



# Lebanon





The daylight rising over Lebanon brings endless opportunities of fun, beach, nature and outdoor activities. You'll never know what to choose...

Lebanon's diverse patchwork of Mediterranean-lapped coast, rugged alpine peaks, and green fertile valleys is packed into a parcel of land some 225km long and 46km wide. An ancient land, Lebanon features in the writings of Homer and in the Old Testament. Its cities were major outposts and seaports in Phoenician and Roman times, just two of the great civilizations that touched this important Middle Eastern crossroads.

The cosmopolitan flair of modern-day Beirut, the gastronomic renown of the country's food and wine, and an educated and outward-looking population complement a country that is both traditional and progressive in outlook. For all the flavours of its storied past and rugged natural beauty, Lebanon is a well-kept tourist secret that begs exploration.

There are four main geographic regions in Lebanon, differentiated by topography and climate. From west to east, they include: the coastal plain, the Mount Lebanon Range, the Békaa Valley, and the Anti-Lebanon Range.

To visit Lebanon is to dispel preconceived notions that linger from a relatively short moment in a long, vivid, and fascinating history: drink in the energetic, urbane vibe of revitalized Beirut; explore a diverse and beautiful landscape that lends itself easily to an unforgettable (and largely untrammled) multi-sport adventure; marvel at

archaeological wonders that are windows into the cradle of civilization; and simply enjoy the welcome of a people who are naturally hospitable, friendly, and gregarious.



*Did you know...*

There are 15 rivers in Lebanon (all of which come from its own mountains)





## General Information

**Capital:** Beirut

**Population:** Approximately 3.8 million

**Languages:** Arabic (official), French, English, Armenian

**Area:** 10,452 square kilometres

**Climate:** Mediterranean climate, with cool, wet winters and hot, dry summers.

**Elevations:** Highest point: Qornet Es-Saouda (3,090m). Lowest point: Mediterranean Sea (0m).

**Currency:** Movement of currency into and out of the country and all exchange transactions are completely free of any kind of control. Gold and silver coins may be freely exchanged, imported, and exported. The official monetary unit is the Lebanese pound.

**Entry Requirements:** Visas: All foreigners must have a valid passport and visa to enter Lebanon. Passports must be valid for at least six months. Visas can be obtained in advance at Lebanese embassies and consulates around the world. Nationals of many countries can also obtain business or tourist visas upon arrival at the Beirut Airport and at other ports of entry on the Lebanese border. At the Beirut Airport, visa stamps can be purchased at a window directly across from passport control.

**Important Note:** Travellers holding passports that contain visas or entry/exit stamps for Israel are likely to be refused entry into Lebanon.

**Customs:** All ordinary personal effects are exempt from customs duty.

**Time:** Lebanese time is GMT +2 hours in winter (October to March) and +3 hours in summer (April to September), when daylight saving time is observed.

**Business Hours:** Government Offices: 8:00 to 14:00 (Mon to Fri) - 8:00 to 11:00 (Sat); Banks: 8:00 to 14:00 (Mon to Sat); Shops and malls: 9:00 to 22:00.

**Communications:** Telephones: While the telephone system in Lebanon is well-developed, there are few public pay phones and international phone calls are expensive. Most Lebanese use mobile phones and coverage extends throughout the country. The country code for Lebanon is (961). This is followed by the local area code and the telephone number. The area code for mobile phones is (03) and the area code for Beirut is (01). If you are dialing Lebanon from outside the country, omit the (0) in the area code.

**Internet:** There are internet cafés available throughout Lebanon and many larger hotels now offer high-speed and wireless internet access for free or for a small fee.

**Electricity:** Electric current is 110/220 volts, 50 cycles. A two-pin plug, with round pins is commonly used (Type C, similar to many European countries), but other types of plugs are also in use so it is best to check before you go.

**Health:** Lebanon is a developed country with relatively good health facilities. Similar to travel to other foreign countries, hepatitis A and B vaccines are recommended; also make sure tetanus-diphtheria and measles vaccinations are up-to-date. A typhoid vaccine is also recommended for travel to Lebanon.

**Flying Time from the UK:** 4 hours and 20 minutes.

The lovely Lebanese coast is framed by the Mediterranean Sea to the west and the Mount Lebanon Range to the east, its temperate climate bringing in sunny, hot summers and cool, rainy winters.

The daytime temperature in the summer, which averages 30°C (86°F), encourages people to head to the beach or to the higher, altitude-cooled mountain slopes.

In the coastal cities of Saida (Sidon) and Jbail (Byblos), tourists can enjoy the rare opportunity to snorkel amongst long-submerged Phoenician ruins, while excellent hiking is a mere hour away in the Chouf region of the Mount Lebanon Range.

### Did you know...

People say that the cedars were planted by God's own hands (This is why they're called 'The Cedars of God', and this is why Lebanon is called 'God's Country on Earth.'



# World Heritage Sites



Anjar



Baalbek



Byblos



Tyre



Ouadi Qadisha

UNESCO - World Heritage Convention has recognised the following as World Heritage Sites in Lebanon

## **Anjar**

Anjar, 58 km from Beirut, is exclusively from one period, going back to the early 8th Century AD. Unlike Tyre and Byblos, which claim continuous habitation since the day they were founded, Anjar flourished for only a few decades.

The city benefited from its strategic position on intersecting trade routes leading to Damascus, Homs, Baalbeck and to the South. This almost perfect quadrilateral of ruins lies in the midst of some of the richest agricultural land in Lebanon. It is only a short distance from gushing springs and one of the important sources of the Litani River.

## **Baalbek**

Lebanon's greatest Roman treasure, can be counted among the wonders of the ancient world. These are not only the largest and noblest Roman temples ever built, but they are also among the

best preserved. Towering high above the Beqaa plain, their monumental proportions proclaimed the power and wealth of Imperial Rome.

## **Byblos**

Byblos is said to be the oldest inhabited city in the world, the source of the first Phoenician letters that gave us our alphabet. Byblos was the major seaport of the east Mediterranean during the 3rd millennium BC. The ruins include the perimeter walls, the Temple of Baalat-Gebal (the goddess of the city), the Temple of the Gbelisks and the royal tombs. There are also ruins dating from Roman times and the crusader castle and church.

## **Tyre**

Founded at the start of the third millennium BC, Tyre originally consisted of a mainland settlement and a modest island city that lay a short distance off

shore. But it was not until the first millennium BC that the city experienced its golden age. In the 10th Century BC Hiram, King of Tyre, joined two islets by landfill. Later he extended the city further by reclaiming a considerable area from the sea.

## **Ouadi Qadisha (the Holy Valley) and the Forest of the Cedars of God (Horsh Arz el-Rab)**

The Qadisha valley is one of the most important early Christian monastic settlements in the world. Its monasteries, many of which are of a great age, stand in dramatic positions in a rugged landscape.

Nearby are the remains of the great forest of cedars of Lebanon, highly prized in antiquity for the construction of great religious buildings.



# Places to Visit Places to Visit Places to Visit



**Beirut:** The former 'Pearl of the Middle East' is back in the spotlight. A bustling city with numerous restaurants and bars. With a huge composition of cultures, Beirut offers something for everyone.



**Jeita Grotto:** A wonderland formed of two fabulous grottoes, full of unimaginable beauty. The caves are situated in the Nahr al-Kalb valley within the locality of Jeita, approximately 11km north of Beirut.



**Beiteddine:** The Beiteddine palace complex is one of the best examples of early 19th century architecture. It is located 50 km southeast of Beirut and is the home of the Beiteddine Festival every summer.



**Sidon:** Known as the fishing centre of Lebanon. But what makes Sidon special are its Arabic sweets stores, which make up most of the markets.



**The Cedars:** The resort of the Cedars near Bsharreh is also known for its excellent skiing and the exceptional view of the Qadisha Valley seen from the highest slopes.



**Tripoli:** Lebanon's second largest city is buzzing and vibrant. Explore the Citadel, wander around the harbour or stroll through the markets and lanes of the city.



**Deir-el-Qamar:** Step into a living museum, with unusual winding and narrow streets that lead out to dramatic palaces and buildings that reflect an old world architectural style.



**Zahleh:** Enjoy bracing mountain air and take a tour of the beautiful vineyards of the region where you can try a bottle of local bubbly (Narjilleh).





## Lebanese Cuisine

Dining out is one of the best ways of really getting to know what Lebanon is all about.

The Lebanese diet focuses on herbs, spices and fresh ingredients, relying less on heavy sauces. Mint, parsley, oregano, garlic, allspice, nutmeg, and cinnamon are the most common seasonings.

Bread, a staple food in Lebanon, is served with almost every meal, most often as a flat bread, or pita. It is so crucial to the Lebanese diet that some Arabic dialects refer to it as esh, meaning 'life.'

Fruit, vegetables, rice and bread out-weigh the amount of meat eaten in the average Lebanese meal. However, the most commonly eaten meats, poultry and lamb, make up some of the country's most popular dishes. The national dish, kibbeh (or kibbe), consists of a ground lamb and cracked wheat paste, similar to paté.

Mezze, a variety of flavourful hot and cold dishes, is another important part of the Lebanese diet. As many as forty small dishes are presented at once as either appetizers or as a meal itself. Hummus (chickpea, sesame seed and garlic

paste), rice and meat wrapped in grape leaves, mashed beans, hot and cold salads, grilled seafood and meats (including kebabs, cooked cubes of lamb, peppers and onions), and pickled vegetables are most popular. Lebanese meals are rarely served in courses, but presented all at once. Tabbouleh (a salad made with cracked wheat) and mujaddara (a lentil and rice dish) are also widely consumed.

Lebanon's variety of fresh fruits makes them popular after-dinner desserts. Melon, apples, oranges, tangerines, persimmons, grapes, and figs are great treats. Baklava, a sweet, flaky pastry, is usually associated with Greek cuisine. However, the Lebanese have embraced the dessert and normally prepare it with pistachio nuts, drizzled with rose-water syrup (the Greeks use walnuts and honey). Ahweh (strong, thick Arabic-style coffee) and the country's national drink, arak (a colourless alcoholic beverage made with anise, also called 'Lion's Milk' because it is white), are most commonly served with dessert.



# Lebanon through the Seasons



**Spring:** Spring (April-May) is one of the most pleasant times to visit Lebanon. The near perfect weather, 0-15°C (32-60°F) in the mountains and 15-25°C (58-72°F) along the coast, makes it a great time to discover the area.

It's a fantastic time for outdoor activities. Varied terrain, scenic vistas, and historic environs combine to create unique trekking opportunities throughout the country. Particularly popular are hikes through one of the Cedar tree reserves (Al-Shouf, Horsh Ehden, Tannourine) or treks down into the majestic Qadisha Valley.

Lebanon also has great mountain biking, caving, rafting, and paragliding through spectacular mountains-to-blue-oceans landscapes. And, after a day of activities in the mountains or sightseeing on the coast, you can spend cool spring evenings sampling Lebanon's gastronomic delights at one of the country's many open air cafés and restaurants.



**Summer:** Summer (June-September) in Lebanon is made for sun worshipping, beaches, mountain escapes, and cultural festivals. The atmosphere here is a mixture of trendy 'see and be seen' and utter relaxation.

For arts enthusiasts, summer is when Lebanon hosts a large number of festivals. The largest of these are held at historic and archaeological sites, serving as breathtaking backdrops. The Baalbek Festival is hosted on the site of spectacular Roman temples; the Beiteddine Festival is held at a 200 year-old palace in the mountains of the Chouf; and the Byblos Festival takes place in one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world.

The international festivals attract premier talent in a variety of performance areas, ranging from opera or jazz to renowned dance companies and famous comedians. For festivals on a smaller scale with more of a local flavour, many villages throughout the country host summer fairs or festivals.



**Autumn:** Fall (October-November) brings cool, crisp weather that is perfect for taking in Lebanon's rich historical treasures.

Leisurely explore the country's numerous archaeological sites and historic monuments. Go on a hike in the Cedars forest or one of the nature reserves. Take a gastronomical tour of Lebanon, sampling regional specialties at the great restaurants scattered throughout the country. Don't miss wine tasting at the vineyards in the Békaa Valley, the citrus harvest in the South, and apple picking in the North.

Hire a guide to take you on a trip along the ancient olive route to see the harvesting of the olives, learn how olive oil is pressed, and purchase Lebanese olive oil and luxurious olive oil soap.



**Winter:** From the warm Mediterranean coast to the snow-covered mountains, Winter (December-March) presents visitors with a host of contrasts. Along the coast there are warm days and cool evenings, with temperatures ranging from 10-20°C (50-67°F). This makes it a good time to visit the many historical and cultural attractions including the ancient cities of Jbail (Byblos), Saida (Sidon), and Sour (Tyre).

The real draw during the winter, however, are winter sports. With six ski resorts catering to skiers and snowboarders of all skill levels, and cross-country and snowshoe trails, Lebanon has something for everyone. A visit during the tail end of the ski season allows visitors to ski in the morning and take a relaxing swim in the Mediterranean in the afternoon.

The country's famous nightlife, entertainment, and shopping do not slow down during the winter months. There is also a popular classical music festival each February at the Al-Bustan Hotel which features renowned classical performers.





## SEP IN LEBANON

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