



Newsletter from the Gjirokastra Conservation and Development Organization

Issue 1, September/October.

1. Restoration Camp with Cultural Heritage without Borders.

The Swedish NGO “Cultural Heritage without Borders” in partnership with the GCDO and the Regional Directorate of the Institute of Monuments, arranged a two week “restoration camp” aiming to teach important traditional conservation skills in the fields of wood restoration and plaster techniques. The “camp” saw 15 students from the Balkan region undertake practical training on projects at the “Zekate house” and the Old Bazaar, under the tutelage of three international conservation specialists. The training aimed to revitalise traditional building skills which are vital to the long-term conservation of the city. It is hoped that this important training will continue and be expanded upon, in 2008.



2. International Cultural and Artisan Day

In collaboration with the Albanian Artisans Confederation and “Friendship Association” of Gjirokastra, the GCDO arranged an Artisan day on September 28th. Artisans and producers of handicrafts from across Albania set up shop in the Old Bazaar, and with polyphonic singers and local bands playing, the old town was once again transformed into a bustling and colourful bazaar reminiscent of old times. In addition the Mayor, Flamur Bime, hosted a round table to look at ways of promoting Gjirokastra’s and Albania’s handicrafts. It was widely acknowledged that Gjirokastra should do more to emulate Kruja, in order to attract tourists.



The GCDO, in conjunction with the Municipality and other partners hope to hold craft days in Gjirokastra next year which will help showcase the craft training programme that the GCDO will instigate this winter.

3. Gjirokastra Photographic Exhibition: “Light and Shade”

In September the GCDO hosted an exhibition of Gjirokastra photographs “Light and Shade”, by the well-known Albanian photographer, Roland Tasho, at the “Çajupi” Hotel. The exhibition is a wonderful portrait of Gjirokastra, its people and its architecture through the seasons. It is hoped that it will travel the country soon for a wider audience.



4. Tourism Exhibitions/Services.

The GCDO represented Gjirokastra at the Tirana Tourism Fair on September 27. The GCDO was invited by USAID/EDEM project which will also help the GCDO to present Gjirokastra in the London Travel Market Fair on November 12. Information pamphlets about Gjirokastra’s main sites and attractions as well as a new fold-out map have been created to help tourists learn about the city and to orientate themselves. The Tourist Information Centre (TIC),



established by the GCDO in the Old Bazar, has had a busy year. According to data from a three month tourism survey undertaken with the UNDP, 73% of tourists now visit TIC and 93% of them find it useful. The TIC has had around 3,800 tourists pass through its doors since it opened in May.

5. A new Museum for Gjirokastra.

The GCDO, with funding from the New York based Philanthropic Collaborative, is working with an Albanian research team on a detailed proposal to create a new museum “of Gjirokastra and the Drinos valley” to be housed, potentially, in Gjirokastra Castle. The museum would bring together photographic, archival and oral archives to present a vivid and colourful account of the cultural history of Gjirokastra and the Drinos valley.

The project proposal will be completed by the end of 2007, and if funds can be acquired to build the museum in 2008, the GCDO believes that the castle will become the focal point of the effort to draw visitors to Gjirokastra.

6. Renewable Energy Lighting in the Castle.

The GCDO in conjunction with UNDP(GEF project) and Regione Marche, of Italy, is finalising the project to illuminate the 60 metre vaulted entrance tunnel into Gjirokastra castle. The tunnel, which houses an impressive array of field guns, is currently poorly lit and presented. In the coming months, the project will see the installation of photo-voltaic panels on the castle roof (in an inconspicuous area) which will provide renewable solar energy to power energy saving illumination in the castle entrance tunnel. Meanwhile the GCDO is working to prepare site information panels for a tourist trail around the castle. It is hoped to have these erected in the next few months.

7. GCDO becomes an Albanian registered NGO.

On last days of October, the GCDO became a registered Albanian NGO- the Gjirokastra Conservation and Development Organization. This will allow the GCDO and its Albanian staff to continue to be at the forefront of efforts to conserve, protect and promote Gjirokastra in 2007-2008.

8. GCDO's Peace Corps Volunteers.

The GCDO's Peace Corp Volunteers, David and Kate Bragg have returned to the States after giving great support, inspiration and help to the GCDO. The Tourist Information Centre project which they helped to establish was selected as one of the two successful projects of Community Development program of Peace Corps Albania for 2007, and it will be presented as part of Peace Corps Albania work to the US Congress. We hope that the Peace Corps will provide further invaluable assistance to the GCDO in the future.



Gjirokastra clean-up volunteers, September 28

Thank you for taking the time to read this newsletter.

** If you would like more information about the GCDO and our efforts to help Gjirokastra, please contact the Director, Sadi Petrela on spetrela@gjirokastra.org or telephone 00355 6920 78767.*