

Lebanon as a 4 Seasons Travel and Tourism Destination

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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 area approximately the size of Cyprus or Connecticut. 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 Beirut, the modern-day Mount Lebanon Range, the gastronomic renown of the Békaa Valley, and 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 flavors 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.

The Anti-Lebanon Range is a stretch of arid mountains that rise to the east of the Békaa Valley and form part of the country's eastern border with Syria. The Békaa Valley, known in ancient times as "the breadbasket" or "granary" of the Roman Empire, is still the country's main agricultural region. Located on a high





plateau between the country's two mountain ranges, the river-fed Békaa supports the production of tomatoes, potatoes, wheat, olives, and grapes, even despite summers that are hot and dry.

Besides some of Lebanon's best wineries (Ksara, Kefraya, Massaya), the Békaa's major attraction is the ruins at Baalbek. Originating as a place of worship to Baal, the Phoenician Sun God, Baalbek was known in Greco-Roman times as the famous Heliopolis, or "City of the Sun." Perhaps because of the

region's agricultural importance in feeding the inhabitants of the Roman Empire, some of the largest Roman temples ever constructed were erected at this site. The construction lasted over 200 years, and the well-preserved temples honor Jupiter, Bacchus, and Venus.

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.

The Mount Lebanon Range includes numerous rivers that fizz with snowmelt, steep-walled gullies that shade grottoes once

the hideout to those fleeing persecution, and also Lebanon's highest summit, Qornet Es-Saouda (3,090m). In winter, the high peaks are blanketed with snow, lending Lebanon its name, Lubnan, the Arabic word for "white." Lebanon boasts a number of world-class ski resorts, one of only a couple countries in the Middle East where you can ski. The ski season runs from December until April.

The Mount Lebanon Range is also the location of Lebanon's Cedar Reserves. The great





cedar forests of Lebanon, now untrammelled) multi-sport protected, are famous for their adventure; marvel at use in the construction of some archaeological wonders that are of the holiest buildings in the world; windows into the cradle of region, indeed the world, civilization; and simply enjoy the including Jerusalem's Dome of the welcome of a people who are the Rock and Solomon's naturally hospitable, friendly, and Temple. gregarious.

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 for taking in Lebanon's rich

Fall
Fall is harvest time in Lebanon, with cooler weather, fewer crowds, and scenic natural beauty. October to November, brings cool, crisp weather that is perfect

historical treasures. Temperatures range from 5-20°C (40-68°F) in the mountains and from 15-28°C (60-85°F) on the coast. Since these months are outside the summer and winter high seasons, there will be fewer crowds and better deals on accommodations.

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 small outfitter 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 snow-covered mountains to the warm Mediterranean coast, Lebanon's winter is a season of contrasts.

December to March, presents visitors to Lebanon with a host of contrasts. Winter along the coast is a mild affair, characterized by warm days and cool evenings, with temperatures ranging from 10-20°C (50-67°F). As such, it is a wonderful time to visit the many historical and cultural attractions along the coast, including the ancient cities of

Jbail (Byblos), Saida (Sidon), and Sour (Tyre). Not only will you avoid the crowds, but you may actually find yourself as the solitary visitor to these ancient ruins.

The real draw during the winter, however, is Lebanon's winter sports. With six ski resorts catering to skiers and snowboarders of all skill levels, and kilometers of backcountry cross-country and snowshoe trails waiting to be explored, Lebanon has something for everyone. Winter is the rainy season in Lebanon, which

translates into plenty of powder at the higher elevations where temperatures range from $-5-5^{\circ}\text{C}$ ($25-40^{\circ}\text{F}$). If timed correctly, a visit during the tail end of the ski season affords visitors the opportunity 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 pieces and performers.

Near perfect weather and a display of colorful wildflowers. Soak up the beauty of a Mediterranean spring in Lebanon.

Spring

April to May, is one of the most pleasant times to visit Lebanon. The near perfect weather, $0-15^{\circ}\text{C}$ ($32-60^{\circ}\text{F}$) in the mountains and $15-25^{\circ}\text{C}$ ($58-72^{\circ}\text{F}$) along the coast, makes it a great time to discover Lebanon while soaking up the beauty of a Mediterranean spring.



Lebanon's archaeological treasures are on full display during the spring months, with snow-topped peaks in the background and bright wildflowers springing up amid the ruins. The Spring weather also makes it 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.





For arts enthusiasts, summer is when Lebanon hosts a large number of festivals, featuring both local and international performers. The largest of these festivals are held at historic and archaeological sites, serving as breathtaking backdrops for performances. For example, 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 flavor, many villages throughout the country host summer fairs or festivals.

