

Lebanon

MIDDLE EASTERN COUNTRY WITH EUROPEAN FLAVOUR RECAPTURING ITS GLORY DAYS AS TOURIST PARADISE

About Lebanon

This country of 4.4 million is slowly recapturing its tourist potential. Bordered by Syria and Israel, Lebanon's population is 60% Arab, 40% Christian. Arabic is the official language, but French and English are also widely spoken.



When To Visit

Almost any time of the year. Lebanon is perfect in summer and winter, and is an increasingly popular ski destination.

Visa Requirements

All foreigners need a visa to enter Lebanon. Australian, Canadian, most EU, New Zealand and US passport holders can get a visa on arrival. Entry will be refused if your passport has any Israeli visas or stamps.

Getting There

Beirut has many air connections to Europe, Asia, Africa and the rest of the Middle East. It has an open land border with Syria.



Bahrain Connection

Lebanese food is arguably the most popular international cuisine in Bahrain, with scores of restaurants offering grilled lamb, beef and chicken. Many top executives of leading Bahrain companies also happen to be Lebanese.

Travel Tip
Accept food or drink (especially tea) when offered, even if you don't consume it. It is considered impolite to refuse.

LEBANON IS, WITHOUT QUESTION, THE MOST 'European' of all Middle Eastern destinations. If you were dropped into Beirut with no signs to guide you, it would be really hard to figure out



The team with Gulf Air's manager in Lebanon Maen Abdulhalim outside the airline's Beirut office.

whether you were in the Middle East or Europe.

Until the seemingly endless Civil War broke out in 1975, Lebanon was one of the region's leading travel destinations. Years of strife followed and it wasn't until the late Nineties, when elections were held for the first time in 35 years, that the country started rebuilding its tourist infrastructure.

Lebanon is still some way away from completely recapturing its glory days, but there can be no doubt that it will get there before too long. It is already fast getting popular again, especially with tour groups, and it's not hard to see why. The people are friendly and outgoing (don't be surprised to find complete strangers coming up to you and engaging you in conversation), the beaches are terrific, the ski resorts surprisingly good, and the food world class.

Lebanese cuisine combines traditional Arabic cooking with a French influence, a combination that makes it very popular across the Middle East and be-

PAGE OPPOSITE:

One of the two Pigeon Rocks, adjacent to the Corniche in the Al Rauouche area in Beirut.



The fortress church known as Castle of the Sea in Sidon (Saida in Arabic). The castle was erected by the Crusading Knights of St. John in the early 13th century.



Travel Tip
Don't assume you can easily tell if someone is Muslim, Christian or Druze. Members of all these groups speak Arabic.

yond. Start it with kibbeh, a lamb and wheat paste, hummus, a chickpea and garlic paste, with mutton stew, fish, or grilled lamb or chicken, and finish it off with baklava, a tasty delicacy with chopped walnuts and syrup wrapped in a flaky pastry.

We were lucky to meet up with Ali's friend Joseph Rahal, a former Bahrain resident, who in a typical show of Lebanese hospitality took several days off from work to show us around his country.

And what a beautiful country it is. Beirut has hidden away most of the scars of war, and its tourist attractions are on par with the best of the region. The Sursock Art Museum, the National Museum, the Martyre Place, a restored park serving as a memorial to war in the centre of town, and Dog River, with inscriptions and bas-relief sculptures carved into the cliffline, are all worthy of visits.

Tripoli (Lebanon's second largest city), Byblos and Tyre all boast history that goes back thousands of

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Another view of the Castle of the Sea in Sidon. A climb to the top leads to the roof where there is a good view of the port and the old part of the city.

Travel Tip
At business meetings, engage in small talk before getting down to business. It's considered rude to get right to the point.





A storekeeper displays his wares on a sidewalk at the Aleppo market.



Deirdre, Christine and Martin enjoying the sun at a beach resort near Beirut.



Our Lebanese host Joseph, left, with Deirdre, Martin and Christine in Sidon.

years. Byblos is one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world (7,000 years!), and is home to a Roman amphitheatre overlooking the sea.

Friendship Tour co-sponsors MTC Vodafone once again went to great lengths to get our message across, organising a press conference at their office in Beirut, at which MTC Lebanon's general manager Mohamad Shabib also spoke. MTC also provided us with local phone numbers to use while in the country.

Fast Fact
Street names are often spelled differently on maps and signs. Transliteration of Arabic into English yields many variations.