

City Tourism

Meet Culture and History and Enjoy the Good Life

Lebanon: Country of Diversity

Beirut-Islamic Tourism

Bordered on one side by the Mediterranean and on the other by two parallel mountain ranges, Lebanon seems a country suspended between the sky and the sea. Despite its small area (10.452 square km) this is a splendid country with its diverse geography, landscape, culture and history. ➤

غابة الأرز.
Cedars Forest.



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التزلج في فاريا .
Chairlift - "Faraya".



Climate

Lebanon enjoys a mild Mediterranean climate with an average of 300 sunny days a year. It almost never rains between June and September, but July and August are often hot and humid, with temperatures around 30 Celsius. Winters are generally cool with heavy rain on the coast and snow in the mountains. Nevertheless, winter brings many pleasant days, making Lebanon ideal for winter sports.

Sports

At Lebanon's many sports and health clubs, you can play golf, tennis or squash, swim or



participate in team sports. Fitness training is very popular, and hotels and clubs will usually allow foreign visitors to their facilities. The moderate climate all year around in Lebanon, with the sea and mountains within one hour drive, makes it possible to ski and swim in the same day. A number of beaches with modern facilities lie within the capital's city limits, and many others extend up and down the coast within easy driving distance. Sailboats are for rent at several yacht clubs, where scuba-diving and sailing instructions are offered by qualified personnel. There are six ski stations in Lebanon: The Cedars, Faraya, Laqlouq, Faqra, Qanat Bakish and Zaarour. Skiers find comfortable accommodation in the hotels at all the above ski resort areas. Ski tows and lifts as well as expert instruction is available.

Shopping

Most international brands are available in Lebanon, but the visitor will be more interested in the local products, especially handicrafts, embroidery, cutlery, brass, caftans and pottery of all kinds among the attractive choices. Talented Lebanese jewellers are another source of original souvenirs at a good price.

Lebanese Cuisine

The cuisine of Lebanon, like its culture, is surprising in its diversity, and is known above all for its *mezze*, countless dishes of savoury hors-d'oeuvres which are endlessly replenished and served in a warm and congenial setting. ➔



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قرية لبنانية - محرب.
Lebanese village -
Meherab



آثار أمونة - عنجر.
Anjar Le grand Palais.



Beirut

Beirut, with its million-plus inhabitants, conveys a sense of life and energy that is immediately apparent. This dynamism is echoed by the capital's geographical position: a great promontory jutting into the blue sea with dramatic mountains rising behind it. A city with a venerable past, 5000 years ago Beirut was a prosperous town in the Canaanite and Phoenician coast. It survived a decade-and-a-half of conflict and has earned the right to call itself, "The city that would not die".

Beirut stands on the site of a very ancient settlement going back at least 5000 years. In the 1st Century BC, Beirut, as it was then called, became a Roman Colony and a seat of a famous law school which continued into the Byzantine era. The city was destroyed by a triple catastrophe of earthquake, tidal wave and fire in 551CE. In the following century, Arab Muslim forces took the city and in 1110 it fell to the Crusaders. Beirut remained in Crusader hands until 1291 when it was conquered by the Mamlukes, an Islamic military dynasty. Ottoman rule began in 1516, continuing for 400 years until the defeat of the Turks in World War One. The French Mandate Period followed and in 1943 Lebanon gained its independence.

There are so many historical sites to see. For example, you can clearly discern the Roman and Byzantine heritage, as in the group of five Roman columns by St George the Maronite Cathedral, the Roman Exedra, the Roman Baths and the Mosaics Floor. You may also want to visit the National Museum, opened in 1942 or the Sursokk Museum in Achrafieh which is dedicated to modern art.

If you are interested in the Crusades and the Mamluke era, you can view the excavated Medieval wall, the Crusader Castle and the Grand Serai built as an Ottoman military barracks in 1853. ➔



شلال عين الشوف.
Ain el Chouf Cascade.

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آثار جبيل.
Byblos Ruins.



مدينة زحلة.
Zahlé.



Mosques

Beirut has many ancient mosques of historical interest, such as:

Al-Umari Mosque: Originally the Crusader cathedral of St John (1113-1150CE), the building was transformed into the city's Grand Mosque by the Mamlukes in 1291.

Zawiyat Ibn al-'Arraq: Built in 1517 by Muhammad ibn al-'Arraq ad-Dimashqi. This building was originally an Islamic law school and continued as a Muslim sanctuary into late Ottoman times. It was rediscovered during the post-civil war clean-up process in 1991.

Amir 'Assaf Mosque: Also called Bab as-Saray Mosque. This was built by Amir Mansour 'Assaf (1572-1580) on the site of the Byzantine Church of the Holy Saviour. Located opposite the Municipal Building.

Amir Munzer Mosque: Built in 1620 on an earlier structure. Also called Naoufara (Fountain) Mosque. There are eight Roman columns in its courtyard.

Majidiyyeh Mosque: This was constructed in the mid-19th Century and named after the Ottoman Sultan Abd al-Majid (1839-1861). There are many Churches to see also, particularly St Louis Church inaugurated in 1863, the Evangelical Church built in 1867, and the Maronite Cathedral of St George built in 1888.

Baalbek

On the place of a very old religious site, the Phoenicians set up a magnificent sanctuary dedicated to the worship of Baal. Under the reign of Alexander the Great, the city developed rapidly. However, the most important construction of the Acropolis of Baalbeck dates from Roman times. A great cultural complex gathers three major edifices: The temple of Jupiter housing 54 Columns and of which only the 6 famous columns remain, measuring each 20 meters in height and 2 meters in diameter at the base, which qualify them to be among the largest Roman columns. The temple of Jupiter has a hexagonal forecourt and is relatively well preserved. The temple of Bacchus is considered as one of the most beautiful successes of Roman architecture and amongst the most well preserved. It is also a popular venue for international festivals and theatre. The temple of Venus is rare indeed, being of a circular plan, comparable in many ways to the Tholos of Delpesin in Greece.

Byblos

This coastal city, located 37km north of Beirut, is now called Jbeil and is the world's oldest continuously inhabited town. Situated on a cliff, it marks the site of the most ancient port of the world ➤



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The Cedars resort settlement is in Lebanon's highest range and is one of the most dramatically beautiful spots in the country. Its centrepiece is an ancient grove of cedars, a tree synonymous for millennia with Lebanon itself. Just below it is the town old Besharre, birthplace of Gibran Khalil Gibran. The Cedars is a resort for all seasons. In summer, the high elevation makes it a wonderful escape from the humid coast, while in winter skiing is the favourite activity.

and a once flourishing commercial centre. But Byblos was also a place of worship, since here dwelled the Temple of Obelisks. Other discoveries revealed the famous figurines of Byblos, the votive statuettes. The visitor will be astonished at the number of superimposed cultural layers: Neolithic, Phoenician, Assyrian, Egyptian, Greek and Roman. The Romans left Byblos a monumental fountain, a sanctuary, a colonnade, and most of all, a magnificent amphitheatre facing the sea. The major attraction at this site is the castle built by the Crusaders inside the ramparts of the ancient city.

The Cedars

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The Jeita Grottoes

20km north of Beirut is the breathtaking Jeita Grottoes which have welcomed thousand of visitors. The two breathtaking grottoes are superimposed and linked by cable car, sinking at a thousand metres inside the mountains. The lower grotto has a bark that leads you into narrow underground passages and lakes and to the source of the River Nahr al-Kalb. The upper grotto may be explored on foot but accompanied by a guide. Stalactites and stalagmites evoke the fauna and flora of the area, with waterfalls, lakes, a surrealistic world that intrigues the spectator.

Sidon

Located 48km south of Beirut, Sidon (called today, Saida) is one of the most famous names in ancient history. The entrance to Sidon from the north is on a wide divided highway lined with palm trees. It is the southern capital and the third city in Lebanon. Its history goes back to the 4th Century BC according to archaeological evidences. Sidon reached its dominance by the 1st Century BC. Earlier, it played a major role during the Persian era (from the 6th to 4th Century BC). The Persians built many palaces in Sidon, although some were destroyed later. Sidon has a similar history of foreign invasions similar to other Lebanese cities.

There are tourist sites that belong to different



خان الإفرنج - صيدا.
Khan el Franj - Sidon.

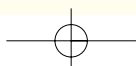


مرفأ صور.
Port of Tyre.

eras. You can visit the Crusaders Sea Castle and The Castle of St Louis as well as Khan el-Faraj which was built by Emir Fakhreddin II. The mosque was destroyed by a storm but rebuilt in 1820.

As you approach the landmark Crusader Sea Castle, modern port installations are immediately visible. The busy main street is

full of small shops of every kind, including patisseries, whose oriental delicacies are stacked in little pyramids. Sidon is famous for a variety of local sweets which you can watch being made in the old souk or in shops on the main street. A growing city with a modern sea port, Sidon is the south's commercial and financial centre. ➤





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الجامع الكبير - صيدا.
The Grand Mosque - Sidon.

Tripoli

75km north of Beirut is located the second capital of Lebanon, Tripoli, a coastal city and on the sea is the Castle of St Gilles. The Church of St Mary of Toures has become today the Great Mosque. It contributed to the introduction of the Western influence on oriental architecture.

The city contains many Mamluke buildings, such as the Mosque of Teynal, that of Abdel Wahed and of the great Mosque of al-Achraf. Also, the tour (la Tour du Lion) in the areas as Mina port, the khans and the hammams with their domes, places of relaxation and pleasure.

Tripoli goes back to the 14th Century BC. Its real history begins with the Phoenicians who established a trading station there around the 9th Century BC. Later, under the Persians, it was a home to a confederation of Phoenician city states (Sidon, Tyre and Arados Island). It was then ruled by Alexander and his successors and enjoyed a period of autonomy at the end of the Seleucid era. The Byzantine city of Tripoli was destroyed by a tidal wave in 551CE. From the early part of the 7th Century to the 12th Century, it was a port for the Muslims. But it fell to the Crusaders for 180 years afterward during which its famous library, Dar al-Ilm' was destroyed. The Mamluke sultan, Qalaoun, took the city but ordered the destruction of the old port and the building of the existing city. The Ottomans ruled the city from 1516 until 1918.

Very few of the Crusader cities are still in existence, such as The Citadel or the Church

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طرابلس.
Tripoli.

of St John of the Pilgrims' Mount. But there are many Mamluke sites to be seen, such as mosques, khanqah, hammams and souks.

Mosques:

The Grand Mosque: Construction began in 1294 and was completed by 1315. It has been built on the remains of a Crusader church and many features of Western architecture are still present. The mosque was used as a madrasa in olden times.

Taynal Mosque: Built in 1336 by Saif ad-Din Taynal and a tomb to the founder. It was built on a ruin of a Crusader church and some materials from the old site were used in the building.

Al-Muallaq Mosque: The name means 'Suspended Mosque'. Built in the 16th Century it has two floors and an attractive courtyard.

You may want to visit Hammam al-Jadid (New Bath), built in 1740, or Khan al-Khayyat (Tailors' Khan), dating back to the 14th Century, or Khan al-Musriyyin (The Egyptian Khan) dating to about the same time. You may also wish to see Souk al-Haraj, a bazaar, dating from the 14th

Century, which has a Roman structure. Finally the Lion Tower, built in the 15th Century and the only one of its kind that is still in existence.

Tyre

Located on the Lebanese Coast, 83km south of the capital, the city of Tyre was founded by the Phoenicians and became the first commercial metropolis of the world. It was in Tyre that the economic empire really expanded. The Sarcophagus of the famous King of Tyre, Hiram, was found in Tyre. It was he who supplied King Solomon, the prophet, with excellent wood from the Cedar forests for the construction of his temple and palace. The visitor can also discover the paved path that crosses a majestic arch of triumph, a field of Roman sarcophagus, mosaic parterres and many other ruins that escaped Assyrian, the Persian and Arab destruction. The archaeological sites are open daily. Several seafood restaurants and pubs are located in the port area and fast food places have opened in the Hay al-Raml area. ■

