

# Things to Do in Valbona

## Knitting Naturally with Sose Selimaj



### *So what IS there to do in Valbona?*

We thought we'd start by sharing the things we do, and have done for hundreds of years! We Knit! Especially during the long quiet winters, we knit and knit and knit. And then, after we have some coffee, we knit some more! But of course, it doesn't start there. We raise the sheep, collect the wool, wash the wool, brush the wool, spin the wool, then we knit the wool and then of course . . . we Wear the Wool!

### *Itinerary:*

1. Visit the Sheep (an optional extra day for stout hikers). Across the Field our Cousin Shkelzen has 30 Sheep. From 25 June - 25 August the sheep are taken up to the Bjeshket - the mountain meadows. If you like, you can combine this day's activity with a visit up there. Just talk to us about arranging this.
2. Raw Wool ("Lesh"). A lovely pair of knitted socks starts of course with a rather nasty mess of filthy raw wool. The first step is to wash the wool. You can try your hand at this, or of course we can just go and look at it. The wool is dried in the sun and then softened by hand.
3. Brushing to Tufë. The next step is that the clean wool is carded into a big soft ball of fluff ("tufë"). Nowadays this is done by Taking it To the Big Old Machine in Bajram Curri, but that's only 50 years old, and we still have the old hand tools for you to use!
4. Spinning the Wool. This is still done the old fashioned way. A ball of new Tuf is mounted on a wooden spindle and spun by hand. It LOOKS easy . . .
5. Now you've got your wool, and you can start knitting! You'll learn the "Balkan Cast-on," how we hold the wool (hint - it goes round your neck), and you can try to knit like the ladies do here, with machine-gun speed!



## *Some Things You Might Like to Knit*

While we also knit vests, mittens, hats and sweaters, the most common thing to knit are SOCKS. Traditionally "fancy knitted socks" were an important part of a bride's dowry. Still today, if you visit someone's house, the woman of the house will often give a visiting woman a pair of socks. Albanians don't use written patterns, but they examine each other's socks with glee, and borrow pairs to take the pattern.

"Papuçe" are little slippers. They are knitted flat in a sort of "V" shape and then stiched up the heel. We usually wear them over another ankle-length pair of socks, which in turn are worn over "Gete" or stockings. We like to be warm!

Socks are usually ankle length for every day use. Socks made of Lesh, or the raw wool are always white, and knitted very tight and thick, so they often appear "boiled." Other socks made with fine wool are knitted in many colorful patterns.

Traditional or Fancy-Dress socks are knee-length, royal blue, and made with open lacework patterns. There is usually a fancy applique at the ankle.



## *If you would like to Spend the Day with Sose*

The fee is 50€, for Sose's day, so you can bring as many people as you like, though large crowds (over 10 people) should let us know, as you might not all fit in the kitchen!

Please let us know at least one day in advance, so Sose can free up her schedule.

Sose speaks fine Malesori Dialect, but given notice we can arrange for a translator.

We don't really expect you to spin enough wool to make your own socks, so you'll get one ball of lesh to keep.

Like all Good Albanian Women, Sose has a drawer full of socks, if you feel like buying some gifts for friends' feet at home!

*For More Information:* See our website, [www. JourneytoValbona.com](http://www.JourneytoValbona.com), or contact Catherine at 355 (0)67 30 14 638.