physical exercises or play team sports like basketball and volleyball. The teacher might then create a sport team (ex: a basketball team) with selected students based on their ability to play sports. These teams play against each other and, at the end of the year, one group is chosen to represent the school at the national competition. If students want to take art or language classes, they need to find private club or classes that offer these kinds of opportunities.

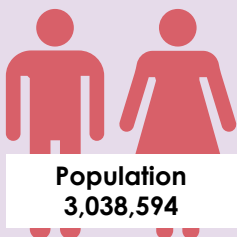
School Rules and Attire: The use of cell phones is not allowed during classes in Albania. If a teacher sees a student using a cell phone, the cell phone is not immediately confiscated. Depending on the schools, the school principal keeps it in his or her office until the student's parents meet with the teacher and school principal. Fighting is considered very serious in Albania. If a student is caught fighting in the school area, it will lead to suspension or expulsion, depending on the severity of the event. Additionally, parents in Albania may be required to meet with the school, and the student could be prevented from registering in that school again. Cheating is not allowed, but it has become a widespread issue in Albania. No student will be expelled from school for cheating.

In public and private high schools, wearing school uniforms is mandatory. Although wearing school uniforms is required, students are now allowed to wear make-up, jewelry, tight pants, and high heels. This is a recent change from more traditional uniform rules.

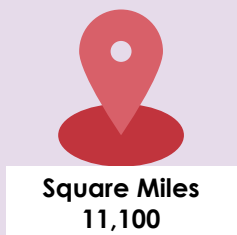
Returning from Exchange: Once YES students return to Albania, the classes they took in the U.S. will be examined for equivalency by the country's Board of Education. If students are missing required classes from their YES year, they must complete them within two months in order to get the required number of credits to graduate and take mandatory national exams. However, if the student is missing more than six subjects worth of credits, the student must repeat the year.



Tirana



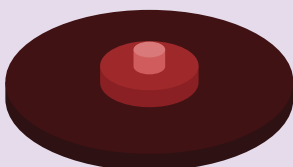
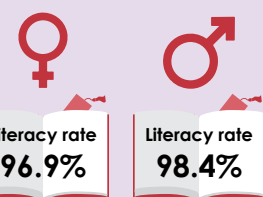
Population
3,038,594



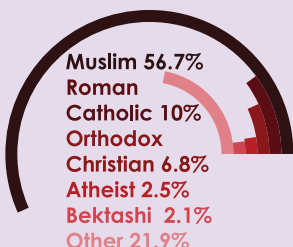
Square Miles
11,100



Currency
Albanian Lek



Albanian 82.6%
Greek 0.9%
Unspecified 16.5%



Personal Interactions



Mixed Gender Socializing: It is common to see opposite genders socializing together in Albania, both in groups and one-on-one. Students are not judged negatively if they are seen holding hands or having a best friend of the opposite gender.

Friendships: Albanian teenagers usually use the term “friend” for someone they have known for a long time, with whom they might be in the same school, neighborhood, or share the same interests with. Teenagers have been taught since they were little that socializing and making relationships is important. Teachers make an effort to put students into different groups to encourage them socialize and create friendships, and this has resulted in increasing respect for their friends and strong relationships between peers. Some teenagers make friendships that last from the time they are in kindergarten; these kinds of friendship are the ones who last longer. Sharing money is very common amongst friends in Albania. Teenagers sometimes pay for their friends as a way to “treat” them or show that they count on them. However, if a student pays for his/her friend, it is expected that their friend treat them the next time they go out together.

Communication Styles: Parents and elders are highly respected in Albania, and students are taught not to argue with someone older and to listen without questioning. However, there are no specific rules on how the teenager should communicate with their parents or other family members. They have a direct style of communication with their family members and relatives. Nowadays, it is easier for teenagers to sometimes show disrespect towards others, but culturally they are taught to keep negative emotions themselves and not express their negative feelings/thoughts directly to their peers. They try to be careful in the way they express their thought/feelings, especially with people they do not know very well. When it comes best friends and they feel more comfortable showing their true feelings. Teenagers may also have strong relationships with family members, depending how open they are.

Eye Contact: In Albania, making eye contact during a conversation is an important sign of showing respect to anyone older than you, such as parents and teachers, as it shows that you are paying attention to what they are saying. Not making eye contact is considered rude.

Cultural Norms: Albanians are usually a little bit late, although they appreciate when things are on time.

Food and Culture



During the week, it can be difficult for families in Albania to gather together and eat meals at the same time due to busy schedules, but during the weekends or on holidays meals are usually eaten as a family. During meals, family members talk about their day at school or work, or about anything important or special that had happened.

Guest Culture: In Albania, guests should try the food and the drinks offered by hosts, even if in small portions, as it is impolite to decline the food or drinks offered. Even if a guest politely declines, hosts will continue to offer food and drinks, because they likely think that the guest is feeling too shy to take food the first time it's offered. Hosts will continue to give food to their guests as a way of honoring them.

Lunch and Diets: Albania has a Mediterranean cuisine with a strong influence from the Ottoman Empire, as in all Balkan countries. Albanians try to eat healthy food and families spend a lot of money on food, as it is top priority for parents to provide good meals for their children. Dieting has become popular among women and young people, especially before the summer starts. In Albania, Muslims do not eat pork or drink alcohol.

Usually in Albania, parents prepare a bag lunch for their kids. Some parents will also give lunch money for students to buy food at school. Students generally share their food amongst their friends, as it is considered rude to eat in front of others who do not have food without sharing it.

Religion: There is religious harmony amongst Muslims, Orthodox Christians, Catholic Christians, and Bektashi (a Sufi order that is a sect of Islamic mystic tradition) in Albania. However, it is not a very common for Albanians to go to church or mosque, and the majority of Albanians do not attend any religious services, except families who are very religious. Churches and mosques do not play any civic role within the community.

Holidays: Various holidays are celebrated in Albania. March 14 is Spring Day; Albanians celebrate this holiday by buying the traditional dessert “ballokume,” participating in different celebrations in town centers, or going out for lunch with their families and relatives. Independence and Flag Day are the most important holidays in the country. Both holidays are celebrated with festivals, fireworks, and time spent with family at home or together outside the city. New Year is another important celebration. After midnight, everyone goes downtown to watch fireworks and, after having a family dinner at home, youth usually go to clubs to celebrate with their close friends. Another holiday is the Day of Mother Theresa on October 19.

The most important religious celebrations in Albania are Christmas (both Catholic and Orthodox), Easter (both Catholic and Orthodox), Eid al-Adha, Eid al-Fitr, and Sultan Nowruz Day (Bektashi). Members of other religions respect each other's beliefs and holidays, but generally religious holidays are celebrated only with families and relatives.

Personal Hygiene



Generally, teenagers take a shower daily (either in the morning or evening), except when they are involved in physical activities. Wearing the same clothes two days in a row is not common and is considered unclean, except in cases where a student needs to wear a school uniform, for which they might wear the same t-shirt two days in a row. Albanians also often iron their clothes.

Generally, Albanian teenagers are not used to or familiar with doing their own laundry. In many Albanian households, all of the dirty clothes are put in a basket together or put next to the washing machine, and then the person who takes care of the house and laundry (usually the mother) washes the family's clothes.