

City Tourism

Lebanon in the spring: A Symphony of Eternal Beauty

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The Arabs used to arrive in Lebanon during the summer season but Ahmad and his wife prefer to spend part of their annual holiday in the country in spring. They leave their children with their grandmother. Lets find out why.

A general view of Beirut.

منظر عام لبيروت.

I came to know them by chance at the Cedar Nature Reserve. The introduction was easy and natural in the midst of the splendid surroundings. We were a group of nature and beauty lovers from different nationalities walking in the shadows of the cedars and listening to the explanations of the guide Mr. Hussam Ghanim.

The climate was excellent, it felt as if we could touch the sky and the tops of the mountains were still covered with snow with a distinct aroma in the air. The smell of the air indicates, as Hussam explained, that there are more than 500 types of plants, some with special fragrances. The reserve is about 550 sq. km. and extends from the Duhar El-Shour (on the

Beirut-Damascus Road) to Tumat Niha South. It has about three million cedar trees, distributed throughout five forests: Ain Zhelta, Bmohria, Barouk, Masser Al-Shouf and Niha with the highest reaching between 1000-2000 metres. Ahmad asked about the sweet smelling plants, and Wissam, from the Centre of Research and Observation attached to the reserve, told him that there are 70 species, such as Kassein/Shouf which has endless uses, Lady's-Thistle which is good for the liver, Sennel, Plantain, which is good for the large intestine and can be eaten like Syrian Marjoran, Common Chicory, Water-Crees, Tournefort's Gundelia and many others. There are 10 species belonging to the reserve and 12 others are

threatened with extinction. They are classified through cooperation with the National Council for Scientific Research and Lebanese and foreign universities.

A European tourist asked about the animals living in the reserve. Wissam answered that there are 32 different animals including mammals such as wolves, hyenas, wild boar and mountain gazelle. The reserve tries to increase the number of animals, especially the ones most threatened by extinction such as Nubian Ibex and deer. The animals are enticed with a safe haven, food and water. Japan is assisting with the construction of artificial lakes.

A walk in the heart of the forest is a rare joy: the natural scenes are very attractive, the air is ➤

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Bcharri and Kanoubin Valley.

بشري و وادي قنوبين.



Cedars in Shouf.

محمية ارض الشوف.

pure and refreshing, peace and quiet are twins that were not interrupted by the singing of various birds living in the forest along with an abundance of migrant birds, different types of butterflies in a variety of colours, reptiles etc. The visitors spoke about the different types of plants they had seen and commented on the vitality of having a diversity of plant and tree species in addition to the cedars, such as Common Oak, Oak Infectoria, Pine, Juniper, Amber (the leaf of which has been used by the Canadians as their national emblem) and Acer. They were also impressed by the colours of some types of butterflies.

They noticed the atmosphere of the forest with a high concentration of oxygen, which allows one to take a deep breath that is good for blood circulation. An American tourist shouted: "It is really an oasis of peace and tranquillity".

The tourists were amazed by the locals and talked at length about the characteristics of the people of this region, especially their long healthy lives and their vitality. They attributed this to their diet, which includes honey, fruits and vegetables.

Our main resting place was the "Baroque Palace" hotel, where we listened to Ahmad talking about his visit to the cedar mountains

soon after his arrival in Beirut. He enjoyed the sight of the snow-covered mountain peaks. He enlisted the help of a trainer who taught him the principles of skiing. He also enjoyed staying late in front of the fireplace with his wife and other visitors staying in the hotel.

On his second day, Ahmad went with his wife to Bcharri, a town near the Cedar, to visit the Museum of Jubran, the internationally renowned Lebanese poet.

He was also supposed to visit Kanoubin Valley, famous for its monasteries and shrines. They went instead to Tripoli in the north of Lebanon and had to postpone their visit to the Kanoubin Valley for their next trip.

Ahmad said that he visited the Crusader Castle of St. Giles overlooking the old city and wandered around the market places, which he admired because of their preserved Mamluke architecture. He said that they went on a sea voyage to Rabbit Island and the Palm Island Natural Reserve. He was impressed by the unforgettable taste of the sweets of this region. Making these delicacies has turned into an industry - the skills are passed on from generation to generation.

Ahmad said: "While wandering through the markets, we were impressed by the warm welcome we received from the people of Tripoli, especially in the soap market. We were received by Mr. Bader Hassun, who inherited an old soap factory. He gave us samples of his products as a gift. We thanked him and promised to acquaint our friends with this unique souvenir from Lebanon.

"When we came back to Beirut on the coastal road from Tripoli, we stopped at Jibeal, the historic town that dates back to Phoenician times. We visited its castle and dined at "Pepe Abed" restaurant where delicious food was served. The restaurant is a focal point for visitors to the old port. We also visited the project of "Edde Sands". It is the heavens of this Riviera of Jibeal.

"In Juniah, a town which never sleeps, we took the cable car (telfreak) to Harrisa and enjoyed the view of Juniah Gulf and its surroundings. Once in Beirut, Nuf, my wife, took the opportunity to shop for the children and the family".

Ahmad concluded: "It's is true that Lebanon is the lung of the East and the symphony of beauty". ■