

Butrint – a brief history of an ancient city

History of Butrint, an ancient port city, is a fragment of the Mediterranean world history. Nowadays this ancient city constitutes the most visited cultural tourist destination of the country.

Most of the monuments visited today in the ancient city have been discovered by the Italian Archaeological Mission, guided by Luigi Maria Ugolini, who worked for nearly 10 years in Butrint (1928-1939).

What Butrint offers today is a remarkable journey through the ages of history, which dates back to 8th century B.C. The old city and its heritage retain a unique testimony of Hellenistic, Roman, Byzantine, Venetian and Ottoman cultures and civilizations.

According to classical mythology, the ancient city known as *Buthrotum*, was founded by the exiles who left the city after the fall of Troy. In the epic poem “Aeneid”, the Latin poet Virgil narrates to Aeneas, who visited Butrint on his way to Italy.

Data of the multi-year archaeological excavations indicate that over there, around the 4th century B.C, this ancient settlement was surrounded by defensive walls and the city gradually turned into a cult center. A chapel dedicated to Asclepius, god of medicine, was built on the southern slope of the Acropolis hill. An inscription of the 4th century B.C (inscribed on one of the seats of the theater), shows that its construction was enabled by donations of religionists to the chapel. The geographer Hecataeus of Miletus described *Buthrotum* as an important port and trading center on the main Adriatic waterway.

In 228 B.C Butrint fell under the Roman rule and in the 1st century B.C it became part of the Roman province of Macedonia. Established by Julius Caesar, *Colonia Iulia Buthrotum* witnessed the greatest development during the rule of Augustus, when it was known as *Colonia Augusta Buthrotum*. The city is also surrounded by defensive walls and involved in a huge construction program of the public sphere. During this period Butrint, which differed from the old center affiliated with the chapel of Asclepius, included constructions of any kind, temples, forums, the theater rearranged according to the Roman style, fountains, baths (*thermae*), villas (private residences). In this period took place even the construction of a new water supply and of the bridge linking the two banks of Vivari canal. In the 5th century, Butrint become an Episcopal residence. The city in that period, retains evidence of this impressive early Christians art and architecture, such: the large baptistery and basilica, constructions of the early 6th century. In other parts of the city so far, there are found 8 other churches, the most important of which is in Vrina plain, on the other side of Vivari canal.

At the beginning of the 19th century, although the entry in Butrint appears to have been fortified, the center was already twisted into a small fishing settlement. In the outfall of Vivari canal, around the year 1807, Ali Pasha also established his fortress, to ensure his protection against the French attacks coming from Corfu. After the death of Pasha, Butrint passed under the Ottoman rule, up to the Declaration of Independence.

It is the co-presence of historical monuments, nature and landscape that makes Butrint a unique place. The ancient city, which became in 1992 a “*World Heritage*” of UNESCO, today is located within the National Park of Butrint. This national park has a total area of 9424.04 ha and since 2003 owns the status of *wetland area* of international importance - “*RAMSAR area*”. The area is considered as quite diverse in terms of flora and fauna that lodges there. It counts about 800 kinds of plants, among which, 16 are considered as endangered and 12 as rare. To date, in the wetland complex of Butrint, there have been identified up to 246 species of birds, 105 species of fish and 39 species of mammals, among them, many species of *special conservation status*.



Museum of the ancient city, reopened in 2005 in the Acropolis castle, presents a chronological overview of the history of Butrint, starting from the Bronze Age to the Late Middle Ages.

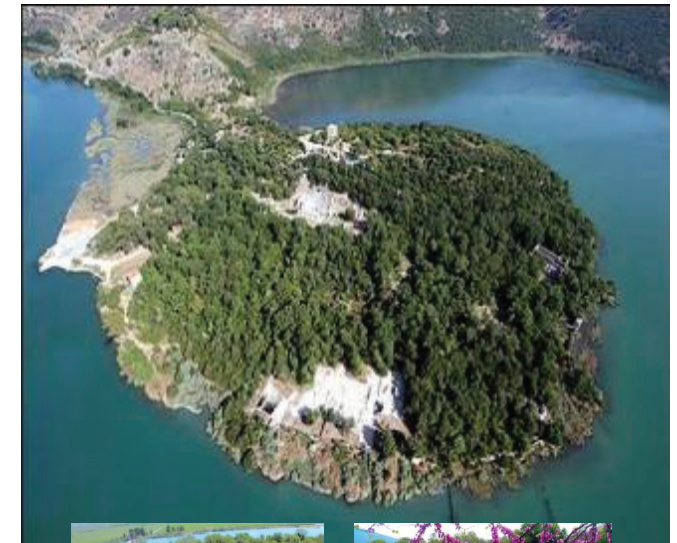


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NATIONAL PARK OF BUTRINT





A journey to the ancient city

1. A Venetian tower built in the 15th and 16th century.
2. A chapel of the 4th century B.C, dedicated to the god of Asclepius
3. The ancient Theatre, a construction of the 3rd century, later arranged according to the Roman style and equipped with a Roman scene.
4. Roman Baths (Thermae) of the 2nd century A.D
5. Agora / the Forum - the civic and commercial epicenter of the city
6. The Gymnasium, perhaps a pagan shrine, later transformed into a church
7. The Roman civic house (Villae), in 5th century transformed into a palace with a triangular dining room (Trikonk Palace).
8. A baptistry of the early 6th century, with mosaic floor.
9. A fountain of the 2nd century A.D, dedicated to the Nymphs.
10. The Great Basilica – a cult establishment of the early Christian period, built in the 6th century A.D.
11. The Lake Gate - a perfect Hellenistic gateway of the 4th century B.C
12. The Lion's Gate - another gateway reconstructed in the medieval period.
13. Acropolis - set up on the hill with traces of early use dating back to the 8th century B.C.
14. The Venetian castle of the 14th and 16th century, reconstructed in the 1930s.
15. Museum of the ancient city of Butrint