



Albania

Status: Multiparty Republic on Balkan Peninsula
Area: 11,082 sq. miles
Population: 2,811,000 (2015 estimate)
Currency: 125 Lek = U.S. \$1



The overprint on a set of eight 1928 stamps reads "Kingdom of Albania," Scott 232.



A set of five stamps in 1946 was issued for the International Women's Congress, Scott 380.

As part of the Ottoman Empire, the Albanians were served by the Ottoman Post. Turkish stamps were introduced in 1863. The Austrian post was the first to sell stamps in Albania in 1854 through the Austrian Lloyd Line offices in about a half dozen coastal towns. The Italians, seeking to expand their influence in the area, sold special overprinted stamps in several coastal towns in 1902. The Ottoman Posts were discontinued upon withdrawal of their army in 1912. The foreign post offices were closed after the outbreak of World War I.

For the first months after independence, the fledgling Albanian government used Turkish stamps (not overprinted) in the areas it controlled. In May 1913, handstamps were used to indicate prepayment of postage. In June, Turkish stamps were overprinted with a double-headed eagle. The first professionally printed stamps appeared with the 1913 Skanderbeg issue. Wartime conditions and political instability limited the Albanian posts to the barest minimum until 1924. The Italians took control of the post office in April 1939. They were replaced by the Germans in September 1943.



Famous Albanians featured on a 2001 pair of commemorative stamps, Scott 2640.

Albanians trace their roots to the Illyrians, an ancient people who dominated the eastern Adriatic coast for centuries before Roman conquest. The area prospered during the Roman and Byzantine eras and provided several emperors for both Rome and Constantinople. In the mid-14th century, the Serbs overran Albania ending 1,000 years of Byzantine rule. The Serbians were quickly replaced by the Ottomans. But the Albanians, under their great national hero, Skanderbeg, were able to resist the Turks for 25 years. This struggle left the Albanians with a strong national identity and the rugged terrain enabled them to preserve their distinctive language and culture.

In 1506, after Skanderbeg's death, the Turks prevailed, introducing four centuries of Ottoman rule, though Turkish control was often largely nominal, especially in the mountainous regions. As the weakened Ottoman Empire disintegrated in the 19th century, Albanian nationalism grew. In 1908, scholars created the Albanian alphabet — based on Latin characters. In 1912, after a three-year rebellion, Turkey recognized Albanian autonomy.

Greece, Serbia, and Montenegro sought to partition Albania and immediately attacked the new state. On November 28, 1912, Albania declared its independence. Its annihilation was prevented by the intervention of the European powers. World War I brought a new crisis; Albania was occupied by six countries (each operating its own post offices). After the war, Albania was stabilized under a dictator who declared himself King Zog I. World War II brought occupation by the Italians from 1939 to 1943, and the Germans from 1943 to 1944. Albania emerged from the war under the strict control of Enver Hoxha, whose Communist orthodoxy turned Albania into a "bastion of Stalinism" until his death in 1985. After the collapse of Communism, Albania embraced western institutions, including membership in NATO.

Stamps of the post-war Communist regime were first available on January 4, 1945. Stamps of this era are inscribed *R P e Shqiperise* (People's Republic of Albania) or simply *Shqiperia* (Albania). After the proclamation of the People's Socialist Republic of Albania, the inscription was changed to *R P S e Shqiperia*. In 1991, the inscription reverted to *Shqiperia*, or *Posta Shqiptare*.



A common stamp from a 1939 set was overprinted in 1942, Scott 331.



Italy issued four stamps during its occupation of Albania early in World War II, Scott J43. Germany did not issue stamps for Albania when it became the occupying force in 1943.



Inscriptions on modern stamps of Albania have changed several times. Under Community influence after World War II, a common inscription is "RPE Shqiperise," as on the Veqilharxhi set of 1957 (Scott 525).