

# Lebanon

Coolly combining the ancient with the ultramodern, Lebanon is one of the most captivating countries in the Middle East. From Tyre's Phoenician findings and Roman Baalbek's tremendous temple to Beirut's BO18 and Bernard Khoury's modern movement, the span of Lebanon's history leaves many visitors spinning.

With all of the Middle East's best bits – warm and welcoming people, mind-blowing history and considerable culture, Lebanon is also the antithesis of many people's imaginings of the Middle East: mostly mountainous with skiing to boot, it's also laid-back, liberal and fun. While Beirut is fast becoming the region's party place, Lebanon is working hard to recapture its crown as the 'Paris of the Orient'.

The rejuvenation of the Beirut Central District is one of the largest, most ambitious urban redevelopment projects ever undertaken. Travellers will find the excitement surrounding this and other developments and designs palpable – and very infectious.

Finally, Lebanon's cuisine is considered the richest of the region. From hummus to *hom-mard* (lobster), you'll dine like a king. With legendary sights, hospitality, food and nightlife, what more could a traveller want?

## FAST FACTS

- **Area** 10,400 sq km
- **Capital** Beirut
- **Country code** ☎ 961
- **Language** Arabic
- **Money** Lebanese lira (LL) – known locally as the 'Lebanese pound'; US\$1 = LL1502; €1 = LL1774
- **Official name:** Republic of Lebanon
- **Population** 4.4 million



## HIGHLIGHTS

- **Baalbek** (p451) Arguably the Middle East's top Roman site and one of the world's most wonderful. Spend a day sizing up this ancient Sun City.
- **Tyre** (p446) With its long, dramatic and colourful history, Tyre has ruins to spare. Take a tour of this terrific World Heritage site.
- **Byblos** (p434) A Crusader castle, Roman ruins, a picturesque port, and enticing souqs – Byblos has it all. Take your time to explore it.
- **Beirut** (p417) Rapidly becoming *the* party town of the Middle East. Don't skip some of the funkier nightlife and best dining in the region.
- **Tripoli** (p437) Grab a glimpse of Lebanon's other side, its Islamic monuments and history, then sample some of the best sweets in the region.
- **Aanjar** (p453) Meander the main street and marvel at the well-preserved ruins of the Middle East's only Umayyad fortified city.

## CLIMATE & WHEN TO GO

Lebanon has a Mediterranean climate – hot and dry in summer (June to August), cool and rainy in winter (December to February).

In summer humidity is very high along the coast and daytime temperatures average 30°C, with night temperatures not much lower. Winter is mild, with daytime temperatures averaging 15°C. In the mountains, summer days are moderately hot (26°C on average) and the nights cool. Winters are cold, with snowfall above 1300m.

Spring (March to May) and autumn (September to November), when the climate is warm but not uncomfortable, are the best times to travel in Lebanon. In winter, the rain and cloud can spoil sightseeing and snow can close some of the higher roads. Not all the budget hotels have heating either. But if you fancy trying Lebanon's ever-developing winter sports (see p642) it's a good time to go.

Travellers on a budget may prefer to avoid the high season (mid-June to mid-September), when prices of hotels and restaurants go up considerably. See Climate Charts, p643.

## HOW MUCH?

- **Cup of coffee** LL1500
- **Newspaper** LL2000
- **One-minute phone call to the UK** LL3000
- **Internet connection per hour** LL3000
- **Average museum admission** LL5000

## LONELY PLANET INDEX

- **Litre of petrol** LL1300
- **Litre of bottled water** LL600
- **Bottle of local beer in bar/restaurant** LL3000
- **Souvenir T-shirt** LL5000
- **Sandwich** LL2000

## HISTORY

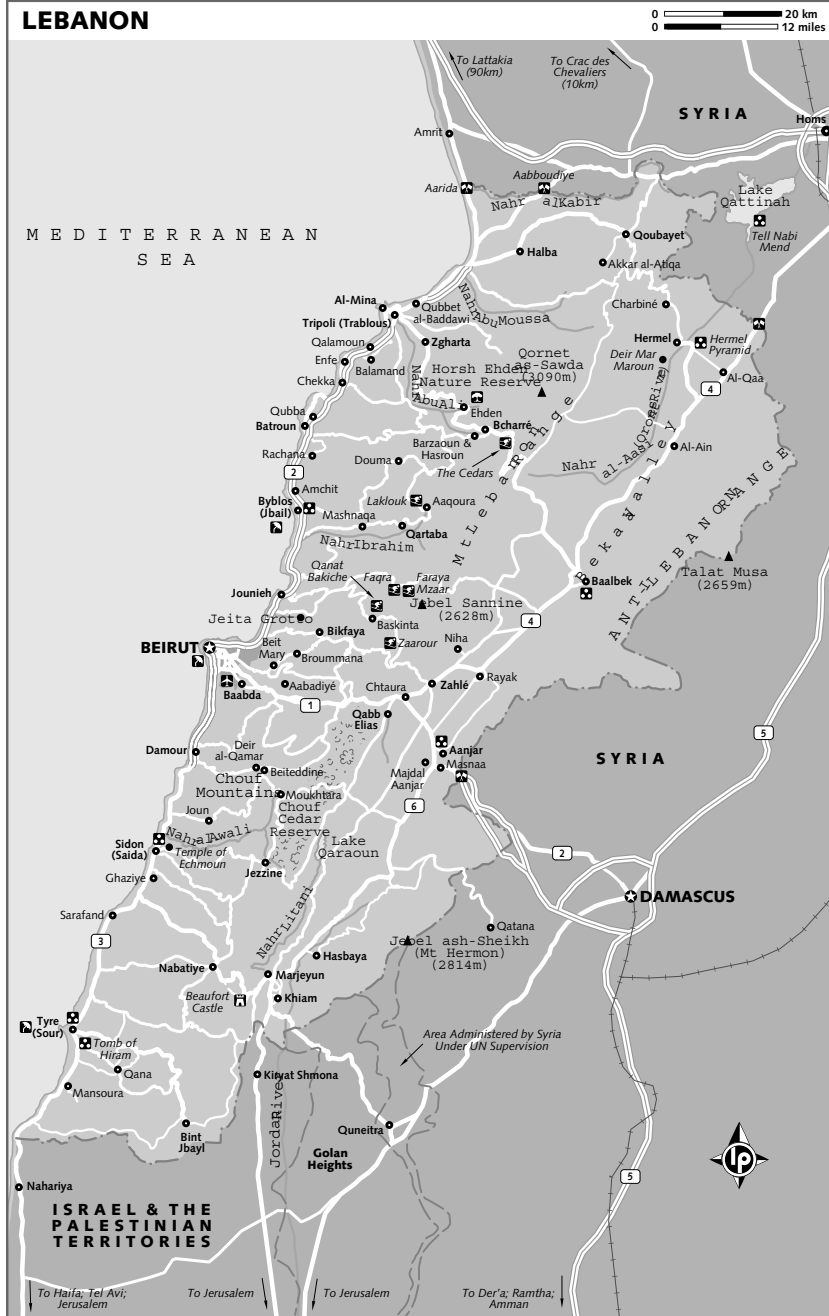
Until it gained independence in 1946, Lebanon formed part of the region known as Syria. As it shared that country's history, see p508 for Pre-Independence events.

## Post-Independence & Civil War

Lebanon emerged with Syria from the break-up of the Ottoman Empire following WWI. Between the wars, the country was under a French mandate and then it became fully independent in 1946. Its strategic Middle Eastern location and relatively stable, West-leaning government made it a major trade and banking centre, with many Western multinationals basing their Middle Eastern head offices in Beirut.

But Lebanon had a fatal flaw in its national make-up: power and control rested with the right-wing Christian part of the population, while Muslims (almost half the population) felt they were excluded from real government. Add large numbers of displaced and restive Palestinians and the result was a recipe for conflict. In 1975 civil war broke out between a predominantly Muslim leftist coalition (allied with Palestinian groups) and Christian right-wing militias. In April 1976 Syrian forces intervened at the request of the Lebanese president, Suleiman Franjeh, to halt the defeat of the Christian forces. An uneasy peace was foisted upon the two sides by the Syrians.

## LEBANON



## Israeli Occupation

Then came more trouble. In order to protect northern Israel from cross-border attacks by the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), the Israelis marched into southern Lebanon in 1978 and set up a surrogate militia, the South Lebanon Army (SLA). Following UN pressure, the Israelis withdrew three months later and were replaced by an interim UN peacekeeping force (Unifil).

Meanwhile in Beirut, both the Christian and Muslim militias continued building up their arsenals. With the failure to find a political solution acceptable to all parties, fighting erupted frequently, only quashed by Syrian intervention. At the same time, Christians started demanding that Syria withdraw its troops from Lebanon.

In June 1982 Israeli troops again marched into Lebanon, this time with the stated aim of eradicating the PLO. Laying siege to Beirut, they relentlessly bombarded the Muslim half of the capital by air, sea and land for seven weeks. In August the USA arranged for the evacuation of PLO fighters to other Arab countries, and a Multinational Force (MNF) of US and Western European troops was deployed in Beirut to protect Palestinian and Muslim civilians. After the assassination of Lebanese president-elect Bashir Gemayel (a Christian militia leader), Israeli troops entered west Beirut. Two days later the Israeli-backed Christian militias famously massacred Palestinian civilians in the Shatila and Sabra camps in this area. Bashir's brother Amin Gemayel was elected president.

## Israeli Withdrawal & Civil War Again

More than a year later Israeli troops finally withdrew to southern Lebanon. No sooner had they left than fighting broke out between Druze Muslim militias and Christian forces who had been deployed in the Chouf Mountains east of Beirut under Israeli protection. At the same time, fighting erupted between Lebanese army units and Muslim militia in the capital. The MNF came under repeated attack and suffered heavy casualties; it withdrew in early 1984 following suicide bombings of the US and French contingents in October 1983.

In mid-1985 the Israelis withdrew from the rest of Lebanon, except for a 60km-long border strip, which remained under Israeli

and SLA control. Over the next couple of years the country descended into more chaos as rival factions within both the Christian and the Muslim camps fought each other, and Iranian-backed Muslim fundamentalists (the Islamic Jihad) resorted to taking foreigners hostage. At the request of the then prime minister, Selim al-Hoss, Syrian troops returned to west Beirut in February 1987 to end fighting between rival Muslim militias. The Syrians slowly brought the Muslim areas of Lebanon under their control.

At the end of his term, in September 1988, President Gemayel appointed a transitional military government led by General Michel Aoun to succeed him. Aoun disbanded the Christian militias and then launched a 'war of liberation' against the Syrians in Lebanon. Following fierce fighting Aoun was defeated and sought refuge in France in August 1991. In the meantime, a majority of Lebanese MPs met in Taif, Saudi Arabia, to sign an Arab-brokered 'accord for national reconciliation'. The MPs elected a new president, René Mouawad, who was assassinated 17 days later. He was replaced by Elias Hrawi, a moderate Maronite Christian who had good relations with Syria.

With the help of the Syrians the Lebanese army took control of Beirut and by late 1991 had spread its presence to most Lebanese areas. By early 1992 all surviving foreign hostages had been released and Syrian troops began withdrawing from the Beirut area.

## Peace... & War with Israel Again

In August 1992 parliamentary elections were held in Lebanon for the first time in 20 years, and Muslim fundamentalists of the Iranian-backed Hezbollah (Party of God) won the largest number of seats. A few months later the cabinet resigned and Rafiq Hariri was appointed prime minister.

As the new cabinet began rebuilding Beirut's infrastructure and rehabilitating the country, the security situation remained tense in southern Lebanon. Israeli forces continued to attack the south during 1991 and 1992 as skirmishes between Israeli soldiers in the border strip and Hezbollah fighters increased in frequency. After Hezbollah fighters killed seven Israeli soldiers in July 1993, Israeli forces launched week-long air, sea and land bombardments

on some 80 villages in southern Lebanon, killing 113 people and causing more than 300,000 civilians to leave for safer areas.

Trouble flared up again in April 1996 when Israel mounted a wave of air strikes on Hezbollah positions in the southern suburbs of Beirut and southern Lebanon. After Hezbollah responded, the Israelis launched another campaign, 'Operation Grapes of Wrath'. Their action attracted wide condemnation when media reported that 102 refugees sheltering in a UN base at Qana had been massacred when the base was bombed by the Israelis.

## Lebanon Today

In late May 2000, the Israelis and the SLA withdrew from Lebanon, leading to great rejoicing throughout the region. Nevertheless, relations between the two countries remain tense, and many Lebanese fear that their country will once again be dragged into the volatile and seemingly irresolvable conflict between the Israelis and the Palestinians.

In February 2005, a tragic event acted as a catalyst for a major historical upheaval. The former prime minister and popular benefactor, Rafiq Hariri, was killed in a car bomb in Beirut. Though Damascus denied any involvement, the Syrians were popularly blamed and huge anti- (and some pro-) Syrian demonstrations followed. The public reaction in turn triggered both the withdrawal of Syrian forces from Lebanon (ending a 29-year military presence) and the eventual downfall of the government later that year. Following elections in May and June 2005, an anti-Syrian alliance led by Saad al-Hariri, (the son of the assassinated Rafiq Hariri) won a majority in Parliament – and for the first time in 15

years, members opposed to Syrian influence outnumbered the pro-Syrians. Fouad Siniora (a Hariri ally) is currently prime minister, and, although the Syrian-backed Emile Lahoud remains as president, pressure is mounting on him to resign. For the first time also, a member of Hezbollah joined the new cabinet. The government has pledged to continue the reform and development initiated by Rafiq Hariri.

In the meantime, political jockeying and continuing Syrian interest in the country, allied with deeply rooted corruption and ever-simmering sectarian tensions still far from guarantee a smooth path forward for the country. Even if the natural Lebanese optimism continues regardless.

## THE CULTURE

### The National Psyche

In Beirut you are your car. Show, status and fun are the chief concerns of many Beirutis. Even outside the famously frenetic capital, people work hard and play hard – sleeping fewer hours per night and notching up more minutes on their mobiles than any other nation in the Middle East.

While a collective amnesia has seemingly seized the country, rude reminders of the civil war are never far beneath the surface. Every inhabitant has lost a loved one, and every corner reveals a scar. Under the glitz and glamour lurks a public debt of US\$32 billion, unemployment at a massive 24%; and an unusually high incidence of depression.

But let's not poop the party. The Lebanese are still intent on fun and travellers will be swept along by the particular brand of Lebanese hedonism. 'Guests are a gift of God', they say in Lebanon, and the country's hospitality is legendary.

### Daily Life

Family is the core unit in Lebanon. Several generations often live together; the old are cared for and the young stay at home until they get married and can afford their own house. Lebanese Christians tend to marry later than Muslims and have fewer children. Muslims now outnumber Christians.

Though Lebanese society – and particularly Lebanese Christian society – is probably the most liberal in the Middle East, certain limits still apply. Excessive drinking, promiscuity and drugs are all taboo.

### VARIETY IS THE SPICE OF LIFE

Lebanon is a republic with a president (elected for a six-year, nonrenewable term), a cabinet and a unicameral National Assembly of 128 members. Under a power-sharing National Covenant agreed to in 1943, the president is a Maronite Christian, the prime minister a Sunni Muslim, the deputy prime minister a Greek Orthodox, the speaker of parliament a Shiite Muslim and the armed forces chief of staff a Druze!

Education is highly valued by both men and women in Lebanon. With high unemployment and a struggling economy, making a living is a key concern. Many seek employment abroad. More than 10 million Lebanese now live abroad (2½ times Lebanon's population), and the brain drain continues.

## Population

Lebanon has an estimated population of 4.4 million. With nearly 90% living in urban areas (almost 1.5 million in Beirut alone), it is one of the most densely populated countries in the Middle East. An estimated 400,000 Palestinian refugees live in the country – representing nearly 9% of the population.

## RELIGION

Lebanon is home to numerous official religious groups including five Muslim and 11 Christian denominations. Prior to the civil war, Christians and Muslims were about equal in numbers; today (due to the Christian exodus and a higher birth rate among Muslims) the latter make up around 70% of the population.

Muslim denominations include the Shites (the majority) who are largely found in the south, the Bekaa Valley and southern suburbs of Beirut; the Sunnis in Beirut, Tripoli and Sidon; and the Druze in the Chouf Mountains. The Maronite Christians (the largest Christian group) live in the Mt Lebanon region.

## ARTS

In summer, many towns and villages hold their own traditional dance and music festivals (see p456). Baalbek's international music festival is the most famous of these. The nation's capital hosts its own festivals for cinema, theatre and music, as well as being home to a number of lively contemporary galleries.

## Literature

In the 10th century, the region was known for its classical Arabic poetry. Credited with reviving the classical tradition was Khalil Gibran, Lebanon's most famous poet (p442). A writer, painter and philosopher, he won international acclaim with the publication of *The Prophet* in 1923. An-

other multiaward winner is the Lebanese-Palestinian poet, Mahmoud Darwish.

Lebanon's buoyant publishing industry has produced a number of famous novelists and poets including the widely published Amin Maalouf (*The Rock of Tanios* is considered his masterpiece), the London-based Tony Hanania and the feminist Hanan al-Shaykh.

## Cinema & TV

Although Lebanon boasts three major film festivals, four film schools and six TV stations, the industry languishes far behind the heady production days of the mid-70s to '80s, when up to 200 films a year were made. The civil war has inspired many directors including Ziad Duweyri, Mai Masri, Jean Chamoun and Ghassam Shalhab. Other names to look out for include Georges Nasser, Maroun Baghdadi and Andre Gedeon. Some films are available on video (in French) from Naufal Booksellers in Beirut.

## Music

Lebanon has an ancient musical tradition. Much music today successfully combines Eastern and Western influences. In the bars of Rue Monot or Gemmayzeh in Beirut, listen out for the oriental trip hop, lounge, Arab deep house, jazz, acid and traditional music.

Lebanon contributes its fair share of pop stars, including the megastar Fairouz (p77), Marcel Khalife, Najwa Karam, Haifa and Nancy, to name but a few.

In the larger towns, traditional and contemporary music can be heard in certain bars (see the Entertainment sections in those towns).

## Architecture

Almost all the great civilisations have marched through the region that comprises modern-day Lebanon, and most of these civilisations left spectacular traces. Unfortunately, much has been destroyed by the years of war and also by uncontrolled redevelopment.

Nevertheless, the rebuilding of Beirut's Central District has sparked a new energy and vitality. Undoubtedly the most innovative and prolific contemporary architect in the country is Bernard Khoury (see the boxed text, opposite).

## BERNARD KHOURY – BEIRUT'S ENFANT TERRIBLE

After studying architecture at the Rhode Island School of Design and later at Harvard, Bernard Khoury went home to Lebanon. Bursting to rebuild his beloved Beirut, he found that his daring designs were discarded in favour of nostalgia and picture-perfect French-Mandate and Ottoman reproductions. After returning in disgust to New York, he was tempted back again in 1997. Since then, his buildings, including the famous nightclub BO18 and the restaurants Yabani and Centrale, have won him international fame and acclaim. Look out for one of his latest projects, the high-profile restoration of the Beirut City Centre Building (BCCB).

## Painting

Long-accomplished in calligraphy and decorative arts (like the rest of the Arab world), Lebanon didn't open its first fine art school until 1937, the *Academie Libanaise des Beaux-Arts*. Today, the American University of Beirut has a Department of Fine Arts.

In the 1950s and '60s the artistic community thrived in Lebanon. Interrupted by the war years, it has re-established itself and flourishing galleries can be found in Beirut. Well-known 20th-century artists include Mohammed Rawas, Moustafa Farroukh and Hassan Jouni. Contemporary artists of note include female sculptor Salwa Raodash Shkheir.

## Theatre & Dance

Though funding and venues are limited, Beirut's theatre scene is active and innovative. Some playwrights to look out for are Jalal Khoury, Roger Assaf and Issam Mahfouz.

Lebanese dance blends Turkish and Egyptian styles. The region's most famous dance is the *dabke*, an energetic folk dance that's performed at social occasions, particularly weddings. Belly dancing (known locally as *raks sharki*) is still popular in Lebanon.

## ENVIRONMENT The Land

Though Lebanon is one of the smallest countries in the world, its terrain is surprisingly varied and diverse. Four main

geographical areas run almost parallel to each other from north to south. They are (from west to east): the coastal plain, the Mt Lebanon Range, the Bekaa Valley and the Anti-Lebanon Range.

The Mt Lebanon range includes Lebanon's highest summit, Qornet as-Sawda (3090m) and the famous Cedars of Lebanon. The Anti-Lebanon Range marks the border between Lebanon and Syria. Its highest summit is Jebel ash-Sheikh (Mt Hermon), at 2814m.

## Wildlife

### ANIMALS

Lebanon is an important migratory staging ground and boasts a large number of birds. Off the coast alone, more than 135 species have been recorded. In the Bekaa Valley, migrating storks can be seen in April.

Unfortunately uncontrolled hunting has taken a major toll on wildlife. Wolves, wild boars, gazelles and ibexes are now all endangered and are very rarely seen. With conservation efforts, some species are thought to be returning.

### PLANTS

Trees are poems that the earth writes upon the sky. We fell them down and turn them into paper that we may record our emptiness.

*Extract from Sand & Foam, 1926, by Khalil Gibran*

Although Lebanon has suffered appalling deforestation, it is still the most densely wooded country in the Middle East (though that's not difficult!). In the mountains, many varieties of pine, juniper, oak, beech and cypress can be found. In spring, wild flowers carpet the hills and mountains, including the indigenous Lebanese violet. In Beirut a large palm-replanting scheme is under way.

Unfortunately, Lebanon's most famous plant (and the one emblazoned on its flag) the cedar tree, has been reduced from once-great forests to a few lonely patches at Bcharré (p442) and in the Chouf Mountains. Though some replantation is afoot, it will take centuries to restore them to their former glory.

### Environmental Issues

Ravaged by more than two decades of war, anarchy, unfettered construction and weak

state control, Lebanon's environment remains very fragile. The only areas to have escaped destruction are – ironically – known mined areas.

The complete lack of basic service industries or infrastructure during the war meant that solid waste was dumped throughout the country. Most water sources are still polluted. Air pollution is another serious, ongoing problem particularly in Beirut. Lebanon now has 1.5 million cars within its cramped confines.

In the past 10 years, new water treatment plants have at last been built, a Ministry of Environment has been created (albeit weak and lacking influence) and various environmental organisations set up (both by locals and NGOs). The coastline is also slowly being cleaned up. Though signs are more positive than they have been for years, the Lebanese government has still to prove its commitment and concern.

## FOOD & DRINK

One of the best things about a holiday in Lebanon is the food. Lebanese cuisine has a reputation as being the best in the Middle East. The proof's in the pudding (literally), so try it.

### MIND YOUR MEZZE MANNERS

Just like its food, Lebanese eating etiquette is more sophisticated than it might look.

- Use only your right hand; tuck away the left.
- Take food from your side of the table; stretching to the other side is considered impolite.
- Avoid letting your fingers come into contact with the dips; use bread like a spoon.
- Don't dip the same piece of bread twice.
- Gobbling, taking large portions, or filling your mouth too full is seen as uncivilised.
- Try not to devastate the dishes; keep them tidy.
- Leaving a little food behind on your plate after eating is good manners.

### LEBANON'S GOLDEN GRAPES

Lebanon is one of the world's oldest wine-producing regions. Its most famous and successful region, the Bekaa Valley, boasts excellent wine-growing conditions including reliable sunshine (for 240 days of the year), steep slopes and chalky soils.

All the main grape varieties are found, including Chardonnay, Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Syrah. Wine consumption both inside and outside Lebanon is rising fast and Lebanon's wines are being taken seriously at last. The country now earns more than US\$7 million annually from sales, producing over seven million bottles, nearly half of which are exported.

When you're in the country don't miss an opportunity to taste the golden grapes. Worth a visit are Château Ksara (the oldest commercial vineyard), Château Kefraya (the largest producer) and Château Musar (the most successful on the international markets and winner of various viticultural medals). Worth sampling are Château Musar (1998), Château Ksara chardonnay (1999) and Le Château Kefraya (1999).

Fresh ingredients, including numerous types of fruit, vegetables and pulses, are plentiful in Lebanon. Unfortunately, seafood is prohibitively expensive and not always of a very high quality. Populations of both fish and seafood were decimated during the civil war.

Arabic or 'Turkish' coffee is popular in Lebanon. Freshly squeezed vegetable and fruit juices are quite widely available. Try the *jellab* (a delicious drink made from raisins and served with pine nuts) and *ayran* (a yoghurt drink). Sohat, Sabil and Tannourini are considered the three best brands of Lebanese mineral water.

Alcohol is widely available in Lebanon – you'll find everything from local beers and wines to imported whisky and vodka. The most popular alcoholic drink is arak, which is mixed with water and ice and usually accompanies meals. Good local brands include Ksarak and Le Brun. The best local beer is Almaza; it lives up to its name ('diamond' in Arabic).

See p84 for other typical drinks and dishes.

## BEIRUT

## بيروت

☎ 01 / pop 1,251,739

Beirut is Lebanon's heart and soul as well as the nation's capital. Double-faced – all banks, boutiques and patisseries at one end; ruined, ragged and the refuge of poverty-stricken Palestinians at the other – it's also vital and resolute. Out of the ashes and scars of the civil war, the city is rising phoenix-like in an exciting rebirth. Beirut is beaver-ing hard to regain its former status as 'the jewel of the Middle East'. It's also fast becoming the party capital of the Middle East. Visitors to Beirut shouldn't miss the chance to sample the capital's now legendary nightlife and superb cuisine. And a nose around the National Museum is a must.

### HISTORY

Beryte, as Beirut was originally known, was a modest port during Phoenician times (2nd millennium BC). Later, it became famous in Roman times for its School of Law, one of the first three in the world, which made it a cultural centre right up until the 6th century AD. Following a long period of decline, it regained its importance as a trading centre and gateway to the Middle East in the 19th century, and its port became the largest on the eastern Mediterranean coast. The city soon became a major business, banking and publishing centre and remained so until the civil war put paid to its supremacy.

Since the war ended, rehabilitation of the city's infrastructure has been the major focus of both the local and national governments.

### ORIENTATION

Beirut is an easy city to navigate as there are conspicuous landmarks all over town.

Hamra, with its many hotels and restaurants, the Ministry of Tourism and a commercial area, is the preferred base for many travellers. To the immediate north and east is Ras Beirut, home of the American University of Beirut (AUB). To the southwest are the seaside suburbs of Manara and Raouché, where you'll find a host of seaside cafés.

The Corniche runs along the coast east from Raouché to Ain al-Mreisse. Further

east, past Minet al-Hosn, home of the Phoenicia Intercontinental Hotel, is the newly rebuilt Beirut Central District, also called Downtown or Solidere, the symbolic heart of the city. Further southeast, Gemmayzeh and Achrafiye are where Beirutis flock to sample the restaurants, bars and nightclubs on offer.

### Maps

The tourist office and some of the car hire companies produce quite useful city maps of Beirut.

### INFORMATION

#### Bookshops

Beirut has a good range of foreign-language bookshops (which keep standard opening hours unless indicated otherwise).

**Books & Pens** (Maliks; Map p422; ☎ 741 975; Rue Jeanne d'Arc, Hamra; ☎ 8am-10pm Mon-Fri, 8am-8pm Sat) This stationers/bookshop stocks a decent selection of international newspapers and magazines, including the *International Herald Tribune* (with the local *Daily Star* inset) for LL2000.

**Librairie Antoine** (Map p422; ☎ 341 470; Rue Hamra, Hamra) If you're out of holiday reading, this place stocks literature (including Lebanese) in English, French and Spanish. Also has a good children's section.

**Naufal Booksellers** (Map p422; ☎ 354 898; Rue Sourati, Hamra) One of the best for books on Lebanon and the region (in French and English), including coffee-table books, guidebooks, maps, Arabic phrasebooks and Middle Eastern cookbooks. Also stocks Lebanese documentaries and feature films, and postcards.

**Virgin Megastore** (Map pp418-19; ☎ 999 666; Opera Bldg, Place des Martyrs, Downtown; ☎ 9.30am-midnight Sun-Thu, 9.30am-1am Fri & Sat) New shop with the best collection of books and maps on Lebanon (on its 1st floor) as well as a wide range of children's books and, on the 2nd floor, local and regional music. The *Guide* (see p419) is sold here. Also sells tickets for some of Lebanon's festivals (such as the Beiteddine Festival).

### Emergency

**Ambulance** (☎ 140)

**Fire brigade** (☎ 175)

**Police** (☎ 112)

**Tourist police** (☎ 350 901)

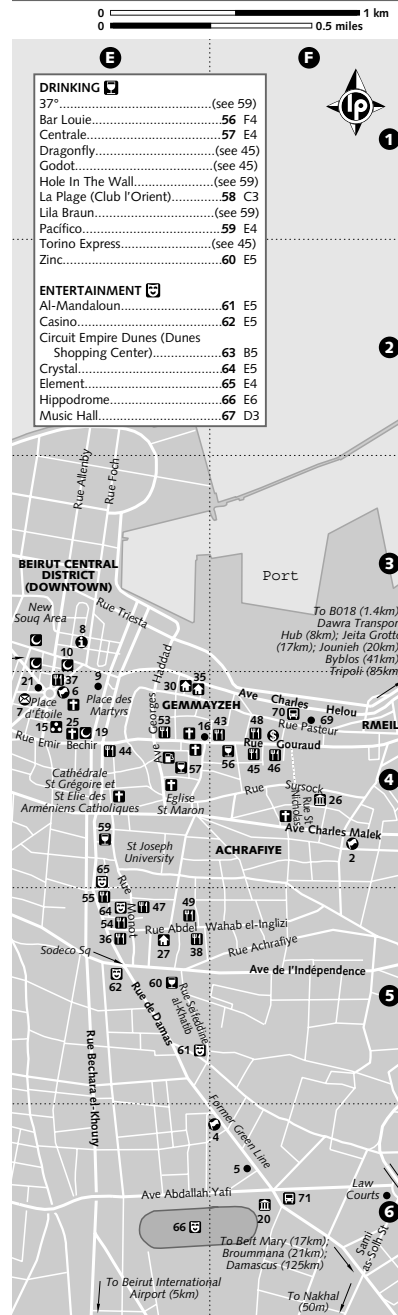
### Internet Access

There's no shortage of Internet cafés in Beirut.

**Pass Par Tout** (Map p422; ☎ 367 149; Rue Omar ben Abdel Aziz, Ras Beirut; per 30min LL1500; ☎ 11am-2am)

BEIRUT

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Crystal.....64 E5	
Element.....65 E4	
Hippodrome.....66 E6	
Music Hall.....67 D3	

Claiming the quickest connections in town, it's also friendly and helpful – albeit rather smoky and dingy.

**PC Club** (Map p422; ☎ 745 338; Rue Mahatma Gandhi, Hamra; per 30min LL1500; ⌚ 9am-5am Mon-Sat, 10am-5am Sun) Popular Internet café that's open later than most.

**Virgin Internet** (Map pp418-19; ☎ 999 777; 4th fl, Opera Bldg, Place des Martyrs, Downtown; ⌚ 10am-midnight Mon-Thu & Sat, 10am-1am Fri, 11am-midnight Sun) At the time of writing, customers had free use of the Internet, and could bring their own laptops.

**Web Café** (Map p422; ☎ 03-283 456; Rue Khalidy, Hamra; per hr LL4000; ⌚ 9am-midnight Mon-Sat, noon-midnight Sun) If you want to check your mail whilst listening to music and sipping a beer (LL3000 to LL4000), then head here. There's also a restaurant.

**Laundry**

Hotel and dry cleaners can do laundry, but it's expensive (around LL2000 for a small load). There was only one self-service laundromat in Beirut at the time of research.

**Laundromatic** (Map p422; ☎ 03-376 187; Rue Sidani; load under/over 4.5kg LL3000/4500, detergent free, dryer per 10min LL1500; ⌚ 9am-8pm Mon-Sat, 12-4pm Sun) Service wash (extra LL1000) and ironing service (LL1000 per item) also available.

**Media**

According to the Reporters Sans Frontiers *Worldwide Press Freedom Index 2005*, Lebanon has the freest press in the Middle East. Its daily and weekly newspapers aren't afraid to criticise politicians and their policies, though more sensitive issues (such as the continuing Syrian influence) remain taboo.

There are six Arabic dailies and one weekly; one French daily, **L'Orient Le Jour** (www.lorientlejour.com), and one English daily, the **Daily Star** (www.dailystar.com; LL2000).

The *Guide* (LL5000) is a useful glossy monthly which reviews the latest hotspots (including bars, cafés and restaurants) and details forthcoming gigs, concerts, shows, exhibitions, festivals, and events for kids.

**Medical Services**

There are several good hospitals with out-patient clinics in Beirut.

**American University of Beirut Hospital** (Map p422; ☎ 374 374; Rue du Caire, Ras Beirut; ⌚ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri except holidays) Considered the best hospital in the Middle East; English and French spoken. If you're at death's door outside hours, head for the Emergency Unit, which is open 24/7; it's on the right-hand side of the

building as you enter the AUBMC down Rue du Caire. The hospital also provides a current list of pharmacies open 24 hours, and can recommend qualified dentists.

## Money

There are ATMs all over the city.

**Amir Exchange** (Map p422; ☎ 341 265; Rue Hamra, Hamra; ☎ 8am–8pm Mon–Sat). One of the very few moneychangers accepting travellers cheques (preferably dollars), it charges US\$2 to US\$3 per US\$100. Bring your passport and original purchaser's receipt.

**Sogetour** (Map p422; ☎ 747 111; www.sogetour.com.lb; 1st fl, Block A, Gefinor Center, Rue Maamari, Ras Beirut; 2% commission; ☎ 8.30am–4pm Mon–Fri, 8.30am–1pm Sat) The best place to change Amex US-dollar travellers cheques.

## Post

**Main post office** (Map pp418–19; ☎ 629 629; Rue Riad el-Solh, Downtown; ☎ 8am–5pm Mon–Fri, 8am–1.30pm Sat)

## Tourist Information

**Tourist Information Office** (Map p422; ☎ 343 073; www.lebanon-tourism.gov.lb; ground fl, Ministry of Tourism Bldg, Rue Banque du Liban, Hamra; ☎ 8am–6pm Mon–Thu, 8am–11am & 1.30–6pm Fri, 8am–1.30pm Sat) Enter from Rue Banque du Liban. Staff are helpful and also give out quite informative brochures (in six European languages). Well worth picking up is the series published in 2005, *Archaeological Promenade*, on Tyre, Sidon, Tripoli, Baalbek and Beiteddine.

**Tourist police office** (Map p422; ☎ 752 428; fax 343 504; opposite Tourist Information Office; ☎ 24hr) For complaints or problems (including robbery), contact this office.

## BEIRUT IN...

### Two Days

Kick off the day with some caffeine at the **Al-Kahwa café** (p426) before notching the **National Museum** (opposite) on your list of sights.

Try mouthwatering mezze for lunch at **Al-Balad** (p425), then size up startling, sparkling **Solidere** (opposite) and its sights. Later, stroll down the **Corniche** (p422) and sip a sundowner at sunset at the **Bay Rock Café** (p426).

Take tapas and drinks in fashionable **Gemmayzeh** (p428), fine-dine at its **restaurants** (p425), then bar-crawl again or head for **Rue Monot** (p428).

Hit the hangover with breakfast at **Paul** (p427) or **Tribeca** (p427), followed by swimming and sunbathing at **Ramlet al-Bayda** (p422) or the **Beirut Swimming Club** (p422). Later, shop for souvenirs at **Maison de l'Artisan** (p430) or **La CD-Thèque** (p430). For dinner, seek out seafood at **Al-Sultan Brahim** (p425), then bag a bar seat at superslick **Centrale** (p428). For live jazz, head for **Blue Note** (p428), or for live local lutes try **Gemmayzeh Cafe** (p427). Before bed, hit the booming Beirut institution, **BO18** (p429).

### Four Days

On day three take a day trip to **Tyre** (p446). On day four, bus to **Baalbek** (p451) and back, then live it up one last time in **Casino** (p429) or **Al-Mandaloun** (p429).

## Travel Agencies

The following are just two of the many Beirut travel agencies:

**Campus Travel** (Map p422; ☎ 744 588; www.campus-travel.net; Rue Makhoul, Ras Beirut) A student travel agency offering discounts (between 5% and 10%) on flights (particularly to Europe, the US and the Gulf) to students (with ISIC cards), young people under 26 (with proof of date of birth) and teachers. Booklets offering discounts of up to 45% on books, clothes, cafés etc are also available. ISIC cards can be bought there (US\$11, with passport, passport photo and a letter from your university/college).

**Tania Travel** (Map p422; ☎ 739 679; www.tania-travel.com; Rue Sidani, Hamra; ☎ 8am–6pm Mon–Sat) On the 1st floor opposite the old Jeanne d'Arc theatre.

## Visa Extensions

Visas extensions can be obtained on the 2nd floor of the **General Security Office** (maktab amn al-aam; Map pp418–19; ☎ 429 061; www.general-security.gov.lb; Rue de Damas; ☎ 8am–2pm Mon–Fri, 8am–1pm Sat), beside the Ministry of Health in Beirut. Tourist visas can be extended for a minimum of one month and a maximum of three months.

Bring two photocopies of passport details (including the original visa) and one passport-sized photo. The procedure generally takes five to seven days for a tourist visa, and between 14 and 20 days for a business visa.

## SURE SAFETY

While Lebanon has seen unrest, demonstrations and political assassination in recent times, there's little reason to be unduly alarmed about travel here. One top tip is to watch the news (as the Lebanese do); events in Israel and the rest of the Middle East can impact fast upon this little country.

## DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

The biggest danger – and annoyance – in Beirut is the traffic. Rules both on and off the road are nonexistent, and pedestrians should take particular care when crossing the road.

Don't forget to carry your passport with you at all times. Police checkpoints outside the capital will request them.

## SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Beirut's sights and activities are spread fairly evenly in a west–east direction, starting from the Corniche, through Hamra and Ras Beirut into the new Downtown area, before jumping south to the National Museum and Hippodrome.

## Museums

### NATIONAL MUSEUM

Light, bright and well laid out, this excellent **museum** (Map pp418–19; ☎ 612 295/7; www.beirut-nationalmuseum.com; cnr Rue de Damas & Ave Abdallah Yaffi; adult/student/child LL5000/1000/1000, guide US\$15; ☎ 9am–5pm Tue–Sun except some public holidays) has an impressive, but not overwhelming, collection of archaeological artefacts. It gives a great overview of Lebanon's history and the civilisations that made their home here, and is a useful primer before a trip around the country or a neat round-off after one. Explanatory panels and captions in English and French assist. Allow at least an hour.

Highlights include some beautifully observed Phoenician marble statues of baby boys (from Echmoun, 5th century BC), lovely 3rd- and 4th-century-AD mosaics, Byzantine gold jewellery (found in a jar under the floor of a villa in Beirut) and the famous, much-photographed Phoenician gilded bronze figurines from Byblos. A plan is distributed free with tickets.

The museum screens a free 12-minute video in its **theatrette** (ground fl; ☎ every hr 9am–

4pm) in English or French on demand, detailing how curators saved the collection during the civil war.

To get there, walk south from Sodeco Sq along Rue de Damas for 15 minutes, or hail a taxi and ask for the Musée or the Hippodrome.

### AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT (AUB) MUSEUM

The **AUB museum** (Map p422; ☎ 340 549; ddc.aub.edu.lb/projects/museum; AUB campus; admission free; ☎ 10am–4pm Mon–Fri except university & public holidays), just inside the university's main gate, was founded in 1868 and is one of the oldest in the Middle East. On display is a collection of Lebanese and Middle Eastern artefacts dating back to the early Stone Age, a fine collection of Phoenician glass and Arab coins from as early as the 5th century BC, and a large collection of pottery dating back to 3000 BC.

### SURSOCK MUSEUM

The exhibitions of contemporary Lebanese art vary in quality at this private **museum** (Map pp418–19; ☎ 334 133; Rue Sursock, Achrafiye; admission free; ☎ 10am–1pm & 4–7pm), which opens only when there are exhibitions scheduled (phone first to check). But the area is still worth a wander if only to admire the beautiful Ottoman- and French Mandate-era mansions and the luxurious villas including this one (which is owned by the Sursock family).

### Beirut Central District (Downtown/Solidere)

In the 1970s the Beirut Central District (now usually called Downtown or Solidere) was exalted as the Paris of the Middle East. In the 1980s it was the centre of a war zone, and in the 1990s it became the focus of a colossal rebuilding program.

Today, with much of the construction work finished, the spotlessly clean and traffic-free streets are so unlike the rest of the city that it has an almost surreal feel. Indeed, the whole area, though impressive, has been criticised for it Disneyesque flavour, with ersatz Ottoman and French Mandate-era architecture almost indistinguishable from the restored real thing.

Nevertheless, the area has undeniably succeeded and is now an upmarket and fashionable part of the city.

The **Solidere Information Office** (Map pp418-19; ☎ 980 650; www.solidere.com; Bldg 149, Rue Saad Zaghloul; admission free; ☎ 8.30am-1.30pm & 2.30-6pm Mon-Fri) has well-crafted display models and information panels outlining the redevelopment. Staff can suggest walking-tour routes. At nearby **Place des Martyrs**, take a peek at the before-and-after exhibition of photographs of the area.

If you devise your own walking tour, don't miss the **Al-Omari Mosque** (Map pp418-19), built in the 12th century as the Church of John the Baptist of the Knights Hospitaller and converted into a mosque in 1291, and the new and impressive **Mohammed al-Amin Mosque** (Map pp418-19), which is currently under construction. Funded by the ex-PM

Rafiq Hariri who was largely responsible for the bid to rebuild Downtown (but killed by a car bomb in early 2005), it has a particular place in the heart of Beirutis. **Sf George's Cathedral** (Map pp418-19; ☎ 561 980; services 7.15am & 6.60pm Mon-Thu & Sat, 9am & 11am Sun) is a Maronite church dating from the Crusades. Well-preserved and well-restored are the **Roman baths** (Map pp418-19) and the **cardo maximus** (Map pp418-19), the evocative remains of a Roman-era market area, and the **Grand Serail**, a majestic Ottoman-era building now housing government offices including the PM's.

### Corniche

The Corniche (seafont) is a favourite promenade spot, especially in late afternoon and

### THE NEW BEIRUT

The rebuilding of Beirut's Central District is one of the largest and most ambitious urban redevelopment projects in the world. This area was blown to pieces in the civil war and its rebuilding is not just practical but also strongly symbolic. The project covers 1.8 million sq metres of land, plus over 608,000 sq metres reclaimed from the sea.

Phase One saw the arrival of upmarket shops and some of the hippest restaurants and cafés in town. Phase Two, under way at the time of writing, involves a new marina and building on reclaimed land.

A bonus has been the unearthing of many archaeological finds issuing from just about every period of Beirut's history.

early evening (in time for the sunset) and on weekends. This is Beirut at its best – a few hours of people-watching here will be one of the best things you do in Lebanon.

If you fancy a dip, the only public beach is the rather litter-strewn and predominantly male **Ramlet al-Bayda** (Map pp418-19), the strips of sand fringing this part of town, from which it gets its name. A better option is one of the many private beach clubs. Though they're less about swimming and more about seeing and being seen, they're convenient, well equipped (many with pleasant pools, bars, snack bars, dressing areas etc) and well maintained. The **Beirut Swimming Club** (Map pp418-19; ☎ 365 999; Corniche, Ain al-Mreisse; adult/child Sun-Thu LL15,000/10,000, Fri & Sat LL20,000/10,000; ☎ 8am-7pm) has a lovely pool and terrace directly above the seafont.

### BEIRUT FOR CHILDREN

Beirut and the Beirutis welcome children and there are numerous activities for them. **Family Fun in Lebanon** (LL18,000), by Charlotte Hamaoui and Sylvia Palamoudian, is a useful guide.

The **Espace Starco** (Map pp418-19; Downtown) area has a **fun park** (admission free, rides LL3000-5000; ☎ erratic, usually noon-7pm) with activities including go-carts, pony riding and a trampoline. In the park's far eastern corner you can hire decent-quality children's (and adults') bikes from **Bicycles Jeep** (Map pp418-19; ☎ 03-539 603; ☎ 3-10pm Mon-Sat, 9am-10pm Sun) and, opposite, the excellent **Beirut-by-Bike**

**Cycling Club Solidere** (Map pp418-19; ☎ 03-435 524; jawadsbeity@hotmail.com; ☎ 8am-8pm), which occasionally organises bike-gymkhanas for kids. Bikes in both places cost LL4000 per hour, or US\$10/30/70 per day/week/month. In 2007 the company will probably move to another location in Solidere. Behind Bicycle Jeeps is **Hoops Sports Center** (Map pp418-19; ☎ 371 713), which offers various ball sports. **Beirut Luna Park** (Map pp418-19; ☎ 03-889 659; Ave du Général de Gaulle; admission free, rides all LL500; ☎ 10am-midnight) has around 10 different rides plus a big wheel.

**Planet Discovery** (Map pp418-19; ☎ 980 650; Espace Starco; Rue Omar ed-Daouk; adult & child LL5000; ☎ 9am-3pm Mon-Thu, 9am-7pm Fri, 10.30am-7pm Sat) is a French-sponsored science museum for children aged three to 15 with a playhouse, toys, puzzles and interactive displays. On some Fridays (at 4pm and 5pm) and Saturdays (3pm, 4pm and 5pm) there are puppet or magic shows (LL5000 on top of admission).

### TOURS

Various tour companies including **Kurban Tours** (Map pp418-19; ☎ 01-363 848; www.kurbantravel.com; Phoenicia Intercontinental, Minet al-Hosn; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Sat) offer three-hour city tours for around US\$22 per person.

The **Beirut-by-Bike Cycling Club Solidere** (left) offers various excellent (free) guided tours by bike including 'Beirut Historical Background' from 7pm to 9pm Tuesday and Thursday, 'Pedal For Fun' (a 15km to 45km day excursion outside Beirut) every second Sunday in the month and 'Ladies on Bikes' from 7pm to 9pm every Thursday.

### FESTIVALS & EVENTS

**Beirut International Marathon** (www.beirutmarathon.org) Held in early October, it includes wheelchair events.

**Mid East Film Festival Beirut** (www.beirutfilmfoundation.org) Also held in October, showcases films from both Lebanon and the rest of the Middle East.

### SLEEPING Budget

Cheap accommodation isn't easy to find in Beirut. The Ain al-Mreisse is the more pleasant location, but the area around Charles Helou is closer to Rue Monot, one of the city's main nightclub and eating strips.

**Pension al-Nazih** (Map pp418-19; ☎ 564 868; www.pension-alnazih.8m.com; Rue Chanty; dm/s/d with TV & fan





US\$6/10/15, d with bathroom, TV & air-con US\$25; (📺 📺) Located near the bus station, the hotel is a friendly, spotless and homely place. Some rooms have small balconies. There are free hot showers and laundry facilities (US\$3 a load). To find it, turn off Ave Charles Helou into Rue Chanty. Lonely Planet has heard from one female traveller that she was assaulted in her room at this pension.

**Talal's New Hotel** (Map pp418-19; ☎ 562 567; zsal72th@yahoo.com; Ave Charles Helou; dm/s/d/tr some with private shower & TV, fridge & balcony US\$6/14/18/21; 📺 📺) Though rooms are small, simple and reasonably clean, the hotel's best assets are its facilities: there's free access to the kitchen and Internet, free hot showers and laundry facilities (US\$2 per load).

**Regis Hotel** (Map pp418-19; ☎ 361 845; Rue Khoda off Rue ibn Sina, Ain al-Mreisse; s/d/tr with bathroom, TV & fridge US\$20/25/30; 📺 📺) Though next to an old bomb site and looking a little war-weary itself, it's a friendly place and the rooms are pretty clean. Some have access to a large, common balcony; ask for one with direct sea views.

Long on the beaten path of Beirut backpackers are four pensions in the same building, located next to the Wash Me car wash. To find them, head for the rear of the building, past some lifts, to Block C where you'll find more lifts. As they're all much of a muckness, and rooms are only reasonably clean, they're best reserved for those on their last Lebanese lira.

**Pension Home Valery** (Map pp418-19; ☎ 362 169; homevalery@hotmail.com; 2nd fl, Saab Bldg, Rue Phoenicia off Rue ibn Sina, Ain al-Mreisse; beds in 2-bed/3-bed dm US\$6, s/d US\$8/12; 📺) is probably the friendliest and best managed. Guests have free use of the kitchen. All rooms have fan; the salon has air-con. Internet access costs LL6000 per hour. On the 3rd floor is the confusingly same-named **Pension Home Valery** (☎ 364 906; pensionvalery3rdfl@hotmail.com). Prices, facilities and cleanliness are similar. The **Pension Mhanna** (☎ 365 216; 5th fl) is slightly cheaper but more basic. The **Pension Florida** (☎ 374 629; 5th fl; s US\$6, d US\$13-15, tr US\$17) is not bad either, with its large and pleasant common balcony where you can sleep. There's also use of the kitchen.

## Midrange

**Seaside Furnished Flats** (Map p422; ☎ 363 200; www.beirutflats.com; Rue George Post, Ain al-Mreisse; studio flat with/without TV US\$69/49.50; 📺 📺) With

## THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

**Hotel Alberg** (Map pp418-19; ☎ 339 797; www.albergobeirut.com; Rue Abdel Wahab el-Ingilizi, Achrafie; d/royal ste US\$275/1212; 📺 📺 📺) Ranked among the best hotels in the Middle East, the Orientalist-fantasy Alberg defines the expression 'boutique hotel'. Each of its 33 rooms is individually and opulently decorated and the service is faultless. Ask for a room with a terrace. If you can't stay here, you can always come for a drink on its lovely roof terrace.

an enviable position by the sea, these fully furnished, one-bedroom flats represent great value. Rooms are basic but clean and spacious with a big balcony, fully-equipped kitchen, bathroom and lounge. Ask for a sea view (from 3rd to 8th floor). Long-stay rates are US\$750 per month. Internet access costs LL5000 per hour.

**Cedarland Hotel** (Map p422; ☎ 340 233; info@cedarlandhotel.com; Rue Omar ben Abdel Aziz, Hamra; s/d with bathroom, TV & fridge US\$37/42, ste US\$53-150; breakfast US\$5; 📺) A reasonably priced and friendly spot; rooms here are light and pleasant and have access to a kitchenette (on each floor) and a washing machine. Ask for a room with balcony with side views (3rd floor and above).

**Marble Tower Hotel** (Map p422; ☎ 354 586, 346 260; www.marbletower.com.lb; Rue Makdissi, Hamra; s/d with bathroom, TV & buffet breakfast US\$55/66, ste US\$100-120; 📺) Well named for its miles of marble, the hotel is most popular for its central Hamra location. Recently renovated rooms are attractive and comfy and represent great value; rooms at the back don't have balconies, but are quieter. Attached to the hotel is the Pickwick Pub (admission free, open 4pm to 4am), which also serves food.

**University Hotel** (Map p422; ☎ 365 390; www.university-hotel.net; 19 Rue Bliss, Ras Beirut; s with bathroom, TV & minibar US\$25-30, d with bathroom, TV & minibar US\$35-40; 📺) Diagonally opposite the AUB (just off the street, above McDonald's), this hotel is a popular student choice. Rooms are small but very clean and good value. Fifteen rooms have balconies with sea views.

**Royal Garden Hotel** (Map p422; ☎ 350 010; rosgarden@dm.net.lb; Rue Emile Eddé, Hamra; d with bathroom US\$66; 📺) Although its located on one of Beirut's busiest streets, its facilities

(swimming pool, health club and bar) make it an attractive option.

**Lord's Hotel** (Map pp418-19; ☎ 740 382/3; fax 740 385; off Ave du Général de Gaulle, Corniche, Manara; s/d with bathroom TV, fridge & breakfast US\$40/50; 📺) Though a little frayed around the edges, the hotel's great location close to the seafront makes it a good summer choice. Prices are modest (though they may soon increase). Ask for a room with direct sea views; we recommend room 408.

## Top End

**Riviera Hotel** (Map pp418-19; ☎ 373 210; www.riviera-hotel.com.lb; the Corniche, Manara; s/d with sea views & breakfast US\$150/170, with rear views & breakfast US\$130/150 plus 10% tax; 📺 📺 📺) With the best hotel beach club in Beirut (offering two swimming pools, a diving school, facilities for jet-skiing, water-skiing etc), good restaurants, and room balconies with gorgeous views, this is the place in summer. Nonguests can use the Riviera Yacht Club (adults during week/weekend US\$10/13, children US\$6/7, open 8am to 8pm between March and mid-October, depending on the weather), with its Olympic-sized pool and children's pool (complete with lifeguards and crèche) both set attractively by the seafront.

**Phoenicia Intercontinental** (Map pp418-19; ☎ 369 100; www.intercontinental.com; Rue Fakhr ed-Dine, Minet el-Hosn; s US\$310-330, d US\$490-520, ste US\$945-14,000; 1-/3-bed/penthouse apt US\$1000/2750/10,000; 📺 📺 📺) Long the queen of the pre-civil war days, the Phoenicia's now back with a vengeance. A small escalator helps guest who can't make the red-carpeted stairs. Five high-quality restaurants including Caffè Mondo (Italian), Eau de Vie (French) and Wok Wok (Asian) also reside here.

**Hotel Monroe** (Map pp418-19; ☎ 371 122; www.monroebeirut.com; Rue Fakhr ed-Dine, Minet al-Hosn; s/d with bathroom US\$150/165, ste US\$300-400, plus 10% tax; 📺 📺 📺) Hippocent on the block is this perfect 1960s recreation. Ask for a room with direct sea views. Unlike many hotels, the Monroe's pool is open year-round.

## EATING

Beirutis love to eat out and their capital is famous for its eating establishments. There's a great range of cuisine at a wide variety of places and prices. And almost every month a new places bursts on the scene. The biggest problem is the choice.

Beirutis often dress for dinner and eat quite late (most won't arrive before 9.30pm). Reservations are advised (essential at weekends or during the high season). Most restaurants also do hotel delivery.

## Restaurants

### LEBANESE/MIDDLE EASTERN

**Al-Sultan Ibrahim** (Map pp418-19; ☎ 989 989; Rue Omar ed-Daouk, Downtown; 📺 noon-midnight; 📺) Considered the best fish restaurant in Lebanon, Al-Sultan has been run by the same family for 35 years and has kept its reputation and quality. The menu is small but select; choose your own fish (and method of cooking) from the day's catch as you enter the restaurant. The set menu (lunch/dinner US\$35) with its choice of mezze, fish main plus open bar is good value. Choose between the cool and civilised restaurant and the terrace and parasols outside.

**Al-Mijana** (Map pp418-19; ☎ 328 082; Rue Abdel Wahab el-Ingilizi, Achrafie; 📺 9am-3.30pm & 7.30pm-midnight; 📺) In the restored house of an aristocrat with a shady, peaceful garden, this old-timer's known for its Lebanese food. If you're looking for a final splurge or a last romantic evening, this might fit the bill. We recommend the three-course set menu (including 11 mezze) plus open bar for US\$35.30.

**Al-Balad** (Map pp418-19; ☎ 985 375, Rue Ahdab, off Place d'Étoile, Downtown; 📺 11am-midnight Mon-Fri, 11am-1am Sat; 📺) With traditional Lebanese cooking prepared to its own special recipes,

## THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

**Le Chef** (Map pp418-19; ☎ 445 373; Rue Gouraud, Gemmayzeh; 2-course meal LL10,000; 📺 7am-7pm Mon-Sat) Beloved for years by both locals and visitors to Beirut, this cheap and cheerful place serves up 'good food at good prices in a good atmosphere', as one regular patron put it. Huge plates of home-style Arabic and Western food are served. Daily specials – from couscous to shepherds pie – are listed in French and Arabic but the helpful waiters are always happy to translate or make recommendations; ask for the entertaining waiter Charbel. No credit cards accepted, but there's an ATM nearby. At the time of writing, the restaurant was planning to open in the evenings too.

this is one of the best places for *mezze* (from LL3300 to LL9900). Try the delicious and slightly spicy red hummus.

**Abdel Wahab** (Map pp418-19; ☎ 200 552; Rue Abdel Wahab el-Ingilizi, Achrafiye; ☎ 10am-1am; ☎) This restaurant has an impressive Orientalist-meets-modernist interior and a growing following. The 'set plateaux' (plates) – hors d'oeuvre for LL13,000, or *mezze*, grill and salad for LL12,000 to LL17,500 – offer value for money. From May to October, the pleasant terrace on the 1st floor opens.

**La Tabkha** (Map pp418-19; ☎ 579 000; Rue Gouraud, Gemmayzeh; mains with salad LL12,000; ☎ noon-midnight Mon-Sat, 11am-5pm Sun; ☎) One of the best options for vegetarians, there's also an all-you-can-eat veggie 'antipasti' buffet served daily for US\$6.50.

## ASIAN

**Le Sushi Bar** (Map pp418-19; ☎ 338 555; Rue Abdel Wahab el-Ingilizi, Achrafiye; sushi per 2 pieces LL5000-7000, set menu LL32,500-38,500; ☎ noon-3.30pm & 7-11.30pm; ☎) Credited with the launch of the sushi craze in Beirut, this restaurant has also featured in *Vogue Paris*' feature '100 Best Restaurants in the World'. Decorated 'au japonais' (with bamboo especially imported), its sushi is known for its quality and freshness. The 'Imperial Selection' dishes (such as marinated scallop) are to die for, but so also are the prices (LL17,000 to LL36,000). Reservations for dinner are a must (48 hours ahead on weekends).

**Yabani** (Map pp418-19; ☎ 211 113; Rue de Damas, Achrafiye; average meal with wine LL65,000, set lunch LL36,300; ☎ 10.30am-3.30pm & 8.30pm-midnight Mon-Sat, 8.30pm-midnight Sun; ☎) Designed by Bernard Khoury, it's innovative, exciting and fun. Guests take the glass elevator down to the restaurant sunk like a bowl in the ground. The sushi is excellent – salmon is flown in twice weekly from Scotland, apparently.

## FRENCH

**Le Rouge** (Map pp418-19; ☎ 442 366; Rue Gouraud, Gemmayzeh; mains from LL9000; pizzas from LL6000; ☎ 10am-11.30pm; ☎) This contemporary-style French restaurant has good bistro food at excellent prices. Reservations advised.

## INTERNATIONAL

**L'O** (Map pp418-19; ☎ 03-199 005; Rue Gouraud, Gemmayzeh; ☎ noon-4pm & 8pm-midnight Mon-Sat, 8pm-midnight Sun; ☎) Cool, contemporary – and

packed – this restaurant has an award-winning chef who offers superb 'fusion cuisine' such as seared duck breast with sweet potato mash and balsamic reduction.

**Casablanca** (Map p422; ☎ 369 334; Rue Ain al-Mreisse, Ain al-Mreisse; brunch LL28,000, set-menu lunch LL33,000, dinner LL55,000; ☎ 12.30-3.30pm & 8pm-midnight Tue-Sun; ☎) In a renovated Ottoman villa overlooking the Corniche, the restaurant's an old favourite among the well-heeled. The speciality is seafood and its 'international cuisine' is high-class – like its clients. Reserve a table with a sea view. Enter the restaurant from the side street opposite the Lalipco petrol station.

## ITALIAN

**Al Dente** (Map pp418-19; ☎ 202 440, 333 333; 137 Rue Abdel Wahab el-Ingilizi, Achrafiye; starters LL11-38,000, mains LL14,500-38,000; ☎ noon-3pm & 8.30-11pm Sun-Fri, 8.30-11pm Sat; ☎) Suitably grand and resplendent as befits its home in the Hotel Albergo, this restaurant has also been called the 'best Italian restaurant in the Middle East'. The food is excellent.

**Pasta di Casa** (Map pp418-19; ☎ 363 368; Rue Clemenceau, Ras Beirut; mains around LL12,000; ☎ noon-midnight; ☎) With its rafters, checked curtains and tablecloths, you'd be forgiven for thinking you were in Italy. If you're kebabed-out, this family-run place is a good choice. Pasta is homemade. Credit cards are not accepted.

## Cafés

**Bay Rock Café** (Map pp418-19; ☎ 796 700; Ave du Général de Gaulle, Raouché; set 'tourist menu' per person US\$16.50; ☎ 7am-3am, summer 24hr; ☎) Spectacularly situated overlooking Pigeon Rocks (one of the icons of Beirut), this café is an essential port of call. Food is on the pricey side but is good quality and fresh. The outdoor terrace is great place for breakfast (from LL4400) or a sundowner. Live music can be heard nightly from midnight to 3am, and belly dancers usually perform from 2am to 2.30am at weekends.

**Al-Kahwa** (Map p422; ☎ 362 232; Al-Kanater Bldg, Rue Bliss, Ras Beirut; ☎ 9am-1am; ☎) With its Moorish interior, this place combines style and friendliness with decent and well-priced food (Western and Lebanese). It's a popular hangout of AUB students during the day. At night, locals come for a game of backgammon or to smoke a nargileh. If you fancy trying the latter (LL10,000 to LL12,000),

this is a great place to do it. There are also veggie options (pizza LL6000, pasta LL8000 and baked potatoes LL3000).

**Peppita** (Map p422; ☎ 370 096; Ave de Paris, Corniche, Ras Beirut; sundaes LL4000-12,000, milkshakes LL4500, ice creams from LL1000; ☎ 6am-2am; ☎) A branch of the famous Tal al-Moulouk, this is a heaven for sweet-tooths. With its spectacular array of pastries, delicious ice cream and a pleasant terrace, it makes the perfect pit stop when walking the length of the Corniche.

**Gemmayzeh Cafe** (Map pp418-19; ☎ 580 817; Rue Gouraud, Gemmayzeh; beer LL3500-4000, grills LL10,000; ☎ 24hr except 2-8am Mon; ☎) Something of a Beirut institution, the café resembles an old Parisian bistro. Its special attraction is its live Arabic music. Shows (10.30pm to midnight) take place every night except Tuesday.

**Tribeca** (Map pp418-19; ☎ 339 123; Rue Abdel Wahab el-Ingilizi, Achrafiye; ☎ 7am-1am; ☎) Beloved by academics and journalists, the cosy but contemporary Tribeca prides itself on its coffee and homemade bagels (LL1250). It's a terrific place for breakfast (serving everything from omelettes to pancakes with peanut butter and jelly).

**Paul** (Map pp418-19; Ave Georges Haddad, Gemmayzeh; mains LL12,000-26,500; ☎ 8am-midnight; ☎) A French franchise and really a restaurant, it's another great place for breakfast with its home-baked croissants and cakes. There's an attractive if rather trafficky little terrace.

**Manara Palace Café** (Map pp418-19; ☎ 364 949; the Corniche, Manara; mains around LL11,000; ☎ 24hr; ☎) With its lovely terrace slap bang on the waterfront and fresh fish at good prices, this is popular with Lebanese families particularly at weekends. There's also a small children's park. At night, from 10pm to 2am, there's live Arabic music (admission free).

**Al-Rawda** (Map pp418-19; ☎ 743 348; Corniche, Manara; grills LL8500; ☎ 7.30am-midnight summer, 8am-8pm winter; ☎) The only place in Beirut with a shaded garden right on the seafront, this is a peaceful and tranquil little haven serving quite good food at reasonable prices.

**Le Coffee House** (Map pp418-19; ☎ 211 115; Rue Monot; sandwiches & snacks from LL7500, mains LL13,500-26,000, kids menu LL7500-9000; ☎ 9am-midnight Sun-Thu, 9am to 1am Fri & Sat; ☎) Located opposite Crystal, with its large and lovely terrace this stylish café is an oasis in maddening Monot. Try the 'Compose Your Own Salad' speciality.

**Pâtisserie Ahmad Aouni Hallab & Fils** (Map pp418-19; ☎ 789 999; Ave du Général de Gaulle, Raouché; cake & ice cream from LL1000-1500; ☎ 5.30am-11.30pm/1am winter/summer; ☎) Also recommended, this has a terrace opposite the seafront.

## Quick Eats

**Barbar** (Map p422; Rue Omar ben Abdel Aziz, Hamra; ☎ 24hr; ☎) A phenomenally popular chain selling everything from *mezze* and shwarma to BBQ chicken wings and vegetarian pizza, as well as pastries, ice cream and fantastic fresh juice. There's an indoor seating area. There's also a branch on Rue Spears, Hamra (Map pp418-19, open 24 hours).

**Bliss House** (Map p422; Rue Bliss, Ras Beirut; ☎ 7am-5am; ☎) Cheaper than Barbar, and always packed with AUB students, Bliss has three shop fronts offer decent-quality fast food at good prices including shwarma (LL3000), kebabs (LL3000 to LL3500), fresh juice (LL2000 to LL3250) and ice cream (LL1750 to LL2000).

**Snack Hamadeh** (Map p422; Rue de Rome, Hamra; ☎ 7am-7pm Mon-Sat) This tiny family-run food stall does a roaring trade with fat-cat businessmen who seek out the home-baked and delicious Lebanese pizzas (LL250 to LL2000).

## Self-Catering

Supermarkets such as **Co-op** (Map p422; ☎ 712 879 Rue Makdissi, Hamra; ☎ 8am-10pm) and **Ildriss Supermarket** (Map p422; ☎ 745 255; Rue Sourati, Hamra; ☎ 7am-9pm Mon-Sat, 2-9pm Sun) offer a wide range of fresh and quality produce and products (including baby food and infant's dried milk).

At the Co-op, there's also a bread, cheese and patisserie counter and, next door, a liquor store. For a treat or a deluxe picnic, check out **La Posta Gourmet** (Map pp418-19; ☎ 990 707; Rue Gouraud, Gemmayzeh; ☎ 10am-9pm Mon-Sat), a fabulous Italian delicatessen selling more than 55 varieties of cheese and charcuterie, prepared dishes, olives etc.

## DRINKING

Beirut has an embarrassment of riches when it comes to bars. Though numerous, they're not cheap and you'll find yourself paying for the 'after-hour' entertainment dearly. A local beer will generally set you back from LL7000 to LL9000 and a cocktail costs LL9500 to LL14000 or more. Between

7pm and 8pm many bars have happy hour, when drinks are up to 50% cheaper. For more information on the hottest areas to hang out, see opposite).

### Achrafiye

**Centrale** (Map pp418-19; ☎ 915 925; Rue Mar Maroun, Achrafiye; ☎ kitchen 8pm-12.30am, bar 8pm-2am; ☎) Designed by Beirut architect Bernard Khoury, this is arguably the capital's most stylish place. If you can't afford the excellent French cuisine in its industrial-chic interior, head for the lively barrel-shaped bar on the top floor with its roof that opens. To find it, look for the leafy alleyway near the ruined archway, about 20m east of the Eglise St Maron.

**Pacifico** (Map pp418-19; Rue Monot, Achrafiye; admission free; ☎ 7pm-1.30/2.30am; ☎) Styling itself on '1920s and '30s Havana after Prohibition', this club prides itself on its food (Cuban-Mexican) and lengthy cocktail list (more than 200 listings) as much as its atmosphere. It's frequented by expats.

**Lila Braun** (Map pp418-19; Rue Monot, Achrafiye; admission free; ☎ 8pm-2am Mon-Fri, 8pm-4am Sat & Sun; ☎) 'In' at the time of writing and hopping up the hip stakes is this well-designed '80s-style bar. The entrance is opposite Pacifico, through an unmarked hallway.

**37°** (Map pp418-19; Rue Monot, Achrafiye; ☎ 7pm-3am; ☎) Less pretentious and very popular with students and graduates for its bargain beers (LL5000), this pub gives students with an ISIC card a 20% discount on drinks. It's a few metres down from Lila Braun.

**Hole In The Wall** (Map pp418-19; Rue Monot, Achrafiye; beer LL5000; ☎ 6pm-2/3am; ☎) Particularly popular with expats, this place has been described as 'an unofficial tourist office with alcohol!'

### Corniche

**La Plage** (Map pp418-19; Corniche, Ain al-Mreisse; beer from LL4500; ☎ 10am-midnight Apr-Sep; ☎) Though not cheap, this is a great place for a sundowner either in the Orientalist interior or outside on the terraces (amid the boats, cigars and yachting shoes). Part of the Club l'Orient, eating here entitles you to free use of the Beirut Swimming Club next door.

### Gemmayzeh

The following bars are all cheek-by-jowl along Rue Gouraud in the newly fashionable

quarter of Gemmayzeh. Beer (from LL4000) spirits (from LL7000) and cocktails (from LL9500) are no bargain, but there's usually a 'happy hour' from 5pm to 8pm.

**Bar Louie** (Map pp418-19; admission free, with live band LL8000; ☎ 11am-2.30am; ☎) Has a particularly lively atmosphere and plays jazz, Latin and Blues music. Bands usually play five times a week (not Wednesdays and Saturdays) from 10pm to 12.30am.

Also recommended are **Dragonfly** (Map pp418-19; ☎ noon-1am Mon-Sat), **Torino Express** (Map pp418-19; ☎ 8am-2am Mon-Sat) and **Godot** (Map pp418-19; ☎ 8am-2am Mon-Fri).

### Hamra

**Blue Note** (Map p422; ☎ 743 857; Rue Makhoul, Hamra; ☎ noon-1am Mon-Sat; ☎) A restaurant-cum-jazz bar plastered with photos of musicians who've performed here, this is one of the best places to hear jazz and blues in Lebanon. Local – and sometimes international – bands perform at least every Thursday, Friday and Saturday. Admission (LL8800 for local bands; LL19,800 for international) is only charged on evenings when music is live. Beer costs upwards of LL4290 and wine/cocktails will set you back LL9350 or more. Reserve at weekends.

**Chez André** (Map p422; Rue Hamra, Hamra; admission free; ☎ 8am-4am Mon-Sat) A favourite watering hole of the international set of the '70s, this tiny bar is something of an institution and is much beloved by local academics, artists and journalists. Try the house speciality: a dark and dangerous cocktail called 'Dracula'. It's inside the arcade on Rue Hamra.

**De Prague** (Map p422; Rue Makdissi, Hamra; admission free; ☎ noon-1am Mon-Sat; ☎) Relatively new to the scene, this place is cool but also laid-back and friendly.

### Sodeco

**Zinc** (Map pp418-19; Rue Seifeddine al-Khatib, Sodeco; beer LL8000; ☎ 8.30pm-2am Mon-Sat; ☎) Another popular restaurant-cum-bar-cum-club set in an old Ottoman house; the atmosphere is friendlier than some, and there's a pleasant outdoor garden.

## ENTERTAINMENT

Beirut now claims to be the party capital of the Middle East. A visit may well convince you and a night on the town is not to be missed. The typical Beirut night out

consists of a dinner with friends at a good restaurant (with optional apéritif at the restaurant or elsewhere beforehand) from around 9.30pm to 11pm, followed by some bar hopping to around 1am or 2am, followed by a stint at an 'after hours' nightclub such as BO18, which should take you nicely to breakfast! During the summer months, the vibrant Maameltein nightclub strip in Jounieh 21km north of Beirut jerks into life. The *Guide* should keep you in the loop.

Many clubs also serve as restaurants and bars. Beirutis like to come to eat at these places between 9pm and 11pm, then get up to drink and dance (when the tables are cleared away). If you want to eat also, a reservation is essential; otherwise you can just turn up for a drink at the bar. Generally the music matches the moment: soft music for the diners, gradually vamped up in readiness for the full-on dance music after midnight. Note that the dress code is smart.

### Nightclubs

**Element** (Map pp418-19; ☎ 212 100; cnr Rue Université St Joseph & Rue de Damas, Achrafiye; admission free, beer LL7800; ☎ 8.30pm-4am; ☎) Designed like an underground bunker, the look is industrial-chic. Though it's one of the top spots, drinks aren't prohibitive and the atmosphere is still friendly and fun. Locals in the know come on Sunday; at weekends it's heaving. Under-21s are not permitted entry.

### THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

**BO18** (Map pp418-19; ☎ 580 018; Beirut-Jounieh Hwy, La Quarantine; admission free, beer LL11,000; ☎ 9pm-5am or later) Next to Forum de Beyrouth, just past the old train station, this is the most famous nightclub in Lebanon. Designed by Lebanese architect Bernard Khoury, it looks more like a bomb shelter than a nightclub. Its roof opens through an ingenious system of truck hydraulics, and seats fold away to form tables on which to dance. It lies about 1.5km from the edge of Downtown; a taxi will take you there for LL10,000 to LL15,000. It's an 'after hours place': most people come from 2am onwards. Uniquely, no food is served and bookings are not accepted. The clientele's age range is generally 18 to 30.

**Crystal** (Map pp418-19; ☎ 332 523; 243 Rue Monot, Achrafiye; admission free, beer LL12,000; ☎ kitchen 9pm-1am Tue-Sun, bar 9pm-5am; ☎) This is a very popular place that has set its sights firmly on the rich and the very rich, and caters to them with both food and wine (including Petrus for LL5,500,000) but when the tables are cleared the club gets going! Despite an interior that's plush and rather hideous, the music and atmosphere are oh-so-cool and also fun. Peak time is 1am onwards.

**Al Mandaloun** (Map pp418-19; ☎ 611 411; Rue Seifeddine al-Khatib, Achrafiye; admission free, beer LL18,000; ☎ 9pm-3/4am Mon-Sat; ☎) Popular particularly with a 30-something Arab clientele, this is where the wealthy, the glitzy and the ritzy hang out. Music is mixed Arab and international and from 1.30am live music replaces the DJ. Monday is considered the best night.

**Casino** (Map pp418-19; ☎ 656 777; Sodeco Sq; admission free, cover charge incl meal & 2 drinks US\$45 Fri & Sat; drinks with/without meal LL15,000/12,000, mains LL17,000-30,000; ☎ 11.30pm-5am Tue-Sun; ☎) Another restaurant-cum-nightclub, this was one of the top three hottest places to be seen when we visited.

### Cinemas

**Circuit Empire Dunes** (Map pp418-19; ☎ 792 123; www.circuit-empire.com; Dunes Shopping Center, Rue Verdun, Verdun; tickets afternoon/evening shows LL5500/7500; ☎ 2.30pm, 5pm, 8pm, 10pm; ☎) One of the largest and most modern cinemas.

### Theatre

Unfortunately, the old-timer Théâtre de Beyrouth was closed at the time of research.

**Théâtre al-Medina** (Map p422; ☎ 753010; masmad@cyberia.net.lb; Saroulla Bldg, Rue Hamra, Hamra; tickets depending on seat & performance LL10,000-30,000; top seats extra LL5,000; ☎ 8.30-10/11pm Tue-Sun mid-Sep-end Jul; ☎) The theatre hosts well-staged plays and musicals (some in English and French), concerts and recitals. From September to May, there is sometimes children's theatre; the rest of the year it operates as a cinema. It's found behind the Kabab-Ji restaurant on Rue Hamra. Book at least one day in advance.

### Live Music

**Music Hall** (Map pp418-19; ☎ 361 236; Starco Center, Downtown; admission free, beer LL11,000; ☎ 10.30pm-

3/4am Thu-Sat; 🚫) This converted theatre has fabulous and diverse live music shows from 11.30pm (with short breaks when a DJ takes over). The entrance is at the rear of the Starco Center.

Some cafés, bars and nightclubs also put on live music. See p426 and p429.

### Spectator Sport

**Hippodrome** (Map pp418-19; ☎ 632 515; Ave Abdallah Yafi; admission LL5000-15,000; 🚫) most weekends) This racing venue is one of the few places you can legally bet in the Middle East; the Lebanese love it.

### SHOPPING

**Maison de l'Artisan** (Map pp418-19; ☎ 368 461; Rue Minet el-Hosn, Ain al-Mreisse) Run by the Ministry of Social Affairs, the house was set up to support local artists, and at the same time guarantee a certain standard. The range of products includes rugs, lanterns, pots, candles, slippers and musical instruments, though few are outstandingly original or of high quality.

**Yahya Express Photofinishing Specialist** (Map p422; ☎ 735 305; Rue Emile Eddé, Hamra) This shop develops film (LL4000 to LL5000) and also burns CDs of images from a memory card (LL5000).

**La CD-Thèque** (Map p422; ☎ 746 078; Rue Sourati, Hamra) The newest branch of 'the best music shop in Lebanon' sells a good variety of CDs (US\$12 to US\$17) including a selection by local artists.

**Nargileh Seller** (Map p422; cnr Rue Antoine Gemayel & Rue Baalbek; 🕒 10am-11pm Mon-Sat, 12-11pm Sun) If you're looking for something beautiful as well as functional, then head for this little specialist shop. To purchase a complete nargileh set costs around LL20,000 to LL90,000.

### GETTING THERE & AWAY

For information about transport between Syria and Beirut, see p458.

Buses, minibuses and service taxis to destinations north of Beirut leave from Charles Helou bus station (Map pp418-19) and the Dawra (AKA Dora) transport hub. To the south and southeast they leave from the Cola transport hub. See p461 and the relevant town and city sections for further details.

For information on car hire, see p461.

### GETTING AROUND To/From the Airport

Beirut international airport lies approximately 5km south of Beirut. The red-and-white LCC bus 1 will take you from the airport roundabout (1km from the terminal) to Rue Sadat (off Rue Bliss at western end) in Hamra; bus 5 will take you to Charles Helou bus station. The blue-and-white OCFTC buses 7 and 10 also stop at the airport roundabout en route to the city centre; bus 10 goes to Charles Helou bus station and bus 7 goes to Raouché, from where you can take bus 9 to Hamra. Fares are LL500. The buses operate between 5.30am and 6pm daily and the maximum wait is generally about 10 minutes.

The yellow airport taxis are notoriously expensive, often charging US\$25 for the trip into town. It's possible to bargain this down to as little as US\$10, but only if the supply of taxis greatly outstrips demand. A cheaper option is to walk 1km to the highway and hail a service taxi into town for LL2000.

From Beirut to the airport, the usual fare is LL10,000 (though they may ask twice this).

### Car & Motorcycle

To park, head for the larger supermarkets, shopping malls, restaurants and business centres. Many have underground or valet parking (around LL1500 to LL2000). Street parking is also possible if you can find a spot, but note that if you park in a no-parking zone (signposted), you may be towed away.

### Buses

Beirut is well serviced by its network of buses. They operate on a 'hail-and-ride' system: just wave at the driver and the bus will stop. There are no timetables, but buses come frequently in the day, and services stop early in the evening.

The bus routes most useful to travellers are listed below. A trip will almost always cost LL500.

#### LCC BUSES

**No 1 Hamra-Khalde** Rue Sadat (Hamra), Rue Emile Eddé, Hotel Bristol, Rue Verdun, Cola roundabout, Airport roundabout, Kafaat, Khalde.

**No 2 Hamra-Antelias** Rue Sadat (Hamra), Rue Emile Eddé, Radio Lebanon, Sassine Sq, Dawra, Antelias.

**No 3 Ain al-Mreisse-Dawra** Ain al-Mreisse, Club Militaire Central, Raouche, Verdun, Museum, Dawra.

**No 4 Wardieh-Sfeir** Radio Lebanon, Riad el-Solh Sq, Place des Martyrs, Fouad Chehab, Yessouieye, Sfeir.

**No 5 Charles Helou-Hay as-Saloum** Place des Martyrs, Fouad Chehab, Yessouieye, Airport roundabout, Hay as-Saloum.

**No 6 Dawra-Byblos** Antelias, Jounieh, Jbail (Byblos).

**No 7 Museum-Baabda** Museum, Beit Mary, Broummana, Baabda.

**No 13 Charles Helou-Cola** Place des Martyrs, Riad el-Solh Sq, Cola roundabout.

#### OCFTC BUSES

**No 1 Club Militaire Central-Khalde** Club Militaire Centrale, Unesco, Summerland, Khalde.

**No 4 Dawra-Jounieh** Dawra, Dbayé, Kaslik, Jounieh

**No 5 Ministry of Information-Seraïl Jdeideh** Ministry of Information, Sodoco, Bourj Hammoud, Séraïl Jdeideh.

**No 7 Club Militaire Central-Airport** Club Militaire Central, Summerland, Bourj Brajné, Airport.

**No 8 Ain al-Mreisse-Seraïl Jdeideh** Ain al-Mreisse, Charles Helou, Dawra, Séraïl Jdeideh.

**No 9 Club Militaire Central-Seraïl Jdeideh** Club Militaire Central, Rue Bliss, Rue Adbel Aziz, Rue Clemenceau, Rue Weygand, Tabaris Sq, Sassine Sq, Hayek roundabout, Séraïl Jdeideh.

**No 10 Charles Helou-Airport** Charles Helou, Shtaila, Airport roundabout.

**No 15 Ain al-Mreisse-Nahr al-Mott** Ain al-Mreisse, Raouché, Museum, Nahr al-Mott.

**No 16 Charles Helou-Cola** Charles Helou, Downtown, Cola.

**No 23 Club Militaire Central-Dawra** Club Militaire Central, Ain al-Mreisse, Charles Helou, Dawra.

**No 24 Museum-Hamra** Museum, Barbir, Hamra.

### Taxi & Service Taxi

Private taxi companies usually have meters and can quote you an approximate fare on the phone. Within Beirut, taxis charge anywhere from LL2000 to LL10,000, depending on your destination.

Service taxis cover the major routes in Beirut. The fare is LL1000 on established routes within the city and LL2000 to outlying suburbs.

## AROUND BEIRUT

### BEIT MARY & BROUMMANA

بيت مرعي & برومانا

☎ 04

Set in pine forests some 800m above and 17km east of Beirut, Beit Mary offers panoramic views over the capital. The town

dates back to Phoenician times and is home to Roman and Byzantine ruins, including some fine **floor mosaics** in a Byzantine church dating from the 5th century. They lie scattered in the enclosure off the road. Nearby and also worth a visit is the 17th-century Maronite monastery of **Deir al-Qalaa**, built on top of the hill with the remains of a Roman temple; three very large columns can be viewed around the back.

The smart **Al-Bustan Hotel** (☎ 870 400; Beit Mary www.albustanhotel.com; s/d US\$210/230, ste US\$250-550 plus 26% tax; 🚫 🚫 🚫) hosts an annual music and arts festival (p456) from mid-February to mid-March (dates vary).

About 4km northeast of Beit Mary is Broummana, a bustling town full of hotels, eateries, cafés, shops and nightclubs. In summer it's extremely popular with Beirutis escaping the heat of the city and has a carnival-like atmosphere, particularly on weekends.

Near Broummana there are two exceptionally good restaurants worth a visit in themselves.

**Restaurant Mounir** (☎ 873 900; Main St; mezze LL5000, grills LL8000; 🕒 noon-midnight; 🚫) serves food on a pleasant terrace with spectacular views over Beirut and the Mediterranean. Book in advance and request a table with a view. To get here from Broummana, make your way towards Beit Mary, turn right into the downhill street and follow the 'Mounir' sign to the bottom of the street.

Though its mountain views don't quite match Restaurant Mounir's sea views, **Kasr Fakhredine** (☎ 960 407; mezze average LL4000-5000; grills LL9000-10,000; 🕒 10am-midnight; 🚫) outdoes Mounir on the food front. Believed by some to serve the best classic Lebanese food in the country (some of which comes from its own fruit and vegetable garden), it's *the* place to splurge in Lebanon, though prices are very reasonable for the quality. There's also a good wine list. Ask for a table for the window. The large and attractive terrace is open from mid-May to the beginning of October. The restaurant lies off the main road, around 50m beyond the centre of Broummana if coming from Beirut.

Service taxis from the National Museum or Dawra usually charge LL2000 to either

Beit Mary or Broummana. The LCC bus 7 (LL500, 40 minutes) departs from just east of the museum.

## JEITA GROTTO

مغارة جعيتا

☎ 09

For many the **Jeita grotto** (☎ 220 841; www.jeita.grotto.com; adult/child 4-11 LL18,150/10,175, parking LL2200; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-7pm Sat & Sun Jul-Aug, 9am-6pm Tue-Fri, 9am-7pm Sat & Sun May-Jun & Sep-Oct, 9am-5pm Tue-Sun Nov-April, closed for 4 weeks late Jan-early Feb) is one of the highlights of Lebanon. Even for those spoiled by other cave experiences, this one is impressive. It's well worth a visit.

The award-winning development is well designed, well managed and well looked after. A cable car transports visitors up to the caves where they can wander the cathedral-like Upper Cavern, before watching an informative 20-minute film (9.30am, 1.30pm and 5.30pm in English, 11.30am and 3.30pm in French) and finally enjoying a brief boat ride through the Lower Cavern. A visit (including the film) takes around 1½ hours.

There's a **restaurant** (set combo LL6500; ☎ 9am-5pm/7pm winter/summer) that serves reasonably priced mains (LL12,000) and snacks (pizzas and burgers from LL6500), with a shaded terrace overlooking the river. A snack bar serves sandwiches for LL2000 to LL4000.

Note that for one to three months in winter the Lower Cavern may be closed due to high water levels. Arrive early to avoid the crowds; it's the most visited attraction in Lebanon.

Jeita lies 18km northeast of Beirut. To get there, catch a minibus (LL1000) or LCC 6/OCFTC bus 4 (LL500) from Dawra and ask the driver to drop you at the Jeita turn-off on the Beirut-Jounieh Hwy, where taxis congregate. Negotiate a return price with the driver (who will wait) as taxis from the grotto back to the highway/Dawra are exorbitant (US\$10/20). A taxi from Beirut costs LL25,000, a return trip from Jeita (including a 1½ hour wait) will cost US\$20 to US\$25.

## JOUNIEH

☎ 09 / pop 96,315

Once a sleepy fishing village, Jounieh, 21km north of Beirut, is now a high-rise strip

mall hemmed in by the sea on one side and the mountains on the other. Famous as the home of noisy nightclubs and glitzy shops, on summer weekends and nights, half of Beirut's population seems to decamp here and the atmosphere, though crazy, is great fun.

## Orientation & Information

The town is roughly divided into three parts: Maameltein, home to most of the nightclubs, the famous casino and some of Lebanon's best restaurants; Centre Ville with its hotels, supermarket and banks; and Kaslik, an upmarket area full of boutiques fleeing the fashionable.

There's no Internet café in Maameltein, only in Kaslik. **Rodolfo** (☎ 636 177; Rue Maameltein, Kaslik; coffee LL2500; pizza LL8000-14,000; ☎ 10am-4am; ☎), the new Italian café-restaurant, has free Internet access if you buy something. No banks in Jounieh change travellers cheques, though they do have ATMs.

## Activities

### TELEFERIQUE

A **teleferique** (cable car; ☎ 914 324; adult/child return LL7500/3500; ☎ 10am-7pm Tue-Sun autumn & winter, 10am-10pm daily summer) runs from Maameltein up to the mountaintop Basilica of Our Lady of Lebanon. The views are spectacular.

To get there, walk from Centre Ville to the clock-tower roundabout; the teleferique is about 10 minutes further on. It closes in bad weather. Note that operational times change marginally from week to week; ring ahead if necessary. Summer is classed as 24 June to 21 October.

### WATER SPORTS

**Restaurant al-Bihar** (☎ 930 862; Rue Maameltein; ☎ 8am-3am), next to restaurant Makhlof, offers jet skis (US\$80 per hour), water-skiing (US\$15 per 15 minutes) and parapenting (US\$30 per ride).

## Sleeping

### BUDGET

**Les Jardins du Liban** (☎ 224 123; www.jardinsdu.liban.com; Rue Maameltein; s/d with bathroom & TV US\$35/40; ☎ P) Though it lies 150m from the main Jounieh-Beirut road in central Jounieh (follow the lane that leads down

the hill), it's well worth the trek. Homely and comfy, the hotel also represents great value for money.

## MIDRANGE

**La Medina** (☎ 930 875; www.lamedinahotel.com; Rue Maameltein; s/d with bathroom, TV, minibar & breakfast US\$60/92; ☎) Rooms are on the small (and kitsch) side but are reasonably comfortable. Ask for a room with a balcony (which are larger); some – such as Nos 123 to 125 – overlook the pool and the sea. The hotel has two little private sandy beaches, a pool open in the summer (nonguests US\$8/5 for adults/children), a restaurant and free Internet access.

**Holiday Suites** (☎ 933 907; www.holidaysuites.com; Rue Mina; s/d/ste with bathroom from US\$65/75/95 plus 19% tax; ☎) Rooms are comfortable and most have lovely balconies with direct sea views. It also has a restaurant and facilities for jet-skiing (US\$40 to US\$60 per hour).

## TOP END

**Four Stars Hotel** (☎ 855 601; www.thefourstarshotel.lebanon.com; Rue Maameltein; s/d/ste with bathroom & breakfast from US\$110/154/242; ☎) This new hotel has three restaurants, a private marina, pool and, soon, diving and water-sports facilities. Rooms are comfortable and well furnished; those with direct sea views are more expensive. Nonguests can use the pool (open mid-May to mid-September) for US\$15/7 per adult/child at weekends and US\$10/5 on weekdays. Towels/deckchairs are US\$2/7.

## Eating

**Chez Sami** (☎ 910 520; Rue Maameltein; 500g fish LL24,000-37,000, meals excl drinks US\$30; ☎ noon-midnight) Considered one of the best seafood restaurants in Lebanon, it's simple but stylish and offers great seaside views and a lovely terrace (open in summer). There's no fish menu, you just pick what you fancy directly from the day's catch as you come in. A plate of fresh fried calamari/crab costs LL12,000/17,000.

**Manuella Restaurant** (☎ 832 480; Rue Maameltein; mezze LL3000-7300, seafood LL44,000-55,000, grills LL9000; ☎ noon-3am) Though the restaurant's rather kitsch (head for the conservatory-cum-terrace at the back), the food makes up for the décor.

**Makhlof** (☎ 645 192; Rue Maameltein; shwarma LL3500, mains LL11,000, large fresh juice from LL3000, all plus 10% tax; ☎ 24hr) A branch of the popular Lebanese chain, it's always packed with locals and has a lovely shaded outdoor terrace right above the sea. Food is simple but fresh and tasty.

For sushi, try **Sushi Bento** (☎ 919 193; Rue Maameltein; sushi LL1500-2750, set menus LL16,000-28,000, noodle dishes from LL5000; ☎ 11am-11pm; ☎).

A good place to prepare for a beach picnic is **Fahed Supermarket** (☎ 832 705; ☎ 8.30am-8.30pm Mon-Sat, 9am-1.30pm Sun), in downtown Jounieh.

For sweets, you can't go wrong with **Pâtisserie Rafaat Hallab** (☎ 635 531; Rue Maameltein; cakes & ice cream LL1000-1500; ☎ 7am-midnight mid-May-Sep), which sells all the usual deliciously sticky pastries and ice cream.

## Entertainment

Jounieh is famous for its nightlife. Your best bet is to walk down Rue Maameltein and choose the bars and nightclubs with the biggest crowds around their entrances. Beware the 'super nightclubs' with tacky dance shows and female escorts.

**Casino du Liban** (☎ 855 888; www.cdl.com.lb; Rue Maameltein; ☎ slot-machine area noon-5am, gaming rooms 4pm-5am, restaurants 8pm-4am, show 10-11pm Tue-Sat) The most famous nightspot in Jounieh is less glamorous than you might imagine: for the most part it consists of lots of gaming machines and middle-aged couples trying their luck. Guests must be over 21 and wear smart casual gear (no jeans or sports shoes); a suit and tie are required if you want to play the roulette wheels.

## Getting There & Away

The OCFTC bus 4 runs from Dawra to Centre Ville, stopping at Kaslik on the way. Also leaving from Dawra is the LCC bus 6 to Byblos, which stops at Maameltein en route. Both services charge LL750 and take approximately 30 to 40 minutes. The trip from Jounieh to Byblos on bus 6 costs LL750 to LL1000. Minibuses to/from Dawra charge LL1000, service taxis LL2000 and private taxis LL10,000 to LL15,000. Taxis to/from Jounieh to Hamra cost LL15,000 during the day and LL20,000 at night. A taxi to Byblos will cost LL10,000 and a service taxi LL2000.

# NORTH OF BEIRUT

## BYBLOS (JBAIL)

☎ 09 / pop 20,784

With its ancient port (now a pretty fishing harbour), Roman site, Crusader castle and restored souq, travellers inevitably fall for Byblos. Lying 42km from Beirut, it's a great place to visit overnight or on a day trip.

There's an annual arts festival in Byblos (see p456).

### History

Excavations have shown that Byblos (biblical name Gebal) was probably inhabited as early as 7000 years ago. In the 3rd millennium BC it became the most important trading port on the eastern Mediterranean under the Phoenicians. In exchange for gold, alabaster, papyrus rolls and linen, it sent cedar wood and olive oil to Egypt.

The city was renamed Byblos by the Greeks, who ruled from 333 BC. The city was named after the Greek word *bublos*, meaning papyrus, which was shipped from Egypt to Greece via Byblos' port.

The Romans under Pompey took over Byblos in 64 BC, constructing temples, baths, colonnaded streets and public buildings. In AD 1104 the city fell to the Crusaders, who built the castle and moat with stone and columns taken from the Roman temples.

Subsequent centuries under Ottoman and Mamluk rule saw Byblos' international reputation as a trading port wane, as Beirut's waxed. It soon settled into life as the small-time fishing town it is today.

### Orientation

The old town stretches from just outside the perimeter of the ruins to the old port and fortified tower. A hotel and restaurants are clustered around the port; the souq is situated just outside the entrance to the ruins.

### Information

#### INTERNET ACCESS

**CD Master** (☎ 540 032; off Rue Jbail; per hr L2000;

☎ 9am-1am Mon-Sat, 2pm-1am Sun) Directly behind the Standard Chartered Bank on Rue Jbail.

#### MONEY

**Lebanese Inter-Market Company Exchange** (☎ 541 623; Rue Jbail; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Sat) About 100m

north of Hawaii Cocktail, Juice & Glace on Rue Jbail. Changes travellers cheques and all major currencies (US\$5 commission per transaction).

The following banks have ATMs (but none change travellers cheques):

**Banque Libanaise pour le Commerce** (BLC; ☎ 540 150; Rue Jbail) Can change US dollars or euros.

**Byblos Bank** (☎ 542 198; Rue Jbail)

### POST

**Post office** (☎ 540 003; Rahban St; ☎ 7.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, 8am-1pm Sat) Look for the Coral Petrol Station on Rue Jbail; it lies around 30m east of the station on a side street. Walk up the hill and it's around 20m on your right, on the 2nd floor.

### TOURIST INFORMATION

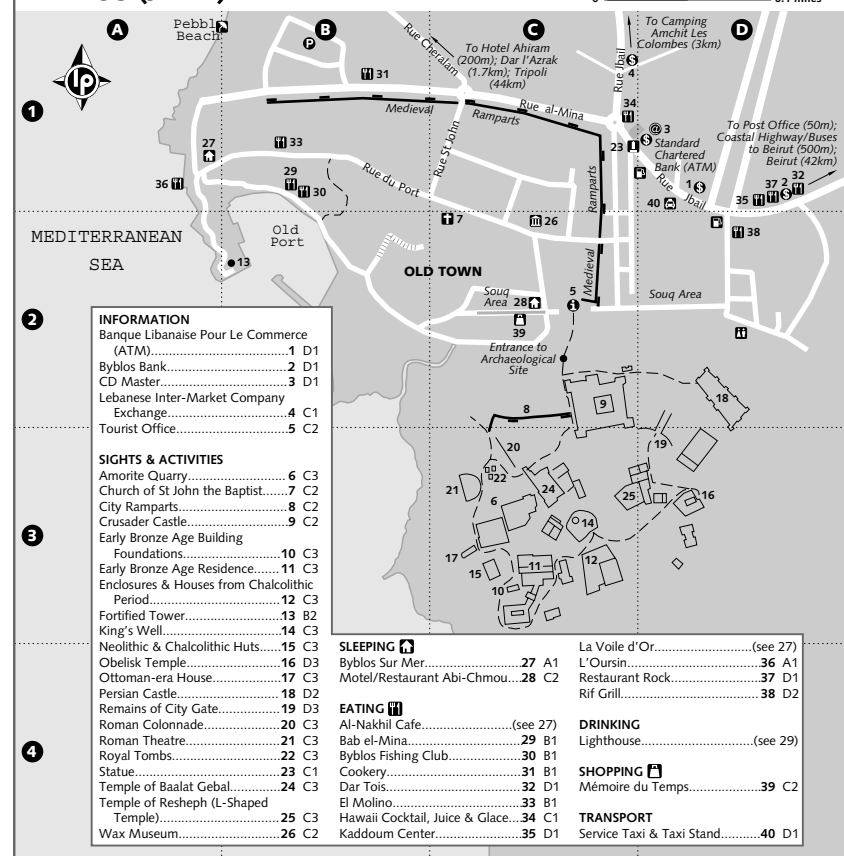
**Tourist office** (☎ 540 325; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1pm Sun occasionally) Near the souvenir shops just north of the entrance to the archaeological site. Provides free brochures and information on Byblos.

### Sights RUINS

This ancient **archaeological site** (☎ 540 001; adult/student & child LL6000/1500; ☎ 8am-sunset) is entered through the restored 12th-century **Crusader castle** that dominates the sturdy 25m-thick **city ramparts** (which date from the 3rd and 2nd millennia BC). There are some glorious views of Byblos from the castle ramparts and from this vantage point you're also able to get a very clear idea of the layout of the ancient city. Due east of the castle are the remains of the older **Persian castle**. From the Crusader castle, turn left past the **remains of the city gate** and follow the path until you reach the Amorite L-shaped **Temple of Resheph** dating from the third millennium BC. From here, move on to check out the intriguing **Obelisk Temple** from the early 2nd millennium BC, where offerings of human figures encrusted in gold leaf were discovered (now the famous Phoenician figurines in the National Museum).

Following the path southwest, go past the **King's Well**, a spring that supplied the city with water until the end of the Hellenistic era, to some of the earliest remains on the site, the **early Bronze Age residence**, and **building foundations**, as well as on the left, the **enclosures and houses from the chalcolithic period** (4th millennium BC) and the **Neolithic and chalcolithic huts** (4th and 5th millennia BC).

## BYBLOS (JBAIL)



Throughout this area, large burial jars were found here containing bodies in the foetal position. Past the better-preserved **Ottoman-era house** and the site of the adjacent **Amorite quarry** is the oldest temple at Byblos, the **Temple of Baalat Gebal** (the Mistress of Byblos) dating from 2800 BC. This was the largest and most important temple constructed at Byblos and was rebuilt a number of times in the two millennia that it survived.

During the Roman period the temple was replaced by a Roman structure and there are the remains of a **Roman colonnade** leading to it. To the northwest of the temple towards the sea is the **Roman theatre**, which has been restored and relocated near the cliff edge, with great views across the sea. Behind this

are nine **royal tombs**, which were cut in vertical shafts deep into the rock in the 2nd millennium BC; some of the sarcophagi found are now housed in the National Museum, including that of King Ahiram, whose sarcophagus has one of the earliest Phoenician alphabet inscriptions in the world.

A one- to two-hour guided tour of the sites (guides speak English, French, Italian, Spanish and German) costs LL20,000 for a group.

### CHURCH OF ST JOHN THE BAPTIST (EGLISE ST JEAN MARC)

Diagonally facing the overpriced and underwhelming **Wax Museum** (☎ 540 463; adult/child under 13 LL6000/4000; ☎ 9am-5/6pm) is the

Church of St John the Baptist. The Crusaders began construction of this Romanesque cathedral in AD 1115. It's an interesting mix of Arab and Italian designs. The remains of Byzantine mosaics lie scattered all around.

## Sleeping

**Byblos Sur Mer** (☎ 548 000; www.byblossurmer.com.lb; Rue du Port; s/d with bathroom, TV & balcony US\$75/88, ste US\$119-136; 🏠 📺) The hotel has a great position and comfortable rooms with lovely sea views and a seafront swimming pool (non-guests LL8000/6000 per adult/child), open mid-May to the end of September).

**Hotel Ahiram** (☎ 540 440; ahiram@inco.com.lb; s/d with bathroom, minibar & breakfast plus 10% tax US\$40/60; 🏠 📺) As rooms vary, check out several. The best have balconies with direct views over the seafront (such as room No 305) and are good value. It also has a restaurant, a nightclub, a terrace and direct access to the sea via steps. The hotel lies just off the main coastal road, 200m north of town.

**Motel/Restaurant Abi-Chmou** (☎ /fax 540 484; Nassib Eid Bldg) Situated diagonally opposite the Crusader castle, this motel is really one big apartment (US\$200 with breakfast) with three bedrooms (six beds) that run off a large communal area. It also has a kitchen, another salon, two bathrooms and a dining room. If the apartment isn't taken, you may be able to rent a room (US\$50/40 with/without breakfast). The triple and twin rooms have views over the ruins and the double room has a private shower. For US\$15 to US\$20 the owner can set up a bed in the dining room. The restaurant serves a set menu of mezza (LL2500 to LL5000) and main courses (LL7000 to LL18,000).

**Camping Amchit Les Colombes** (☎ 622 401; Amchit; camp site US\$3, 1-/2-person bungalow without air-con US\$20, 3-/4-person chalet with/without air-con US\$30; 🏠 📺) Lebanon's only camping ground is in Amchit, 3km north of Byblos. Set on a promontory overlooking the sea, it's a pleasant spot with good views and amenities, including hot showers, kitchen with gas burners, and electrical points for caravans (220V). The fully furnished chalets (with kitchen with gas cooker and fridge; same price with or without air-con) and bungalows (tiny and basic A-frame huts with two single beds and a Portaloo-type shower and toilet) are not well maintained, however. Note that this is really a place for Byblos' young to find

a quiet spot – bungalows and chalets are rented by the hour! It's a 25-minute walk from Byblos; a service taxi costs LL1000.

## Eating

### RESTAURANTS

**Bab el-Mina** (☎ 540 475; Old Port; set menu with fish & drinks for 2 people US\$30 plus 10% tax, beer LL3500; 🕒 11am-midnight; 🏠 📺) Boasting a lovely location overlooking the port, the restaurant specialises in fish and traditional Lebanese mezza, but at competitive prices. The Fisherman's Platter (the set menu) is excellent.

**Byblos Fishing Club** (Pepés; ☎ 540 213; Old Port; set menus LL26,400-29,400, with wine LL31,350; 🕒 11am-midnight) Next door to Bab el-Mina, the Fishing Club is best known for its charismatic Mexican owner, Pepé. Over the decades he's dangled many a film star on his knee. Pepé – now in his 90s – still occupies a corner. Though the food's not outstanding, its outdoor terrace and eccentric 'boat bar' merit a visit. Next door, the little museum (admission free; open 11am to 5pm) contains Phoenician artefacts recovered by Pepé himself, as well as some South and Central American crafts.

**Dar l'Azrak** (☎ 737 379; 3-course meal US\$25; 🕒 11.30am-midnight/1am winter/summer; 🏠 📺) A large new establishment considered the best restaurant in Byblos, this place also has terraces with lovely seaside views. It specialises in seafood. Stairs lead down to a small pebbly beach (with changing room and outdoor shower) and natural 'swimming pool'. It's 1.7km outside town on the seafront just off the main coastal road leading north (1.5km beyond Hotel Ahiram).

**El Molino** (☎ 541 555; Rue du Port; meal with 2 margaritas about LL3,000, beer LL4000; 🕒 noon-midnight Tue-Sun; 🏠 📺) This place offers Mexican food and a fun atmosphere at night; at lunchtime it can be quiet. Some tables have sea views.

**Rif Grill** (☎ 545 822; off Rue Jbail; burgers LL2500-3500, platters LL12,000; 🕒 11.30am-1.30am; 🏠 📺) Modern, quite stylish and 'in'. Rif Grill serves up reasonable Western food for its 20- and 30-something clientele. Burgers, pizzas (LL6000 to LL8000) and salads (around LL4000) are all served.

**Cookery** (☎ 544 500; Rue al-Mina; 🕒 7.30am-midnight) Popular locally, this recently renovated restaurant has a great selection of delicious sandwiches (LL5000 to LL12,000), pizzas (LL7500 to LL14,000) and mains

(LL8000 to LL16,000). It's probably the best choice for veggies.

**L'Oursin** (fish plate with drinks US\$30-40; 🕒 noon-midnight Apr-Oct) Situated on a jetty on the seafront. Reservations are essential for Saturday night and Sunday midday.

The restaurants at the Byblos Sur Mer hotel include **La Voile d'Or** (mains LL17,000, pasta LL3850-11,000; 🕒 6am-midnight; 🏠 📺), which has a good reputation.

### CAFÉS

**Al-Nakhil Café** (hamburger, fries & Pepsi LL7500; 🕒 9am-midnight summer only) Set on the jetty and also forming part of the Byblos Sur Mer hotel, this place serves tasty fast food at palatable prices – with a pleasant seafront table and parasol thrown into the bargain.

**Dar Tois** (☎ 330 352; Rue Jbail; cakes & ice cream LL1500-2500; 🕒 6am-10pm) A bright and cheerful patisserie that's a good place for breakfast.

### QUICK EATS

There are several good, cheap fast-food places on and around Rue Jbail.

**Restaurant Rock** (near Byblos Bank, Rue Jbail; felafel & kebabs LL1500-3250, mezza LL3000, beer LL1000; 🕒 8am-1am) Probably the top spot for fast food, this is clean, popular and reasonably priced. It claims to serve the best felafel and kebabs in town.

**Kaddoum Center** (Rue Jbail; 🕒 8am-2am; 🏠 📺) Next door to Restaurant Rock and more up-market, it has fruit juices (LL1500 to LL4500) and milkshakes (LL4500) as well as burgers and sandwiches (LL4000 to LL11,000).

**Hawaii Cocktail, Juice & Glace** (☎ 541 500; Rue Jbail; snacks 2000-5500; 🕒 8am-3am; 🏠 📺) Also good for fruit juices, ice cream and Western snacks such as nachos and chicken wings, it has a large, pleasant terrace overlooking Rue Jbail.

## Drinking

**Lighthouse** (☎ 03-455 718; Port; 🕒 6pm-midnight Tue-Sun) Opening at the time of research, this promises to become a popular pub-bar (also serving food) that transforms itself into a nightclub with DJ after 10pm. It's beside the steps leading up to Bab el-Mina restaurant.

## Shopping

**Mémoire du Temps** (☎ 547 083; www.memoryoftime.com; souq; 🕒 9am-7.30pm) Styling itself as a museum-cum-shop, Mémoire has a stunning collection of fossils (some of which

are not for sale) for US\$5 upwards. Certificates of authenticity are supplied. The second Mémoire du Temps at the entry of the souq near Motel/Restaurant Abi-Chmou is a good bookshop that also sells some old artefacts.

## Getting There & Away

The service-taxi stand in Byblos is near the Banque Libanaise pour le Commerce. A service taxi to/from Beirut (the hub in Beirut is Dawra) costs LL3000 (about eight services between 7am and 6pm). The LCC bus 6 (LL500, around one hour) and minibuses (LL1000) also leave from Dawra and travel regularly along the coast road between Beirut and Byblos, stopping on Rue Jbail. It's a scenic and very pleasant trip.

## TRIPOLI (TRABLOUS)

طرابلس

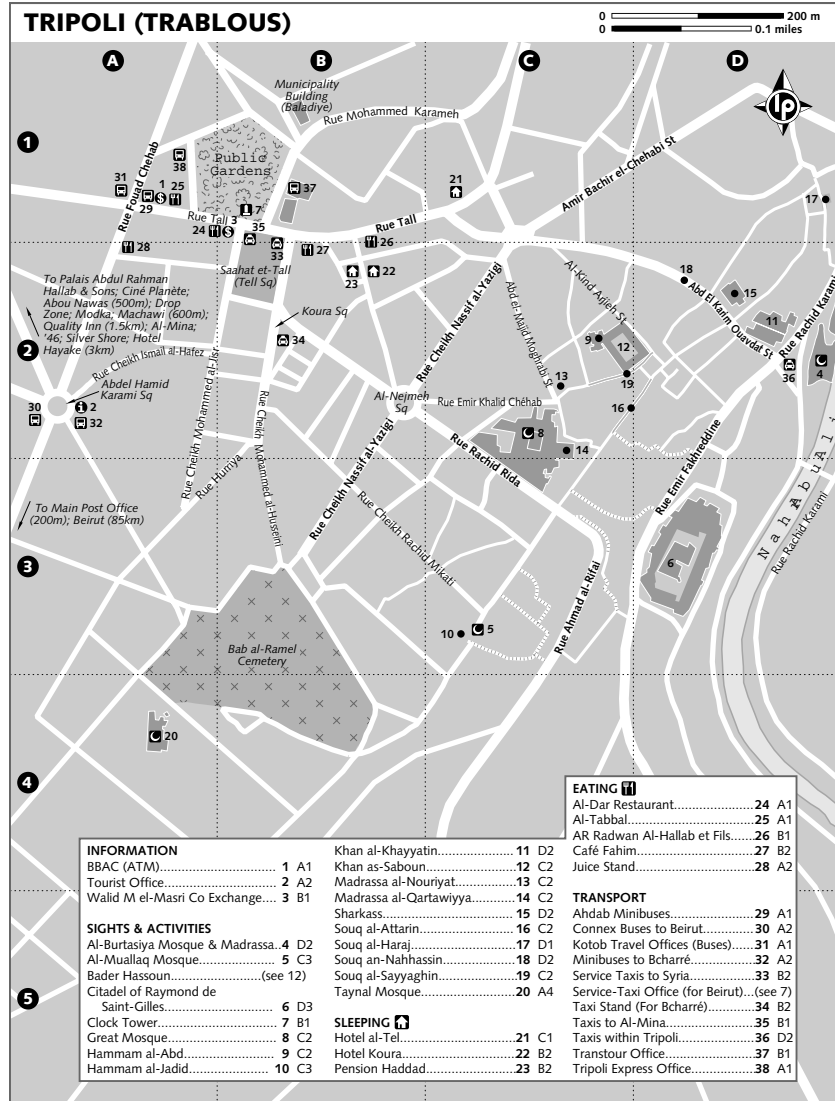
☎ 06 / pop 229,398

Tripoli, 85km north of Beirut, is Lebanon's second largest city and is the main port and trading centre for northern Lebanon. Famous for its medieval Mamluk architecture, including a large souq area considered the best in Lebanon, it's a great point from which to explore the northern part of the country. Tripoli is also famous as the sweets capital of Lebanon. The main speciality is *haliwat al-jibn*, a sweet made from cheese and served with syrup.

## History

Like other Phoenician cities along the eastern Mediterranean coast, Tripoli's early expansion reflected its success as a trading post. Its name, taken from the Greek word *tripolis* (three cities), derives from the 8th-century arrival of traders from the three ports of Sidon, Tyre and Arwad (off Tartus in Syria).

Conquered in turn by the Seleucids, Romans, Umayyads, Byzantines and Fatimids, it was invaded by the Crusaders in 1102 and ruled by them for 180 years. In 1289 the Mamluk sultan Qalaun took control and embarked upon an ambitious building programme; many of the mosques, souqs, madrassas and khans in the old city date from both the Crusader and Sultan Qalaun's eras. The Turkish Ottomans took over the city in 1516 and ruled quite peacefully until 1920, when it became part of the French mandate of Greater Lebanon.



## Orientation

There are two main parts to Tripoli: the city proper, which includes modern Tripoli and the old city; and Al-Mina, the port area, a promontory 3km to its west. The geographical centre of town is Saahat et-Tall (pronounced 'at-tahl'), a large square by the clock tower where you'll find the service

taxi and bus stands, as well as most of the cheap hotels.

The old city sprawls east of Saahat et-Tall, while the modern centre is west of the square, along Rue Fouad Chehab. In Al-Mina you'll find the Corniche, shops and some of the city's best restaurants and cafés.

## Information

### INTERNET ACCESS

There are Internet cafés scattered around the new part of town.

**Drop zone** (☎ 03-151 719; City Complex, Rue Riad al-Solh; per hr 10am-2pm LL1000, other times LL2000; ☎ 8.30am-1am/2am; ☎)

**Modka** (☎ 423 788; City Complex, off Rue Riad al-Solh; per hr LL1000; ☎ 9am-midnight) Next to Drop Zone but newer and cheaper and with a juice bar serving good fruit juices (LL1000 to LL3000).

### MONEY

Most of the large banks have ATMs, such as the BBAC on Rue Tall.

**Walid M el-Masri Co Exchange** (☎ 430 115; Rue Tall; ☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Sat, 8am-1pm Sun) US-dollar travellers cheques can be changed here for US\$2 per cheque (up to a maximum of US\$100).

### POST

**Main post office** (Rue Fouad Chehab; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat) Around 400m south of Abdel Hamid Karami Sq.

**Post office branch** (Rue ibn Sina; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat) In Al-Mina.

### TOURIST INFORMATION

**Tourist office** (☎ 433 590; www.lebanon-tourism.gov.lb; Abdel Hamid Karami Sq; ☎ 8am-5/6pm winter/summer Mon-Sat) Staff members are friendly and helpful and speak English and French. English- and French-speaking guides cost US\$25/50 for three-hour/full-day tour for one to three people (prices are negotiable).

## Sights

If you want to enter the mosques, remember to wear appropriate clothing: legs and arms must be covered and women must also cover their hair. Most mosques have kaftans (gowns) that you can borrow for a small tip. In general, mosques are open from about 10am to 11am/noon, from 1pm to 4.30pm, from 5.15pm to 7pm and from 7.30pm to 9pm (closing for prayer). Leave shoes *inside* the mosque (occasionally petty thieves snatch those left outside), and watch your valuables in the souqs.

### THE OLD CITY

Dating from the Mamluk era (14th and 15th centuries), the Old City is a maze of narrow alleys, colourful souqs, hammams, khans, mosques and madrasas. It's a lively and fascinating place where craftspeople,

including tailors, jewellers, soap makers and coppersmiths, continue to work as they have done for centuries. The **Souq al-Sayyaghin** (the gold souq), **Souq al-Attarin**, the medieval **Souq al-Haraj** and **Souq an-Nahhassin** (the brass souq) are well worth a wander.

The **Great Mosque**, built on the site of a Crusader cathedral and incorporating some of its features, has a magnificent entrance and minaret. Opposite the mosque's northern entrance is the **Madrasa al-Nouriyat**, which has distinctive black-and-white stonework and a beautiful inlaid mihrab. This madrasa is still in use today. Attached to the east side of the Grand Mosque is the **Madrasa al-Qartawiyya**, converted between 1316 and 1326 from the former St Mary's church. Its elegant black-and-white façade and honeycomb-patterned half-dome above the portal are well worth a look.

You have to look up to see the **Al-Muallaq Mosque**, which is suspended over the street. This simple 14th-century building is a fair distance south of the Grand Mosque and very close to the **Hammam al-Jadid**, the palatial ruin of an 11th-century bathhouse with coloured-glass windows studded in the cupolas that cast shafts of light down into the rooms. A neighbouring **shop** (☎ 9am-5/7pm winter/summer) holds the key.

The **Khan as-Saboun** (Soap Khan) is in the centre of the medina, just off the gold souq. Built in the 16th century, it was first used as an army barracks, though it's been functioning as a market for centuries. In the 18th century, when Tripoli's soap industry was world famous, the khan was at its centre. Today, it's occupied by various shops including **Bader Hassoun** (☎ 03-438 369), which sells soap.

To the west of the Khan as-Saboun is the 300-year-old **Hammam al-Abd** (☎ 8am-11pm), the city's only functioning bathhouse. Unfortunately, it's only open to men – the full treatment costs LL16,000. To find it, turn into the passageway marked 'Sona-Massage'.

One of the most beautiful buildings in the old city is the **Khan al-Khayyat**, formerly a Crusader hospital and today a beautifully restored 14th-century tailors' souq lined with small workshops. To the northwest of the khan is **Khan al-Misriyyin**, which is believed to date from the 14th century when it was used by Egyptian merchants. On the first floor of the dilapidated khan, you can find



**Sharkas** (Mahmoud al-Sharkas; ☎ 425 857; bar of soap LL1000-3000, boxes of 3 LL4000, 1kg natural/perfumed soap LL6000/8000; ☎ 10am-5/7pm winter/summer). Making soap since 1803, the family produces good-quality, authentic Tripoli soap; you're welcome to look around. Note that the shop is on the 1st floor (not the one with the same name on the ground). Close to the souq is the **Al-Burtasiya Mosque & Madrasa**, with its particularly fine mihrab inside.

To the south of the souqs on the outskirts of the old city, but well worth the walk, is the restored **Taynal Mosque**. This dates from 1336 and has a magnificent inner portal.

### CITADEL OF RAYMOND DE SAINT-GILLES

Towering above Tripoli, this **Crusader fortress** (adult/student & child over 10 LL8000/4000; ☎ 8am-sunset) was originally built during the period from AD 1103 to AD 1104. It was burnt down in AD 1297 and partly rebuilt the following century by a Mamluk emir.

The most impressive part of the citadel is the imposing entrance, with its moat and three gateways (one Ottoman, one Mamluk, one Crusader). Guided tours are available and prices depend on group size: generally LL5000/15,000/20,000 for one person/small group/large group.

### Sleeping

There's plenty of budget accommodation in Tripoli but almost no midrange or top-end options.

### BUDGET

**Hotel Koura** (☎ /fax 425 451, 03-326 803; off Rue Tall; dm/s US\$7/15, d with bathroom & breakfast US\$20, s/d with bathroom, air-con & breakfast US\$35/40; ☎) This is a spotless small hotel with a central shared lounge run by a charming brother and sister. Rooms are simple but quite well furnished, with decent bathrooms.

**Pension Haddad** (☎ 03-507 709; www.pensionhaddad.8m.com; off Rue Tall; dm/s/d with fan US\$7/10/15; breakfast/dinner LL3000/6000, laundry per shirt/trousers LL500/1000) A family-run place, its rooms are reasonably clean and cosy and have character even if the paint's peeling and there are only two common bathrooms. Free tea is offered and there's a warm welcome.

**Hotel Hayke** (☎ 601 311; Rue ibn Sina; s/d/tr with breakfast US\$10/20/30) Located in Al-Mina, this is a friendly, family-run hotel offering pretty basic but fairly hygienic rooms (with rather

thin mattresses). The advantage here is the location: ask for a room on the second floor with a sea view. Rooms 7 and 8 have the best views. It's next door to the post office, 150m from the mosque on a road running parallel to the Corniche. The entrance is at the back of the building.

**Hotel al-Tel** (☎ 628 407; Rue Tall; s/d with fan LL15,000/30,000, d with fan & bathroom LL35,000, d with air-con & bathroom LL45,000; ☎) Quite cosy and with moderately clean rooms, this is an option if the Koura, Haddad or Hayke are full. Six rooms have balconies. TV is available on request.

### TOP END

**Quality Inn** (☎ 211 255; www.qualityintripoli.com; s/d/ste with bathroom, TV, minibar & breakfast plus 26% tax LL120,000/150,000/225,000; ☎) It offers good facilities (three restaurants, two pools, a Jacuzzi and sauna); however, rooms at Quality Inn are comfortable but nothing special. There are no balconies and rooms look on to the exhibition space next door. The pools (nonguests US\$10) are open from June to September. Credit cards accepted. The hotel lies beside a fairground located between the old city and Al-Mina, around 1.7km northwest of Abdel Hamid Karami Sq.

### Eating

#### RESTAURANTS

**Silver Shore** (☎ 601 384; the Corniche, Al-Mina; meals around US\$30 plus drinks; ☎ 8am-7pm; ☎) Considered the best seafood restaurant in northern Lebanon, it serves only fish. Try the special-recipe hot sauce dish.

**Al-Dar Restaurant** (☎ 432 121; Rue Tall; mezze LL2500-5500, mains LL7000-8500; ☎ 9am-7/9pm winter/summer; ☎) This new restaurant in a 19th-century Ottoman house is probably the best place in town for simple but enjoyable and inexpensive food. Upstairs there's a pleasant restaurant, and downstairs a takeaway section (with a few tables) where the food is even cheaper (shwarma/kebabs LL2000).

**46** (☎ 212 223; the Corniche, Al-Mina; mains LL16,500; ☎ 10am-midnight Tue-Sun; ☎) With large windows overlooking the seafront and a nautically themed interior, this place is known for its fish (LL18,000 to LL26,000) as well as its pasta dishes (LL9,000 to 15,000). There's live piano or instrumental music every Saturday night. Credit cards are accepted.

**Abou Nawas** (☎ 611 412; 1st fl Masri & Kabara Bldg, Nadim al-Jsir St; 3-course meal with half-bottle of wine US\$20; ☎ 10am-midnight Mon-Sat; ☎) Lying diagonally opposite the Ciné Planète Complex, this restaurant is an opulent Orientalist fantasy complete with murals, chandelier and festoon curtains. The food is classic Lebanese and high quality – but at reasonable prices. To find it, look for the stylised red logo outside, which resembles a Chinese lantern. Credit cards are accepted.

**Machawi** (☎ 433 344; Rue Riad al-Solh; shwarma LL2000, mains LL5000; ☎ 11am-11pm; ☎) A clean and quite stylish place furnished with its own ovens, it serves simple but excellent food at great prices.

### Cafés

**Palais Abdul Rahman Hallab & Sons** (☎ 444 445; Rue Riad al-Solh; coffee from LL1250, juice LL2500, cakes/ice cream from LL1500; ☎ 5am-midnight; ☎) Founded in 1881, this is probably the best Hallab patisserie in Lebanon and certainly the best place to sample Tripoli's famous sweets. Everything is made on the premises, including the Hallab chocolate and ice cream, and you can visit the vast kitchens and the experimental 'laboratory'. On the 2nd floor there's a restaurant (with set menus for LL6500 to LL12,000 that change daily). Credit cards are accepted.

**Café Fahim** (☎ 444 516; Rue Tall; coffee/soft drink LL1500, nargileh LL1000-3000; ☎ 6am-10pm) An atmospheric if rather male-orientated place, with its vaulted interior and local men smoking nargileh and playing backgammon. It's opposite the clock tower.

**AR Radwan Al-Hallab et Fils** (☎ 444 433; Rue Tall; plate of mixed pastries LL2500; ☎ 6am-11pm; ☎) Another good patisserie.

There's also a juice stand on Rue Fouad Chehab.

### QUICK EATS

There are several fast-food places located around Saahat et-Tall.

**Al-Tabbal** (Rue Tall; shwarma LL2000; ☎ 8am-1.30am; ☎) Probably the best fast-food option, it has a menu chalked up in English above the till and clean tables to sit at.

### Entertainment

Tripoli is not renowned for its nightlife, but it does have a cinema complex, **Ciné Planète** (☎ 442 471; City Complex, Rue Riad al-Solh; tickets

LL5500, half price on Mon & Wed; ☎ programmes 3pm, 5.30pm, 8pm, 10.30pm; ☎), which shows latest-release English-language movies, with Arabic subtitles.

### Getting There & Away

#### TO/FROM BEIRUT

Three companies run coach services from Beirut to Tripoli (as well as various individually owned minibuses). **Connex** (☎ 611 232; www.connexliban.com) has 20 buses daily (LL2000, 1½ hours via Jounieh and Byblos, 7.30am to 8pm). **Tripoli Express** (☎ 03-327 625) has 17 smaller buses daily (LL2000, 1¼ hours, 7am to 8.30pm) via Jounieh (LL2000, 20 minutes) and Byblos (LL2000, 50 minutes). **Kotob** (☎ 444 986), which runs 10 older buses daily, is the cheapest option and takes longer (LL1500, two hours, every 15 minutes from 5.30am to 6pm), stopping to let passengers off and on at Jounieh (LL1500, 30 minutes), Byblos (LL1500, one hour) and Batroun (LL1500, 1½ hours). All three services leave from Zone C of Charles Helou bus station in Beirut.

From Tripoli, **Connex** (☎ 400 037) runs buses every 10 to 20 minutes to Beirut (LL2000, 1½ hours, 5.30am to 6pm) and express services on 'luxury coaches' (LL2500, 1¼ hours, every hour on the hour 7am to 4pm); **Tripoli Express** (☎ 444 986) runs smaller buses (LL2000, 1½ hours, every 10 to 15 minutes from 5am to 6pm); and **Kotob** (☎ 444 986) service runs between 5am and 5.30pm (LL1000, every 15 minutes) and follows a similar route.

**Ahdab** (☎ 437 799) runs minibuses from Tripoli to Beirut every 15 minutes from 5am until 8pm (before/after 2pm LL1000/1500, 1½ to two hours).

Service taxis leave about every half hour to Beirut (LL1000 between 5am and 4pm, LL1500 between 4pm and 5pm, about 1½ hours) travelling via Jounieh (LL1000 to LL1500, 40 minutes) and leave from just outside the clock tower. For Byblos (LL1000 to LL1500, 30 minutes) take the Beirut bus.

#### TO BCHARRÉ, CEDARS & BAALBEK

Minibuses from Tripoli to Bcharré (LL2000, 1¼ hours, three to four buses daily between 9am and 5pm) leave from outside the Marco Polo travel agency about 25m from the tourist office on Abdel Hamid Karami Sq. From Bcharré, they leave hourly from

6am until 2pm. For the Cedars, organise a taxi at Bcharré, which costs LL4000.

A service taxi from Tripoli to Bcharré costs LL4000 (from 6am to 5pm daily) and one to the Cedars costs LL10,000; service taxis leave from Al-Koura Sq.

When there is no snow or ice and the mountain road is open, it is possible to take a taxi from Bcharré to Baalbek (around US\$50, 1½ hours).

For information on buses from Tripoli to Syria, Turkey, Jordan and Saudi Arabia, see p459.

### Getting Around

Service taxis cost LL500 within the old and new parts of Tripoli; LL1000 to outlying parts of the city; and LL500 to LL1000 to Al-Mina. Foreigners are often asked double; try negotiating.

### BCHARRÉ

☎ 06

The trip to Bcharré takes you through some of the most beautiful scenery in Lebanon. The road winds along the mountainous slopes, continuously gaining in altitude and offering spectacular views of the Qadisha Valley. A Unesco World Heritage site, the valley is home to several old monasteries and hermits' dwellings, and offers good trekking. Villages of red-tile-roofed houses perch atop hills or cling precariously to the mountainsides; the Qadisha River, with its source just below the Cedars, runs along the valley bottom; and Lebanon's highest peak, Qornet as-Sawda (3090m), towers overhead. It's a truly magnificent area.

Bcharré is the main town in the Qadisha Valley. Famous as the birthplace of Khalil Gibran, and the stronghold of the right-wing Maronite Christian Phalange party, it's a very relaxing place to spend a couple of days.

### Orientation & Information

The town is dominated by the St Saba Church in the main street. There are a few shops on the main street, as well as the **L'Intime Internet Café** (☎ 03-732 091; per hr LL2000; ☎ 9am-midnight), which is about 20m from the church.

### Sights & Activities

#### GIBRAN MUSEUM

In keeping with his wishes, the famous poet and artist Khalil Gibran (1883–1931) was

buried in a 19th-century monastery built into the rocky slopes of a hill overlooking Bcharré. The **museum** (☎ 671 137; adult/student LL3000/2000; ☎ 10am–6pm daily summer, 9am–5pm Tue–Sun winter), which has been set up in this monastery, houses a large collection of Gibran's paintings, drawings and gouaches, and also some of his manuscripts. His coffin is in the monastery's former chapel, which is cut into the rock. The museum is really only for avid fans of Gibran but those who are unfamiliar with the poet but want to get to know his work will appreciate the selection of books for sale.

#### CEDARS OF BCHARRÉ

From Bcharré it's about a 4km climb along a tortuous road to the last remaining forest of **cedars** (☎ 672 562; suggested donation LL1500–5000; ☎ 9am–6pm May–Oct) in Lebanon, here since biblical times. Known locally as Arz ar-Rab (Cedars of the Lord), they populate the slopes of Jebel Makmel at an altitude of more than 2000m. Once covering most of Lebanon's high summits, the forest has been reduced over the centuries to little more than a small wood. The forest is classified as a national monument; in summer, you can walk through it on marked trails.

A taxi from outside the St Saba Church in Bcharré costs LL10,000/20,000 one way/return (including a one-hour wait). At the time of research, there was also a regular minibus service (leaving every hour from 7am to 7pm from outside the St Saba Church) transporting soldiers back and forth to the Cedars. You can hop on for LL1000. The main entrance to the forest is off the main road opposite the first group of souvenir stalls. There's another entrance on the other side of the forest where there's also the **Restaurant al-Kalaa** (☎ 03-892 856).

#### SKIING

The skiing season commences around mid-December and ends in March or April, depending on the weather. There are ski-hire shops (full equipment hire US\$8) and accommodation in the village below the forest. The resort is slowly developing; three new chair lifts have been built; by the end of 2006 there will be a new gondola and a large hotel, and a whole new skiing area is due to open higher up the mountain at the end of 2008.

Near the Cedars, **Cedar of Lebanon Ski Resort** (☎ 06-678 078; www.cedarsoflebanon.info, www.skileb.com; Sat, Sun & holidays half-/full-day LL25,000/40,000, Mon–Fri LL25,000, child any time LL25,000/18,000; ☎ 8.30am–3pm Mon–Fri, 8.30am–4pm Sat & Sun during ski season) is open in winter for both downhill and cross-country skiing.

#### QADISHA GROTTA

This small **grotto** (admission LL4000; ☎ caves 8am–6pm summer, closed mid-Dec to mid-May) extends around 500m into the mountain and has some great limestone formations. Though not as extraordinary as Jeita Grotto, its spectacular setting makes it well worth a visit.

The grotto is a 7km walk from Bcharré; follow the signs to the L'Aiglon Hotel and then take the footpath opposite. It's then a 1.5km walk to the grotto. The caves (illuminated) take around 30 to 40 minutes to visit. Occasionally after rain the caves are closed due to dangerous water levels. The small **restaurant** (☎ noon-midnight or later) opens in summer.

### Sleeping & Eating

There are just two hotels in Bcharré. At the Cedars of Bcharré, there are more options, of which we recommend **Hotel St Bernard**.

**Hotel St Bernard** (☎ 678 100; www.hotelstbernard.com; s/d/ste with bathroom & breakfast US\$60/100/120) Designed like a chalet with a cosy log fire in the large lounge, it has comfortable rooms (with balconies on the 1st floor) and there's a good restaurant (mains LL12,000) that has a terrace with views over the forest. The hotel lies off the main road; follow the signs.

**Palace Hotel** (☎ 671 005; fax 671 460; Bcharré; s with bathroom & TV US\$20–30, d/tr with bathroom & TV US\$40/48, breakfast US\$4.50) Located just below the main road, about 100m west of St Saba Church, the hotel offers very clean, tranquil and good value rooms. Rooms on the 2nd floor have balconies with views over the valley.

**Hotel Chbat** (☎ 672 672; www.hotelchbat.com; Rue Gibran, Bcharré; s/d/tr with bathroom, TV & breakfast US\$50/75/90, apt with salon for 1/2 people summer US\$80/105, winter US\$90/120; ☎) More Swiss-looking than Lebanese this chalet-style hotel has comfortable rooms with balconies. There's also a pool (open from mid-May to mid-September; LL5000 per day for nonguests), a gymnasium, a restaurant (serving home-made food) and a large lounge and terrace.

The owners can propose guided walks through the Qadisha Valley. If you have time, do explore this beautiful valley.

**Makhlouf Elie Restaurant** (☎ 672 585; Main St, Bcharré; 2-course set menu with coffee & soft drink US\$7, sandwich LL2000–3000; ☎ 9am-midnight) The main boon of this restaurant opposite the fire station is its outdoor terrace with great views overlooking the valley. The food is standard Lebanese fast food.

**Restaurant River Roc** (☎ 671 169; Bcharré; mezze LL2000, grills LL4500–7000; ☎ 10am–1am) Though there's a large and lovely terrace commanding great views of the valley, the food doesn't quite live up to the setting. It lies on the main road to Tripoli about 2km uphill from the centre.

**Pâtisserie Ô Delices** (☎ 850 784; Bcharré; ☎ 9am–8pm/10pm winter/summer) This family-run patisserie offers around a dozen delicious and inexpensive homemade Lebanese and Western-style cakes (LL1000 to LL2000) as well as fruit juices and ice cream. It lies on the main road 50m east of the village church.

### Drinking

**La Noche** (☎ 671 200; beer LL2000; ☎ 4pm–1am daily mid-Jun–mid-Sep, Fri–Sun winter) The new – and only! – pub lies at the bottom of the hill on the road leading up to Hotel Chbat.

### Getting There & Away

The bus and service-taxi stop is outside the St Saba Church in the centre of town. Buses/service taxis leave daily from 6/7am to 5pm every hour for Tripoli (LL3000/5000, about one hour) and to Beirut via Byblos every hour (LL5000/10,000, about two hours) During the dry season (July to November), you may find a taxi to Baalbek, which costs about US\$40.

## SOUTH OF BEIRUT

### SIDON (SAIDA)

☎ 07 / pop 163,554

Sidon is a small port city lying 45km south of Beirut. With Beirut's ever-widening sprawl, it's becoming quite difficult to distinguish the two. Sidon far precedes Beirut, however. Dating back some 6000 years, it was once a prominent and wealthy Phoenician city.

A succession of invaders passed through Sidon's portals, including Persians, Greeks,

صيدا

Romans, Byzantines, Arabs (who gave it the name Saida), Crusaders and Mamluks. With its attractive Crusader Sea Castle and fine mosques, khans and vaulted souqs, it makes a great day trip from Beirut. Sidon is also famous for its sweets and soap.

### Orientation & Information

Saahat an-Nejmeh, a huge roundabout, marks the centre of town. You'll also find the bus and service-taxi stands here. On Rue Riad as-Solh, which runs south off Saahat an-Nejmeh, there are banks and moneychangers. The old city, the harbour, the Sea Castle and the one hotel are west of Saahat an-Nejmeh and Rue Riad as-Solh.

**Banque Audi** (☎ 720 411; Riad as-Solh; ⌚ 8.30am-2pm Mon-Thu, 8.30am-12.30pm Fri, 8.30am-noon Sat) About 300m south of Nejmeh Sq. Has an ATM and can also change travellers cheques.

**Bob Net** (☎ 03-865 706; Dalaa St; per hr LL1000; ⌚ 8.30am-2am) Around 200m from the Dalaa hospital, it's the best Internet café in town (though connections are slow).

**Foundation Hariri** (☎ 727 344; ⌚ 9am-4pm Mon-Sat) Also inside the Khan al-Franja, this proactive organisation gives excellent information on Sidon and Tyre, as well as providing (free) guided tours of the khan (if staff are not busy).

**Post office** (☎ 722 813; Rue Riad as-Solh; ⌚ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat)

**Tourist office** (☎ 727 344; ⌚ 8.30am-2pm Mon-Sat) Operates inside the Khan Franja.

### Sights & Activities

Though Sidon's beaches look pleasant, they are not clean and are probably best avoided.

### THE OLD CITY

Old Sidon lies behind the buildings fronting the harbour, just across from the wharf. It's a fascinating labyrinth of vaulted souqs, tiny alleyways and old buildings dating back to the Middle Ages.

In the **souqs** you'll find shops selling everything from electrical appliances to orange water; you'll also see craftspeople – many of whom live above their stalls – at work. You can also get good-quality fruit here at bargain prices (LL500 for a kilogram of tangerines – though you may be asked more).

Highlights include the **Khan al-Franj** (Inn of the Foreigners; admission free), a graceful limestone khan built by Fakhreddine (Fakhr ad-Din al-Maan II) in the 17th century. Beautifully

restored, it consists of vaulted galleries surrounding a large rectangular courtyard with a central fountain. Just behind the Khan al-Franj is the **Bab as-Saray Mosque**, the oldest in Sidon, dating from 1201. Unfortunately it was closed to visitors at the time of research. Another gem is the **Palace Debbané** (Al-Moutran St, Souq; admission free; ⌚ 9am-6pm Sat-Thu) entered from the souq via a tall staircase marked with a sign. Built in 1721, this former Ottoman aristocrat's building has intricate Mamluk decoration, including tile work and cedar wood ceilings. There are plans to open a Sidon historical museum here in the future.

Further inside the old city is the **Great Mosque al-Omari** (admission free), said to be one of the finest examples of Islamic religious architecture of the 13th century. It was constructed around a church built by the Crusaders. Severely damaged by the Israeli bombings of 1982, it underwent a long restoration.

### SEA CASTLE

Erected in the early 13th century by the Crusaders, the **Sea Castle** (Qasr al-Bahr; admission LL4000; ⌚ 9am-6pm, closes 4pm winter) sits on a small island that was formerly the site of a temple dedicated to Melkart, the Phoenician Hercules. It is connected to the mainland by an Arab fortified stone bridge. Like many other coastal castles, it was largely destroyed by the Mamluks to prevent the Crusaders returning to the region. Fortunately, Fakhreddine II had it restored in the 17th century. Sometimes freelance guides hang around outside. They charge LL10,000 for four people; negotiate if there are fewer of you.

### SOAP MUSEUM

Located in an old soap factory that dates from the 17th century, this **museum** (☎ 733 353; Rue al-Moutran; admission free; ⌚ 9am-6pm Sat-Thu) shows that soap can be scintillating!

Sidon (alongside Tripoli) has been famous in the Middle East for its soap since the 17th century. The museum's exhibits and interpretive installations are well done. Look for the fantastic drying towers (where the soap bars are left to dry for up to a year) and the delightful bird-shaped soap moulds. Guides (speaking English and French) give interesting 15- to 20-minute free tours (but you should tip LL5000 to LL10,000). Other

features include a 12-minute video with subtitles in English, a good coffee shop and souvenir shop selling Sidon's speciality, *sanioura* (a kind of Middle Eastern shortbread), as well as other delicacies including rose water syrup, Turkish delight and, of course, soap.

### Sleeping

#### BUDGET

At the time of research, budget sleeping options were almost nonexistent in Sidon. However, a new place, Hotel al-Kalaa is expected to open in 2006, diagonally opposite the Sea Castle.

**Couvent Latin** (Katia; ☎ 03-442 141; Couvent de Terre Sainte et Paroisse Latine; s/d with bathroom US\$15/25) Located inside the souq, the little hotel boasts a pleasant open courtyard. Rooms are reasonably clean. The friendly family offers to take guests around the souq. Ask for directions at the Milk Time Café in the souq, which is about 30m from the Soap Museum's souq-side entrance.

**Hotel d'Orient** (☎ 720 364; Rue Shakrieh, Souq, Old City; dm/s with fan US\$5/7, d with fan US\$10-12) Grim and grimy, this is really only an option for those on their last Lebanese lira. It lies diagonally opposite the As-Shakrieh Mosque on Rue Shakrieh.

#### MIDRANGE

**Yacoub Hotel** (☎ 737 733; www.yacoubhotel.com; btwn Rue al-Moutraah & Rue Shakrieh; s/d with bathroom, TV & breakfast US\$30/50, ste with bathroom, TV & breakfast US\$60-80) This newly converted 200-year-old building offers spotless, comfortable and attractive rooms at good prices. It's friendly and well managed with a salon where hot drinks can be had. There are two entrances; the easiest to find is from the courtyard opposite the Catholic cathedral of St Nicholas around 150m from the soap museum.

### Eating

**Palamera** (☎ 729 543; Riad as-Solh; pizzas LL6000-9000, pasta LL8000-12,000; ⌚ noon-midnight Tues-Sun; ☺) Serving an eclectic mix of Italian, Chinese and Mexican, this place also has a kind of conservatory at the back that opens in summer. It's about 100m from the Soap Museum.

**Rest House** (☎ 722 469; mezze LL4000-6000, grills LL12,000; ⌚ noon-10pm) On the seafront, 200m southeast of the Sea Castle (over which it looks), this government-owned restaurant

has indoor and outdoor eating areas and serves good fish, though it's not cheap.

**Pâtisserie Kanaan** (☎ 720 271; Rue Riad as-Solh; ⌚ 5.30am-10pm; ☺) This modern, clean and air-conditioned place, just south of the Nejmeh roundabout, has an excellent selection of Arab sweets and ice cream (LL1250 for a cornet). It's great for a coffee (from LL2250), a cake (LL1250) or breakfast.

**Pâtisserie Al-Fardos** (☎ 721 878; Nejmeh Sq; ⌚ 5am-10pm) This pâtisserie is cheaper than Kanaan, with coffee from LL1000 and a good selection of Arab pastries including *sanioura* (LL1000 for six).

There are lots of sandwich stalls and cheap cafés around Saahat an-Nejmeh and the harbour. A good choice is **Abou Rami** (☎ 7.30am-9.15pm Sat-Thu), a felafel shop opposite the Sea Castle which also has some outdoor tables and chairs.

### Getting There & Away

#### TO/FROM BEIRUT

Buses and service taxis from Beirut to Sidon leave from the Cola bus station. To Sidon, OCFTC buses (LL750, one hour, every 10 minutes from 6am to 8pm) leave from the southwest side of the Cola roundabout. **Zantout** (in Beirut ☎ 03-223 414), the best private company for the south, also runs 36 buses daily from 6am to 9pm (LL750, one hour), 14 of which are express (LL1500, 30 minutes). Minibuses (without air-con) to/from Sidon leave every 10 to 15 minutes from 6.30am to 8.30pm and cost LL1000/1500 for day/evening trips. Service taxis to Sidon, which congregate near the buses, cost LL2500.

**Zantout** (☎ 722 783) runs regular buses from Sidon to Beirut from 5am to 8pm daily (LL1500, 30 minutes) departing from the Lebanese Transport Office on Saahat an-Nejmeh; OCFTC buses (LL750, one hour, every 10 minutes from 5am to 6.30pm) also leave from here.

#### TO TYRE

The Zantout bus from Sidon to Tyre (LL750, 45 minutes to one hour, nine to 10 buses from 6am to 7.30pm) leaves from the Lebanese Transport Office at the southern end of the town on Rue Fakhreddine, the continuation of Rue Riad as-Solh, near the Castle of St Louis. A service taxi from Sidon to Tyre costs LL3000 and a minibus (leaving from Saahat an-Nejmeh) costs LL1000.

## ECHMOUN

About 4km northeast of Sidon, **Echmoun** (admission free; ☎ 8.30am-6pm) is Lebanon's only Phoenician site boasting more than mere foundations. There are remains of temples and shops as well as interesting mosaics (though most are damaged).

The temple complex devoted to Echmoun, god of the city of Sidon, was begun in the 7th century BC. Other buildings were added later by the Persians, Romans and Byzantines. The highlight of the site is undoubtedly the throne of Astarte, guarded by winged lions.

From Sidon you can take a taxi (one way/return LL5000/8000), service taxi (LL1000 to LL2000) or minibus (LL500) to the turn-off on the highway at the funfair, then walk the 1.5km to the ruins.

## TYRE (SOUR)

☎ 07 / pop 135,204

Famous for its extraordinary Roman ruins (it's a Unesco World Heritage site), Tyre offers much more besides. It has picturesque harbours, fascinating souqs and, according to some, the cleanest beaches in Lebanon – or the least polluted, according to others! It also makes a good base for further exploration of the south. After suffering dreadfully during the civil war and Israeli incursions, Tyre is now showing signs of renewal.

## History

Tyre's origins are still under investigation by historians. Herodotus dates it to approximately 2750 BC. Ruled by the Egyptians and then the famous King Hiram (who sent cedar wood and skilled workers to Jerusalem so that the Hebrew King Solomon could build the Temple of Jerusalem) it prospered. Later it was colonised by the Assyrians, Neo-Babylonians, Greeks, Seleucids, Romans, Byzantines, Arabs, Crusaders, Mamluks and Ottomans and lost much of its early prosperity. Today it is home to a number of Palestinian refugee camps, but is trying to regain its position as one of Lebanon's major cities.

## Orientation & Information

The old part of Tyre lies on the peninsula jutting out into the sea. The modern town is on the left-hand side as you arrive from Beirut. Behind the port is the Christian

quarter, with its tiny alleys and old houses with shaded courtyards.

There's still no tourist information office in Tyre (though one should open in 2007), but two freelance **guides** (group LL20,000) are usually available at the archaeological sites. Individuals or pairs can negotiate a price. Look also for the very informative guidebook (LL10,000) written by a Lebanese archaeologist, Ali Khalil Badawi, and recently translated into English (and, in the future, French) on offer at the sites. A brochure about the sites is available at the tourist office in Beirut.

Banks with ATMs and the **post office** (☎ 740 565) are near the service-taxi stand in the town centre. Internet cafés include the following:

**Alfanet** (☎ 347 047; off Rue Abu Deeb; per hr LL1500; ☎ 10.30am-1am; ☎) Just north of the main roundabout.  
**Swiss.Net** (☎ 03-446 154; Rue Nabih Berri; per hr LL1000; ☎ 9am-midnight) Cheaper but a bit slower.

## Sights

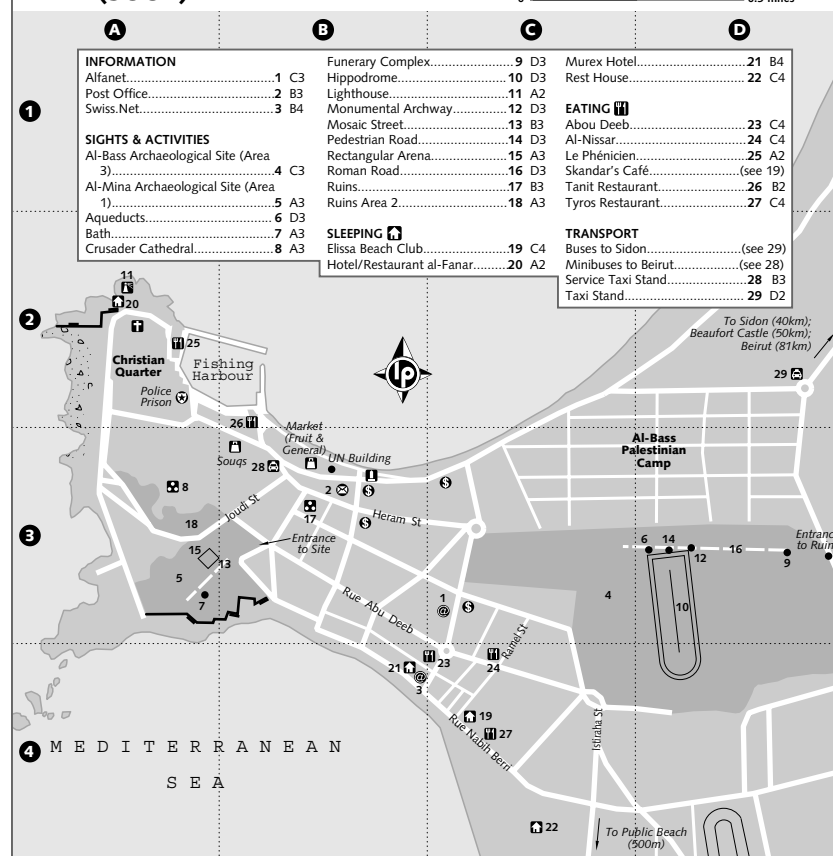
Tyre's excavated ruins are in three parts. The **Al-Mina Archaeological Site** (Area 1; ☎ 740 115; adult/student/child LL6000/3500/3500; ☎ 8.30am-30min before sunset) covers a large area leading down to the ancient Egyptian **submerged harbour** created in the 3rd millennium BC. It features a '**mosaic street**' paved with impressive geometrical Roman and Byzantine mosaics. On each side of the street are rows of large columns, made of green marble imported from Greece.

Look out also for the unusually large public **bath** from the 2nd or 3rd century AD and an unusual 4th-century **rectangular arena**, which served as a central meeting place and would have held up to 2000 spectators.

The second site, known as **Area 2**, is a five-minute walk to the north of the first site. On our last visit it was fenced off and closed to the public but it should reopen by mid-2007. You can see the ruins of a **crusader cathedral**, including massive granite columns, from the road.

The **Al-Bass Archaeological Site** (Area 3; ☎ 740 530; adult/student/child LL6000/3500/3500; ☎ 8.30am-30min before sunset) lies 2km from the Al-Mina site. Just past the entrance is a **funerary complex**, with hundreds of ornate stone and marble sarcophagi from the Roman period lining the road. Some are intricately carved with the names of the occupants or reliefs drawn from the *Iliad*. The Byzantines re-

## TYRE (SOUR)



used some, etching a quick cross and a new name on them. The well-preserved **Roman road** from the 1st century AD is made of big blocks of paving stone and lined in many parts with marble columns. The road stretches in a straight line for about 1.6km from the impressive 20m-high **monumental archway**, which probably dates from the time of Emperor Hadrian (2nd century AD). To the south of the Roman road and on a raised level is a **pedestrian road** which was originally roofed (arches remain). Further along, there's a U-shaped **hippodrome** built in the 2nd century AD for chariot racing. One of the largest of the Roman period, it could hold more than 20,000 spectators. At the far end of the road, there are the

remains of Roman **aqueducts**, parts of which are held up by arcades.

## Sleeping BUDGET

**Hotel/Restaurant al-Fanar** (☎ 741 111; www.alfanarresort.com; s/d with bathroom & breakfast without sea view US\$25/40, with sea view US\$35/50; ☎) With its feet almost in the water, the location is the principal plus here. Run by a charming family, it's also homely, peaceful and welcoming, with rooms that are simple but clean. There are two little terraces, a pub (beer LL3000) in the cellar and, outside, a tiny beach. The restaurant (open from noon to 10pm or later) overlooks the lighthouse and serves homemade food and fish dishes

(three-course fixed menus including six mezze and a fish dish for two/four people for US\$30/50).

### MIDRANGE

**Elissa Beach Club** (☎ /fax 347 551; Rue Nabih Berris with bathroom US\$35-50, d with bathroom US\$47-60, s/d with bathroom, balcony, minibar & TV US\$55/60; ♿) The rooms, decorated with matching psychedelic curtains and bedspreads, are clean and pretty comfortable albeit a little weary. Note that prices are negotiable (particularly for students with ISIC cards). Rooms 10 and 11 have direct sea views.

**Murex Hotel** (☎ 347 111; www.murexhotel.com; Rue Nabih Berris; s/d with bathroom, TV, balcony with sea view & breakfast US\$65/75; ♿) With a central location opposite the sea, the rooms and balconies aren't enormous, but they're pleasant and comfortable. Guests can swim from the steps below the hotel. There's a coffee shop with a terrace; a great place for breakfast.

### TOP END

**Rest House** (☎ 742 000; www.resthouse-tyr.com.lb; Istiraha St; r with bathroom, TV, terrace/balcony & breakfast US\$70, with sea view US\$90, ste US\$120-200 plus 10% tax; ♿ P ♿) Large, bright, airy, tranquil, and with excellent facilities like two private beaches, two pools, health club, restaurant, snack bar and beach bar, this is a luxury hotel at midrange prices. Nonguests can use the beach club and open-air pool (open mid-May to mid-October) for LL15,000/8000 per adult/child (four to 12 years old) at weekends and LL11,000/6000 during weekdays.

### Eating

**Le Phénicien** (☎ 740 564; Old Port; mezze LL3000-5500, fish LL40,000-70,000, beer LL3000; ☎ noon-11pm winter, noon-2am summer; ♿) Considered the best in town, its speciality is fish. The pleasant outdoor terrace overlooks the fishing harbour.

**Tanit Restaurant** (☎ 347 539; mezze LL4000, mains LL15,000, beer LL3000; ☎ 10am-midnight or later) The atmospheric Tanit is popular with locals for its bar as well as its food, which ranges from mezze to stir-fries and steaks. The restaurant lies around the corner from the fishing harbour.

**Tyros Restaurant** (☎ 741 027; Rue Nabih Berris; mezze LL4500, grills LL6500-7500, beer LL2500; ☎ 8am-midnight Mon-Fri, 8am-4am Sat & Sun; ♿) This enormous, tentlike place is popular with the locals for its great atmosphere, a huge mezze menu

and food at reasonable prices. On Saturdays there's classical Arabic music and singing from 10.30pm to 4am.

**Skandar's Café** (☎ 344 414; beer LL3000, mezze LL3000, grill LL10,000; ☎ 6am-2am; ♿) Below the Elissa Beach Club hotel, it serves a mix of Italian, Chinese and Lebanese food. If you fancy a dance, get here after 11pm on a Saturday, when there's a DJ in attendance.

There are a few fast-food places at the roundabout on Rue Abou Deeb, including the large and very popular Abou Deeb, which serves good felafels (LL1000) and shwarmas (LL1750). Close by is **Al-Nissar** (Ramel St; ☎ 9.30am-3am), which serves delicious fruit juice from LL2000 and ice cream from LL1000.

### Getting There & Away

For Beirut, minibuses (LL2000, after 8pm LL3000, one to 1½ hours, every 15 minutes depending on passenger demand from around 5am to 8om or 10om) go direct. The larger buses stop in Sidon (where it's necessary to change). The first bus from Tyre to Sidon (LL1000, 30 to 45 minutes) leaves daily from the roundabout that lies about 1km north of the entrance to the Al-Bass site, the first at 6am and the last at 8pm. Large minibuses also travel from Tyre to Beirut (LL2000 to LL3000, one to 1½ hours, 5am to 8pm depending on passenger demand).

A service taxi from Beirut (Cola) costs LL6000 and from Sidon LL3000. Minibuses leave from the Cola transport hub in Beirut and cost LL2000; from Sidon they're LL1000. The Sidon service-taxi and minibus stand is about 50m before the port on the northern coastal road.

### CHOUF MOUNTAINS جبال الشوف

These spectacular mountains, southeast of Beirut, are the southernmost part of the Mt Lebanon Range. In places they're wild and beautiful; in others they're dotted with small villages and terraced for easy cultivation.

### Information

**Reel** (☎ 511 195; Deir al-Qamar; per hr LL2000; ☎ 9am-2am) Provides Internet access.

### Sights

**BEITEDDINE PALACE (BEIT AD-DIN)** بيت الدين The main attraction in the Chouf is the **Beiteddine Palace** (Beit ad-Din; ☎ 05-500 077; adult/

student LL7500/5000; ☎ 9am-6pm Tue-Sun Apr-Oct, 9am-3.45pm Nov-May), 50km southeast of Beirut. Sitting majestically atop a hill and surrounded by terraced gardens and orchards, the palace was built by Emir Bashir over a period of 30 years, starting in 1788.

Meaning 'House of Faith', it was built over and around a Druze hermitage. During the French mandate it was used for local administration, but after 1930, was declared a historic monument. In 1943 it became the president's summer residence. The palace was extensively damaged during the Israeli invasion; it's estimated that up to 90% of the original contents were lost during this time. When fighting ended in 1984, the palace was taken over by the Druze militia, who ordered its restoration and declared it a 'Palace of the People'. In 1999 the Druze returned it to the government.

Although conceived by Italian architects, the palace incorporates all the traditional forms of Arab architecture. The gate opens on to a 60m-wide courtyard (Dar al-Baraniyyeh) walled on three sides only; the fourth side has great views out over valleys and hills.

A double staircase on the western side leads into a smaller central courtyard (Dar al-Wousta) with a central fountain. Beyond this courtyard is the third – and last – courtyard (Dar al-Harim). This was the centre of the family quarters, which also included a beautiful *hammam* and huge kitchens.

Underneath the Dar al-Wousta and Dar al-Harim are the former stables, now home to an outstanding collection of 5th- and 6th-century **Byzantine mosaics**. Found at Jiyeh, 30km south of Beirut, they were brought to Beiteddine in 1982. Don't miss them.

In the right-hand wing of the building, there's a **museum** exhibiting Roman and Byzantine artefacts, some guns, jewellery and old clothes.

There's no information available on site so it's worth picking up a free brochure at Beirut's tourist office beforehand. Guided tours are no longer available.

The palace hosts an annual music festival in July (see p456).

### DEIR AL-QAMAR دير القمر

This picturesque town, 5km downhill from Beiteddine, was the seat of Lebanon's emirates during the 17th and 18th centuries.

### MODERN MYTHS

Around 2½km from Deir al-Qamar, you'll pass a strange folly in the shape of a castle known as **Musée Moussa** (☎ 500 106; admission LL7500; ☎ 8am-5pm winter, 8am-6pm summer). Built in 1945 in response to a seemingly impossible condition of marriage requiring that 'every stone must be different', the unrequited lover built his castle yet never got his queen. Inside are montages showing traditional Lebanese life as well as an extensive collection of armoury.

The main square has some fine examples of Arab architecture, including the **Mosque of Fakhreddine** built in 1493; a **silk khan** built in 1595, now housing the French Cultural Centre; the Municipality housed in an 18th-century palace, which was once a tribunal; and **Fakhreddine's Palace**, built in 1620 and now an underwhelming **wax museum** (☎ 512 777; adult/student LL6000/4000; ☎ 8.30am-sunset) featuring Lebanon's historical personalities. Inside there's a **terrace café** (mezze/steak LL3000/12,000; ☎ 9am-midnight) and, in the basement in summer, a **disco** (admission free; ☎ 8pm-2am).

### Sleeping & Eating BEITEDDINE

There's nowhere to stay in Beiteddine village, and few places to eat.

**Mir Amin Palace** (☎ 05-501 315; www.miraminpalace.com; s/d/junior ste with bathroom, TV & breakfast US\$123/155/300 plus 10% tax; ♿ P ♿) On the hill overlooking both the palace and Beiteddine village is this five-star establishment, built by Emir Bashir for his eldest son. It's one of the most beautifully set, tranquil and luxurious hotels in Lebanon. In the low season (end of September to end of March) discounts of up to 40% are offered, making it a bargain. Internet access is available at LL5000 per hour. If you can't stay here, come for a drink (beer LL4400) or meal (three courses and open bar per adult/child US\$25/12.50, open Monday to Saturday). The pool (open from early May to the end of October) is open to nonguests (per adult/child LL15,500/10,100).

**Le Moulin** (☎ 05-501 050; mezze LL3250-7000, grill LL8000-12,000; ☎ 10am-11pm Sun-Fri, Sat 10am-5am summer only; ♿) Around 1.5km from Mir Amin Palace at the base of the hill, this renovated water mill has an attractive vaulted cellarlike

interior and outdoor terrace. On Saturday from 9pm to 3am there's live Arab music.

In the village, there are a couple of fast-food places, such as **Snack Vieux Moulin** (shish kebabs LL3000), open all year.

#### DEIR AL-QAMAR

There's nowhere to stay in the town itself.

**La Bastide** (☎ 505 320; bastideir@hotmail.com; d with bathroom & breakfast winter/summer US\$50/60) Follow the main road up the hill going east to Beiteddine and, perched just off the main road about 1.5km past the town, is this old house with lovely views from the terrace across to Beiteddine, and comfortable rooms (most with balconies). Drinks and snacks are available.

**Al-Midane** (☎ 03-763 768; ☒ 10am-10pm winter, 10am-2am or later in summer) With its large terrace right on the main square, this is a great place for a drink (beer LL3000) or a meal (mezze LL3000 to LL7500, grills LL12,000 to LL18,000). The food is a mix of Italian, French and Lebanese. You can also eat inside the stunning 600-year-old vault in the building behind.

**Snack Antoun** (sandwiches, pizzas & burgers LL3000; ☒ 8.30am-8.30pm) In the little arcade that runs off the road just above the mosque, this place serves snacks and good coffee in a tiny 'garden'. The charming and characterful old proprietor, Mr Antoun, is so pleased to have company (even non-Arab-speaking) he rarely allows customers to pay!

#### Getting There & Away

If you want to visit Beiteddine, go to the northwest junction of the big roundabout at Cola (look for the derelict building) and ask for the bus to Niha (LL1500, 1½ hours, every hour from 8.15am until early evening). On the bus, tell the driver you're going to Beiteddine; you'll be dropped off at a roundabout with a statue of two soldiers. Take the road opposite the Al-Dalwa restaurant and walk approximately 200m (don't take the first turn right). A bit further on and around a bend is the road leading to the Mir Amin Palace Hotel, and from there it's a short walk downhill to Beiteddine. If this all sounds too complicated, you can pay LL5000 for a service taxi direct from Cola to Beiteddine.

From Beiteddine, it's a 6km downhill walk to Deir al-Qamar. (A service taxi for this trip costs LL2500 to LL3000.)

Travellers wanting to go to Deir al-Qamar first can catch OCFTC bus 18 from Cola to Damour then take a service taxi from Damour (from LL500). A service taxi from Cola to Deir al-Qamar costs LL4000.

To get away, travellers can usually catch one of the buses or service taxis on their way to/from Beirut.

Note that service taxis on the Beirut-Deir al-Qamar route are infrequent, and rare after dark.

## BEKAA VALLEY

### وادي البقاع

The Bekaa Valley is famous for its magnificent archaeological sites at Baalbek and Aanjar as well as for being the homeland of Hezbollah (Party of God). Heavily cultivated over millennia (it was one of Rome's 'breadbaskets'), it has suffered from both deforestation and soil erosion and now is a relatively deprived area.

The valley's major transport hub is the town of Chtaura, situated on the Beirut-Damascus Hwy.

#### ZAHLÉ

زحلة

☎ 08 / pop 78,145

Zahlé is renowned within Lebanon for its open-air riverside restaurants and general holiday feel. Very busy during the hot weather, it's like a ghost town in winter when most restaurants close. In summer, it makes a nice lunch stop en route from Beirut to Baalbek and is a good base for exploring the valley. Most travellers choose to stay either in Baalbek or in Aanjar.

#### Information

Most of the town's banks, ATMs and exchange bureaux are on Rue Brazil, the main street. No banks change travellers cheques.

**Dataland Internet** (☎ 891 009; Rue Brazil; per hr LL2000; ☒ 11am-11pm Mon-Sat, noon-2pm & 5-11pm Sun) Opposite the dock tower. Offers the fastest connections in town.

**Post office** (☎ 822 127; Rue Brazil) About 750m from highway turn-off, on the right.

**Tourist Information Office** (☎ 802 566; 3rd fl Chamber of Commerce Bldg; ☒ 8.30am-1.30pm Mon-Sat) Just off Rue Brazil, signposted about 750m from the highway turn-off.

#### Sleeping & Eating

**Hotel Monte Alberto** (☎ 810 912; www.montealberto.com; s/d with bathroom, TV, balcony & breakfast US\$50/60; ☒) Located high above town, the hotel commands amazing views. Its rooms are simple but spotless and comfortable. There's a large restaurant (with a rotating section in the corner) and a lovely summer terrace landscaped into the mountainside.

**Hotel Akl** (☎ 820 701; Rue Brazil; s/d US\$15/20, s/d with bathroom US\$25/33) Though the character-filled hotel is dilapidated, rooms are clean with balconies and loads of light. Rear rooms overlook the river. Management is friendly.

**Grand Hotel Kadri** (☎ 813 920; www.grandhotelkadri.com; Rue Brazil; s/d with bathroom, TV & breakfast US\$105/125 plus 10% tax; ☒ P) Facilities include a health club, tennis court, nightclub and two restaurants but, like all hotels on the strip, it can be noisy. The swimming pool (mid-June to mid-September) is open to nonguests for US\$10/5 per adult/child up to 12 years old.

**Arabi Hotel** (☎ 821 214; Rue Bardouni; sarabi@inco.com.lb; d/ste with bathroom, TV, balcony & breakfast Apr-Oct US\$66/132; ☒ closed Nov-Mar; ☒) Located on the Bardouni river at the heart of the outdoor eating scene, its rooms are quite noisy and rather overpriced. Its terrace restaurant (meals US\$20 to US\$40) is famous in Zahlé.

Next door to the Arabi Hotel is the new restaurant **Mazaj** (☎ 800 800; mains LL9000-16,000; ☒ noon-midnight Sun & Mon, noon-6am Sat; ☒) With two separate menus, one Lebanese and the other international, it's a good place for bickering couples unable to agree! We recommend the mezze. On Saturday from around 10.30pm to 6am, it transforms into a club with live music.

#### Getting There & Away

Only minibuses run from Beirut to Zahlé (LL3000, around one hour, approximately every 15 minutes from 4am to 1am) leaving from the southwest side of the roundabout at the Cola transport hub. Service taxis (LL6000) leave from the same spot. Both will drop you off at the highway turn-off, which is over 1km from the centre of town (or for LL1000 extra you can ask the service taxi to drop you off at the centre).

To get to Baalbek from Zahlé by government bus, take OCFTC bus 4 or 5 (LL500, 30 minutes) from the bus stop just below the car park midway along Rue Brazil. A

#### VISIT TO THE VINEYARD

A few kilometres south of Zahlé lies one of Lebanon's most prestigious vineyards, **Château Ksara** (☎ 813 495; Ksara; admission free; ☒ 9am-7pm, 9am-4pm Mon-Sat winter). Lebanon's oldest winery was founded by the Jesuits in 1857. Underground, a network of more than 2km of tunnels was discovered, dating from Roman times. These natural 'cellars' made perfect storage. A visit includes a 10-minute film about the winery and a tasting of the Château's red, white and rosé wines, followed by a short tour (in English and French) of the cellars.

service taxi to Baalbek will cost LL2000 and take around 30 minutes; you'll find one at the main taxi stand on a square off Rue Brazil. Minibuses run regularly to Baalbek (LL2000, 30 minutes) from around 6am to 11pm from the bus stop; they also run regularly during the same hours to Beirut (LL3000 to LL4000, about one hour) and to Chtaura (LL1000) for Anjar.

#### BAALBEK

بعلبك

☎ 08 / pop 30,916

Known as the 'Sun City' of the ancient world, Baalbek is the most impressive ancient site in Lebanon and arguably the most impressive Roman site in the Middle East. Its temples, built on an extravagant scale that outshone anything in Rome, enjoyed a reputation as one of the wonders of the world. Today, the World Heritage-listed site is Lebanon's number one tourist attraction.

Each July, Lebanon's most famous arts festival is held here (see p456).

#### History

The town of Baalbek, 86km northeast of Beirut, was originally named after the Phoenician god Baal. The Greeks later called it Heliopolis (City of the Sun), and the Romans made it a major worship site for their god Jupiter.

#### Orientation & Information

The ruins lie just off the main Beirut road, with the Palmyra opposite. The banks, various eateries and Al-Shams Hotel also lie on Rue Abdel Halim Hajjar. Intersecting with the latter is Ras al-Ain Blvd, where Pension

Shouman, the service-taxi office and riverside restaurants are found.

**Jamal Bank** (☎ 370 563; Rue Abdel Halim Hajjar; ☎ 8.30am-2pm Mon-Thu, 8.30-12.30 Fri, 8.30-noon Sat) Has an ATM and changes travellers cheques.

**Network Center** (☎ 370 192; off Rue Abdel Halim Hajjar; per hr LL1000; ☎ 10am-9pm) The only place in town offering Internet access.

## Sights

A good time to visit the site of the **ruins** (☎ 370 645; adult LL12,000; ☎ 8.30am-30min before sunset) is early morning or – even better – late in the afternoon, outside the tour bus time when it's also cooler. Allow a few hours to wander through the museum and the ruins and consider taking food and drink with you;

none is available at the site. Guides speaking English, French, Italian, Spanish or German can be organised at the ticket office and cost US\$17 for one to 10 people and US\$20 for a group of 11 to 20, for one hour.

In the car park near the ticket office there is a **museum** (admission included with site ticket; same opening hours) housed in a large vaulted tunnel. As well as displaying some beautiful artefacts, there are well-designed, interesting and informative illustrated panels chronicling Baalbek's history through a series of themes. It's well worth a visit.

From the ticket office, you'll enter the ruins via a **forecourt** and monumental staircase leading up to the **propylaeum**. Next to this is the **hexagonal court**, where a raised threshold

separates the propylaea from the sacred enclosure. Beyond this is the **Great Court** (Sacrificial Courtyard), which leads to the remains of the **Temple of Jupiter**, completed around AD 60. Its remaining six columns are a massive and spectacular reminder of the size and majesty of the original structure.

Adjacent to the Temple of Jupiter is the **Temple of Bacchus**, known in Roman times as the 'small temple'. This was, in fact, dedicated to Venus/Astarte rather than to Bacchus. Completed around AD 150, it's amazingly well preserved and is quite ornate. In the southeastern corner of the temple stands the attractive 15th-century **Mamluk tower**. The **museum** it houses was closed when last visited. Behind the temple on its western flank are the remains of the **Mamluk fortifications** and **mosque**.

When you leave the site, check out the exquisite **Temple of Venus** near the entrance. It's closed to visitors but you can have a good look by wandering around the perimeter fence.

## Sleeping

**Palmyra Hotel** (☎ 376 011; fax 370 305; Rue Abdel Halim Hajjar; s/d/tr with bathroom US\$38/53/63) A relic itself, the Palmyra has seen guests as diverse as Jean Cocteau and the shah of Iran grace its portals. Rooms are simple but comfortable though the bathrooms are showing their age. Ask for a room with views over the ruins; best are Nos 25, 27 and 28. A few doors down in a lovely old building is the Palmyra's annexe (double room in low/high season US\$75/100) furnished like a beautiful private home with very comfortable rooms. Breakfast costs US\$5.

**Hotel Jupiter** (☎ 376 71; Rue Abdel Halim Hajjar; s with/without shower US\$15/10, d with shower US\$20) Entered via an arcade northeast of the Palmyra Hotel, it has large, light but basic rooms with fans off a central courtyard. There's also a restaurant. Hani, the helpful (and talkative) owner, is a mine of local knowledge.

**Hotel Shouman** (☎ 03-796 077; Ras al-Ain Blvd; dm/s/d LL10,000/20,000/25,000) Close to the ruins, three of the rooms here enjoy great views. There are comfortable beds and a simple but clean shared bathroom. Enter via a stone staircase; the pension is on the 1st floor.

**Al-Shams Hotel** (☎ 373 284; Rue Abdel Halim Hajjar; dm/d US\$6/7) Three rooms have balconies (two with views over the ruins), there's free

kitchen access and 24-hour hot water, but rooms (with shared bathroom) are basic and only moderately clean. Breakfast is US\$3.

## Eating

**Shahrazad** (Shearazade; ☎ 371 851; Souq, off Rue Abdel Halim Hajjar; chicken shawarma sandwich/kebab LL3000/7000; ☎ 8am-midnight) Frequented by locals, this place is best known for the fabulous views of the ruins from its large windows. Food is simple but tasty and good value. If you haven't yet done justice to Lebanese mezze, here's your chance: there's a mezze menu (a selection of 13) for US\$8.

**Riviera Restaurant** (☎ 370 296; Ras al-Ain Blvd; mezze LL2000; ☎ 8am-midnight) In summer, this restaurant en route to the spring serves basic but tasty food in its outdoor eating area.

There are quite a few cheap eateries on Rue Abdel Halim Hajjar; the best is the very popular **Al Khayam Restaurant** (☎ 10am-midnight) at the beginning of the street, which serves delicious felafels (LL750) and shawarma (LL1500) and has a few tables.

Further up Rue Abdel Halim Hajjar are several shops selling delicious sweets and meat pastries.

## Getting There & Away

The only public transport options from Beirut to Baalbek are minibuses and service taxis. From the Cola transport hub, a minibus to Baalbek costs LL5000 (1½ hours); a service taxi costs LL7000. The bus stop in Baalbek is opposite the Palmyra Hotel and the service-taxi office is in the souq area.

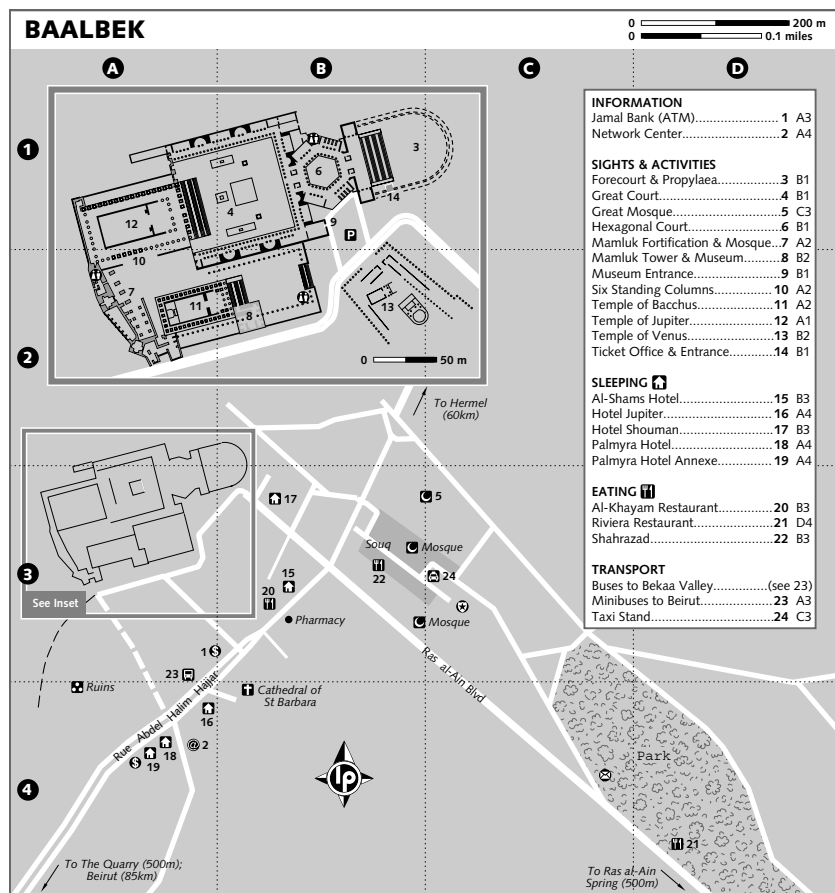
For information about how to get to Baalbek from Zahlé, see p451. For information about how to get to Baalbek from Tripoli or Bcharré, see p441.

Minibuses from Baalbek go direct to Beirut (LL5000, 1½ hours, 24 hours a day subject to demand); to Damascus (LL7500, two hours) go direct mornings only (from 8am to noon); in the afternoon change at Chtaura (LL3000, 20 to 30 minutes, 24 hours). If you can't find a minibus to Beirut, you can take a bus to Chtaura (LL2000), then a service taxi from there (US\$4 per person).

## AANJAR

☎ 08 / pop 3240

The best-preserved Islamic archaeological site in Lebanon, **Aanjar** (☎ 621 780; admission LL6000; ☎ 8am-sunset), is the only significant



Umayyad site in Lebanon. It was discovered by archaeologists as recently as the 1940s.

The Umayyads ruled briefly but energetically from AD 660 to 750 and Aanjar is thought to have been built by the sixth Umayyad caliph, Walid I (r AD 705–715). It was an important inland commercial centre, located on intersecting trade routes. The walled and fortified city was built along symmetrical Roman lines; the layout is in four equal quarters, separated by two 20m-wide avenues, the *cardo maximus* and the *decumanus maximus*. There is a **tetrapylon**, a four-column structure, where the two streets intersect; it's interesting due to its alternating layers of large blocks and narrow bricks, a typically Byzantine effect.

In the city's heyday, its main streets were flanked by palaces, baths, mosques, shops (600 have been uncovered) and dwellings. The **remains** of these can be seen today. Perhaps the most impressive are those of the **great palace**, one wall and several arcades of which have been reconstructed.

Local guides are usually available (around US\$6/10 for couples/groups) at the site, and very useful free tourism brochures (with map) are distributed with tickets.

If you need to overnight here, you can stay at the very comfortable **Challalat** (Mona Lisa; ☎ /fax 620 753; s/d/ste with bathroom, TV & balcony LL60,000/90,000/120,000; 🍴) a new hotel and the only one in town at the time of writing. It also has a restaurant.

To eat, head for the excellent and extremely popular **Shams Restaurant** (☎ 620 567; Beirut-Damascus Hwy; mezze LL2500, grill LL6000; 🕒 10am-midnight), serving superb fresh fish and seafood, among other dishes, at excellent prices. It's around 200m down from the ruins on the main road and also has a lovely terrace.

Aanjar is 21km from Chtaura on the Beirut-Damascus Hwy. You can catch a service taxi (LL1000) or bus 12 (LL500) from Chtaura, which will drop you at the turn-off with the 'Welcome to Aanjar' sign, leaving you with a 2km walk. Take the road on the left-hand side, walk for approximately 10 minutes and turn left at the road opposite the Shams restaurant. Follow that road until you reach the entrance to the ruins. Alternatively, hire a taxi to take you all the way to the site from Chtaura, have the cab wait an hour while you admire the site, then return. This costs around LL15,000. For Beirut, go to Chtaura first.

From Beirut a bus leaves at 2pm (LL2000 to LL3000, 1½ hours, Monday to Saturday). From Aanjar, there's a bus daily at 6am.

## LEBANON DIRECTORY

### ACCOMMODATION

Accommodation in Lebanon is not the bargain it is elsewhere in the Middle East. Budget-category dorm beds/singles start at around US\$6/10, doubles around US\$12 to US\$15; midrange at US\$35/45 for singles/doubles. Top-end hotels start at US\$95/125 for singles/doubles. Hotels quote room rates in both Lebanese lira and US dollars, but you can often pay in either.

Note that during the low season (December to March) and excluding holidays, discounts of up to 40% or 50% are often available; always ask. During the high season (May to September), book well in advance.

### ACTIVITIES

Lebanon offers a good range of activities. Water sports, including water-skiing, boating and jet-skiing (in Beirut and Jounieh among other places) and diving (including Beirut) are all possible. Diving is a rapidly growing activity with some interesting wrecks to ex-

plore. A recommended website to check out for diving in Lebanon is that of the **Atlantis Diving College** (www.atlantisdivingcollege.com).

Lebanon is also one of the few countries in the Middle East to offer skiing. The main resorts include **Faraya Mzaar** (☎ 09-341 034/5), the **Cedars** (☎ 06-671 073/2), **Faqra** (☎ 01-257 220) and **Lalouq** (☎ 01-200 019). See p442 for more information on skiing at the Cedars.

Biking is another growing sport. **Cyclo Sport** (Map pp418-19; ☎ 446 792; cyclospor@cyberia.net.lb; Rue Gouraud, Gemmayze, Beirut; 🕒 9am-11pm) can suggest itineraries and routes and also hires out bikes for LL4000/15,000/30,000 per hour/day/month. You can also buy a bike (from LL150,000 to LL2,500,000) and resell it here when you leave.

Caving is possible in various places including the Jeita Grotto (p432); Paragliding is practised at some of the ski resorts, and trekking possibilities are almost limitless in Lebanon, including in the Qadisha Valley near the Cedars.

### BOOKS

As well as this book, Lonely Planet publishes a comprehensive guide, *Syria & Lebanon*.

For ancient history, *The Phoenicians* by Donald Harden is comprehensive and authoritative. For prewar travel accounts, try *The Hills of Adonis* by Colin Thubron.

For the civil war *The Formation of Modern Lebanon* by Meir Zamir, and *Pity the Nation: Lebanon at War* by Robert Fisk are both recommended.

New publications include *Transit Beirut – New Writing & Images* (edited by Malu Halasa and Roseanne Saad Khalaf), which includes short stories by local authors; *Bliss Street* by Kris Kenway, a breathless account of a love affair between a local girl and a mobile-phone salesman detained in Lebanon by accident; and *Teta, Mother & Me – An Arab Woman's Memoir* by Jean Said Makdisi (the sister of Edward Said), which tells the stories of three generations of women. Much of it is set in Beirut.

For those planning a longer sojourn in Beirut, the new *At Home in Beirut. A Practical Guide to Living in the Lebanese Capital* (LL25,000) by Charlotte Hamaoui and Sylvia Palamoudian is comprehensive and useful. Similar in vein is *Family Fun in Lebanon* (LL18,000) by the same authors.

All these books are available in Beirut.

### BUSINESS HOURS

Unlike the rest of the Middle East, Lebanon's 'weekend' (when government offices and schools close) is Sunday, not Friday. During religious holidays (such as Ramadan) and the summer, hours may vary. The following is a general guide only:

**Banks** Open 8.30am to 2pm Monday to Friday (a few open to 4pm) and Saturday morning.

**Government offices** Open 8am to 2pm from Monday to Saturday, except Friday when they open 8am to 11am. Some offices close at noon on Saturday.

**Museums and monuments** Most close on Monday.

**Private offices** Open from 9am/10am to 2pm and 4pm to 8pm/9pm Monday to Friday and some on Saturday morning too.

**Restaurants** Between noon and midnight daily. Some close on Sunday. Cafés open from around 7am (or earlier) to around 7pm.

**Shops** Open from 9am/10am to 6pm/7pm from Monday to Friday and Saturday morning. Some also open for a few hours on Sunday.

### COURSES

Many students come to Beirut to study Arabic. The following centres provide courses for foreigners:

**American Language Center** (Map p422; ☎ 366-002; www.a/c.edu.lb; 1st fl, Choueiry Bldg, Rue Bliss, Beirut; 25 hr per week for 1 month; US\$250; 🕒 9am-6pm Mon-Sat)

**American University of Beirut** (Map p422; ☎ 01-374 444; www.aub.edu.lb/cames)

For details about student visas see p458, and for hotels that offer long-term accommodation see p423.

### DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

The main danger in Lebanon is land mines. UN experts estimate that more than 100,000 remain. Don't wander off tracks. Driving carries its own risk (see p461).

### EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

#### Lebanese Embassies & Consulates

Following are the Lebanese embassies and consulates in major cities around the world. Irish and New Zealand nationals should apply to the UK consulate for visas. For addresses of Lebanese embassies in neighbouring Middle Eastern countries, see the relevant country chapter. Note: there is no Lebanese embassy in either Israel or Syria.

**Australia** Canberra (☎ 02-6295 7378; fax 6239 7024; 27 Endeavour St, Red Hill, Canberra, ACT 2603); Melbourne (☎ 03-9529 4588; toun@alphalink.com.au;

### PRACTICALITIES

- The *Daily Star* provides good coverage of local news in English, the daily *L'Orient Le Jour* in French. The monthly magazine, the *Guide*, is useful for upcoming events, openings and exhibitions in Beirut. You can usually find it in Beirut's Virgin Megastore.
- The BBC World Service can be received on both 1323kHz and 72kHz; popular locally are Radio One, Light FM and Nostalgie. The major local TV channels are the government-run broadcaster Tele-Liban, and five commercial channels: New TV, MTV, Future TV, NBN and LBC.
- European two-round-pin plugs are needed to connect to Lebanon's electricity supply (220VAC, 50Hz).
- Lebanon uses the metric system for weights and measures.



117 Wellington St, Windsor, Victoria 3181); Sydney (☎ 02-9361 5449; Level 5, 70 William St, Kings Cross, Sydney, NSW 2010) The Melbourne and Sydney branches only issue visas to Victorian and NSW residents, respectively.

**Canada** Montreal (☎ 514-276 2638, consulban@qc.aira.com; 40 Chemin Côte Ste Catherine, H2V-2A2-PQ, Montreal 153); Ottawa (☎ 613-236 5825; fax 613-232 1609; 640 Lyon St, K1S 3Z5 Ottawa, Ontario)

**Egypt** (☎ 02-361 0623; fax 361 0463; Sharia Ahmad Nasim, Giza, Cairo)

**France** (☎ 01 40 67 75 75; fax 01 40 67 16 42; 3 Rue Coperic, 75016 Paris)

**Germany** (☎ 4930-474 98 60; fax 474 986 66; Berlinerstrasse 126-127, 13187 Berlin)

**Jordan** (☎ 5929111; fax 5922333; Sharia Mohammed Ali Bdeir, Abdoun, Amman)

**Netherlands** (☎ 0703-65 89 06; fax 0703-62 0779; Frederic Straat 2, 2514 LK The Hague)

**UK** (☎ 020-7229 7265; fax 020-7243 1699; 21 Palace Gardens Mews, London W8 4RA)

**USA** Los Angeles (☎ 213-467 1253; fax 213-467 2935; Ste 510, 7060 Hollywood Blvd, Los Angeles, CA 90028); New York (☎ 212-744 7905; lebcorny@aol.com; 9 East 76th St, New York, NY 10021); Washington (☎ 202-939 6300; emblebanon@aol.com; 2560 28th St, Washington, DC 20008)

## Embassies in Lebanon

Opening hours are generally from 8am or 9am to 12.30pm or 1pm Monday to Friday. Some, such as the Jordanian embassy, are also closed on Friday. Nationals of Ireland and New Zealand should contact the UK embassy. Note: there is no Syrian or Israeli embassy in Lebanon; however, most nationalities will have no problem obtaining a Syrian visa on the Syrian border (see p653).

**Australia** (Map pp418-19; ☎ 01-374 701; austemle@cyberia.net.lb; Serail Hill, Downtown, Beirut)

**Canada** (☎ 04-521 163; beirut@dfait-maeci.gc.ca; 1st fl, Coolrite Bldg, Autostrade, Jal ad-Dib) Around 10km outside Beirut.

**Egypt** (Map pp418-19; ☎ 01-862 932; fax 01-863 751; Rue Thomas Edison, off Rue Verdun, Ramlet al-Bayda)

**France** (Map pp418-19; ☎ 01-616 730; ambafrance@cyberia.net.lb; Rue de Damas) Near the National Museum.

**Germany** (☎ 04-914 444; germanemb@germanembassy.org.lb; Mtaileb, Rabieh) About 20km outside Beirut.

**Italy** (Map pp418-19; ☎ 01-340 225; Place d'Etoile, Downtown)

**Jordan** (☎ 05-922 500; fax 922 502; Rue Elias Helou, Baabda) Around 7km outside Beirut.

**Netherlands** (Map pp418-19; ☎ 01-204 663; nlgovbei@sodetel.net.lb; 9th fl, ABM Amro Bldg, Ave Charles Malek, Achrafiyeh)

**UK** (Map pp418-19; ☎ 01-990 400; Serail Hill, Downtown, Beirut)

**US** (☎ 04-417 774; fax 407 112; Awkar, facing the Municipality, PO Box 70-840 Antelias) About 25km outside Beirut.

## FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Many towns and villages host their own small festivals which range from local fairs to full-on folkloric performances. The five major arts festivals are listed here.

### February

**Al-Bustan Festival** (www.albustanfestival.com) An annual festival held for five weeks in Beit Mary (North of Beirut). Daily events feature opera, chamber music and orchestral concerts.

### July & August

**Baalbek Festival** (www.baalbeck.org.lb) Lebanon's most famous arts festival; held at the Roman ruins. Features opera, jazz, poetry and pop, and theatre productions.

**Beiteddine Festival** (www.beiteddine.org.lb) Music, dance and theatre held in the beautiful courtyard of the Beiteddine Palace.

**Byblos International Festival** (www.byblosfestival.org) Held in August among the ruins of Byblos's ancient harbour – includes pop, classic, opera and world music.

### October

**Beirut International Marathon** (www.beirutmarathon.org) Also includes wheelchair events.

**Mid East Film Festival Beirut** (www.beirutfilmfoundation.org) High-profile film festival with a growing reputation as the best in the Middle East.

## GAY & LESBIAN TRAVELLERS

There's a thriving (if clandestine) gay scene in Beirut, which is regarded as the most liberal capital in the Middle East. Nevertheless, homosexuality is illegal under Lebanese law; gay travellers should be discreet, particularly in predominantly Muslim areas. For further information, check out: www.gaymiddleeast.com, www.travelandtranscendence.com and www.bintelnas.org.

## HOLIDAYS

**New Year's Day** 1 January

**Feast of Mar Maroun** 9 February – feast of the patron saint of the Maronites

**Easter** March/April – Good Friday to Easter Monday inclusive

**Qana Day** 18 April – commemorates the massacre at the UN base at Qana

**Labour Day** 1 May

**Martyrs' Day** 6 May

**Day of Resistance and Liberation** 25 May – celebrates the Israeli withdrawal from South Lebanon in 2000

**Assumption** 15 August

**All Saints Day** 1 November

**Independence Day** 22 November

**Christmas Day** 25 December

Also observed are the Muslim holidays (p647) of Eid al-Fitr, Eid al-Adha, Prophet's Birthday, Islamic New Year and Ashura.

## MONEY

Lebanon's currency is the Lebanese lira (LL) (known locally as the Lebanese pound). There are a few coins (piastres) of LL50, 100 and (more commonly) 250 and 500 pieces still in circulation, as well as notes of 50, 100, 250, 500, 1000, 5000, 10,000, 20,000, 50,000 and 100,000.

US dollars are accepted everywhere and are as good as interchangeable with the Lebanese lira. Often, smaller amounts are quoted in Lebanese lira, and larger amounts (with fewer 0s!) are quoted in US dollars (the etiquette also followed in this chapter). Many places give change in either currency.

Country	Unit	Lebanese lira (LL)
Australia	A\$1	1101
Canada	C\$1	1268
euro zone	€1	1774
Israel & the Palestinian Territories	NIS1	320
Japan	¥100	1283
New Zealand	NZ\$1	1027
Syria	£1	29
UK	UK£1	2620
USA	US\$1	1502

US dollars are widely accepted, but travellers cheques (in any currency) are not. The best way to access cash is through the ATMs found in all larger towns. ATMs accept credit cards or co-branded home banking cards for Citrus, Diners Club, Maestro, MasterCard, Visa and Visa-Electron and dispense cash in both Lebanese lira and US dollars.

Budget hotels and restaurants do not accept credit cards. Tipping is widely expected in Lebanon particularly in the better hotels and restaurants and by drivers of hired cars or guides; around 10% is a good bench-

mark. There is no black market in Lebanon, but there are plenty of moneychangers that sometime offer better rates than the banks. Check commission, which can range from 3% to 5%, and shop around.

## PHOTOGRAPHY

Film (from around LL6500) and video tapes are widely available in Lebanon. Colour transparency film (from around LL15,000) is available in Beirut and some of the larger towns (though Fujichrome Velvia as well as black-and-white transparencies and film are harder to find). It costs around LL4500/16,000 to process negative/transparency film.

Memory cards can be bought in Beirut, but prices are on the high side. A few places in Beirut are beginning to burn CDs of digital photos (see p430). In Beirut, various shops stock the spare parts of (and can repair) the mainstream camera brands, including Nikon, Canon, Olympus and Pentax.

## TELEPHONE

### Mobile Phones

Mobile-phone coverage extends throughout most of the country (bar a few remote, mountainous areas). Obtaining a mobile in Lebanon costs from US\$250, but some car-hire agencies hire them out for around US\$6 per day, plus a deposit and call charges (see Hire, p461).

### Phone Codes

The country code for Lebanon is ☎ 961, followed by the local area code (minus the zero), then the subscriber number. Local area codes are given at the start of each city or town section in this chapter. The area code when dialling a mobile phone is ☎ 03. The international access code (to call abroad from Lebanon) is ☎ 00.

### Phonecards

Telephone cards have now rendered the old government *centrales* or telecom centres redundant. Cards come in two types: the Telecard for LL10,000 or LL30,000, which you can only use in card-operated public phone booths, or the prepaid Kalam card for LL15,000 or LL45,000, which you can use to call from any phone, public or private (by employing a code). Cards can be bought in any *centrale* or anywhere the 'OGERO' sign is displayed. Calls to Australia and New

Zealand cost LL1400, to Ireland LL1500, and to France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Spain and the US LL1100. Rates are a couple of hundred lira cheaper off-peak (10pm to 7am).

## VISAS

People of all nationalities require a visa for Lebanon bar Gulf countries (but not Yemen). Nationals of Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Gulf Cooperative Council (GCC) countries, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Monaco, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the UK and the USA can get a tourist or business visa on arrival at Beirut International Airport, or at the border with Syria.

Lebanon denies entry to travellers with evidence of a visit to Israel in their passport (see p353). Look out for the question 'Have you ever visited Israel or Occupied Palestine?' on some visa application forms – a 'yes' will put paid to your application.

Note that visa rules and regulations can – and do – change in Lebanon; always check the latest information with your embassy/consulate.

At the airport, visa stamps are sold at a window on the right (open 24 hours), just before passport control. Visas for 48-hour transit and one-month visas are issued free of charge; a three-month visa costs US\$34. Note that the 'three-month' visa requires you to extend this before the end of your first month (see p420). Visas (including multiple-entry visas, which are useful if you're planning to go in and out of Lebanon from Syria) can also be obtained in advance at any Lebanese embassy or consulate. For addresses of Lebanese embassies in the Middle East see the relevant country chapters.

If you're coming by road (bus or private transport), see the information under Border Crossings, p660.

Those wishing to study in Lebanon can apply for a student one-year residence visa (LL250,000) with a letter from the school, two passport photos and two copies of your passport details.

For details of visas for other Middle Eastern countries, see p653.

## WOMEN TRAVELLERS

Compared to many parts of the Middle East, Lebanon seems very liberal and laid-back; women should have few problems with either undue attention or safety. Revealing clothes are common in Beirut and Jounieh, but outside the main centres long-sleeved, loose clothing is still preferable. This is particularly the case in the south and the Bekaa Valley, which is a predominantly Shiite area. For further advice for female travellers see p654.

## TRANSPORT IN LEBANON

### GETTING THERE & AWAY

You can travel to Lebanon by air, by land from Syria and, from May to October, by boat from Limassol in Cyprus.

### Entering Lebanon

Entering the country at the airport or border crossings is neither complicated nor bureaucratic. All that's required is a valid passport and a visa. You can't enter Lebanon if there is evidence in your passport of a visit to Israel.

### Passport

Make sure you carry your passport at all times. Many Lebanese checkpoints require them.

### Air

**Beirut international airport** (BEY; ☎ 01-628 000; www.beirutairport.gov.lb) is Lebanon's only airport. The national carrier, **Middle East Airlines** (MEA; Map p422; in Beirut ☎ 01-622 225; www.mea.com.lb), has an extensive network including flying from Beirut to and from Australia, Europe and the Middle East. The airline has a pretty good safety record.

Several airlines have their offices in the Gefinor Center in Ras Beirut including MEA.

### DEPARTURE TAX

Airline passengers departing from Beirut International Airport must pay a steep US\$37/50 for economy/business class. It's usually included in the ticket price, but check.

The following international airlines service Beirut:

**Air France** (airline code AF; in Beirut ☎ 01-200 700; www.airfrance.com) Hub: Charles de Gaulle Airport, Paris.

**British Airways** (airline code BA; in Beirut ☎ 01-747 777; www.britishairways.com) Hub: Heathrow Airport, London.

**Cyprus Airways** (airline code CY; in Beirut ☎ 01-200 886; www.cypsrairways.com) Hub: Larnaca Airport, Larnaca.

**EgyptAir** (airline code MS; in Beirut ☎ 01-980 165; www.egyptair.com.eg) Hub: Cairo International Airport, Cairo.

**Emirates** (airline code EK; in Beirut ☎ 01-739 042; www.emirates.com) Hub: Dubai Airport, Dubai.

**Gulf Air** (airline code GF; in Beirut ☎ 01-323 332; www.gulfairco.com) Hub: Bahrain Airport, Bahrain.

**Lufthansa** (airline code LH; in Beirut ☎ 01-347 006; www.lufthansa.com) Hub: Frankfurt Airport, Frankfurt.

**Malaysia Airlines** (airline code MH; in Beirut ☎ 01-741 344; www.mas.com.my) Hub: Sepang International, Kuala Lumpur.

**Middle East Airlines** (airline code ME; Map p422; in Beirut ☎ 01-737 000; www.mea.com.lb) Hub: Beirut International Airport, Beirut.

**Royal Jordanian Airline** (airline code RJ; in Beirut ☎ 01-379 990; www.rja.com.jo) Hub: Queen Alia Airport, Amman.

**Syrian Arab Airlines** (airline code RB; in Beirut ☎ 01-375 632; www.syrian-airlines.com) Hub: Damascus Airport, Damascus.

**Turkish Airlines** (airline code TK; in Beirut ☎ 01-741 391; www.turkishairlines.com) Hub: Ataturk Airport, Istanbul.

Airline tickets bought in Lebanon are expensive. Examples of return flights (not including tax) to neighbouring countries: Amman (US\$210), Cairo (US\$246), Istanbul (US\$185) and Larnaca in Cyprus (US\$95). MEA does not fly currently to Baghdad (Iraq), Damascus (Syria), Tehran (Iran) and Tripoli (Libya).

### Land

#### BORDER CROSSINGS

The only way into Lebanon by land is through Syria; the border with Israel is closed and will be for the foreseeable future. You can't get a visa for Syria in Lebanon, but you can at the border crossings (see Visas at the Border, p553 for details). There is no departure tax when leaving by land.

### Syria

There are four places in Lebanon where you can cross the border with Syria: at Masnaa (for Damascus), Abboudiye (for Aleppo), Al-Qaa (at the northern end of the Bekaa Valley) and Aarida (on the coastal road from

Tripoli to Lattakia) which are open all year. Visas can be obtained at these Lebanese/Syrian border crossings.

Crossing the borders is pretty quick and painless; you'll need to fill out an entry and exit form for each country (taking about 10 minutes), hand over your yellow entry card (which you received on entering the country) and provide details of your accommodation in either country. Ensure you have a reservation at a hotel with the name and number at hand; they may well check. Otherwise you may be charged business visa rates.

If coming from Syria to Lebanon you deal with **Lebanese border immigration** (☎ 08-620 016/620 017; 1-month tourist/2-day business visa free, 15-day/1-month business visa LL25,000/50,000; ☎ 24hr). Note that payment can only be made in Lebanese pounds, and that immigration allows tourists to spend a maximum of four days in Syria on a single-entry visa (as opposed to multiple entry).

Crossing from Lebanon to Syria, **Syrian border immigration** (☎ 011-391 4029/391 4208; ☎ 24hr) issues a two-week tourist visa (but up to one month is permitted) for citizens of Australia and New Zealand (US\$30), Ireland (US\$50), France, Italy, Spain and the Netherlands (US\$52); Germany (US\$28); and the US (US\$16).

### To/From Turkey

The Turkish embassy in Beirut will only issue visas to Lebanese nationals. However, Western nationals wanting to travel from Lebanon to Turkey will have no trouble obtaining a Turkish visa at the Syrian-Turkish border (or at Turkey's international airports). Depending on your nationality, they cost US\$20 to US\$45.

### BUS & SERVICE TAXI

Buses to Syria from Beirut leave from the **Charles Helou bus station** (Map pp418-19). **Beirut Pullman Terminal office** (Map pp418-19; ☎ 573 322; ☎ 24hr) sells tickets. The buses aren't luxurious, but they're clean and have allocated (numbered) seats. Reservations are not necessary in winter, but in summer they're wise; book at least one day in advance.

For Syria, buses go to Damascus (LL7500, three to four hours, every hour from 6am to 8pm daily), Aleppo (Halab; LL11,000, 6½ hours, every 30 minutes from 7am to 1.30am) and Lattakia (LL9000, four hours,

three times a day at 10.30am, 2.30pm and 5.30pm). These services run every day of the week. For Turkey, buses travel to İstanbul (LL26,000, 36 hours, 10.30pm daily), and for Egypt, to Cairo (LL60,000, 24 hours, 3am Friday and Sunday). All buses go via Damascus and involve a change of bus in each country (on to local services).

A service taxi from Charles Helou will cost you US\$10 to Damascus (2¼ hours) and US\$12 to Aleppo (five hours). Don't worry about finding a seat in one of these – the Syrian drivers are famous for pouncing on potential customers the minute they enter the bus station! Service taxis also go to Amman in Jordan (US\$25, five hours, 10 daily).

Tripoli (in northern Lebanon) also has an international bus service. **Kotob** (Map p438; ☎ 06-444 986) buses leave for Aleppo in Syria (LL7500, almost five hours, every hour from 9am to 1pm) and to Lattakia (LL7500, two hours, 3pm). They go to Damascus (LL10,000, three hours) via Beirut on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday. Daily **Transtour** (Map p438; ☎ 06-445 514; Rue Mohammed Karamah, Tripoli) buses leave for Aleppo (LL8000, five hours, every 30 minutes) from 8.30am to 11pm via Homs (LL5000, 2½ hours). There are two Transtour services daily to Damascus (LL8000, 4½ hours), leaving at 5am and 3pm.

Kotob also go to Amman in Jordan (LL37,500, five to seven hours). Transtour runs one daily bus at 11pm to İstanbul in Turkey (LL75,000, 32 hours) as well as Sunday services (at 9am and 11pm) to about 10 other destinations in Turkey and Eastern Europe (ask at the office), a daily bus at 5am to Amman (LL38,000, eight hours) and a bus every Sunday at 5am to Cairo, Egypt (LL98,000, 32 to 36 hours).

Service taxis from Tripoli to Syria travel to Homs (LL7500), to Hama (LL9000) and to Aleppo (LL15,000). They leave when full from Saahat et-Tall. Service taxis from Tripoli don't go to Damascus.

## CAR & MOTORCYCLE

If you're bringing your car into Lebanon, you must have an International Driving Permit and a *carte de passage* (see p662). Note also that a steep charge (payable in cash) is levied for foreign-registered vehicles at the border (refundable on departure). There are petrol stations on both sides of the border (fill up in Syria by preference;

it's cheaper) as well as quite good garages that can provide spares and repairs. At the time of writing, diesel vehicles were banned from entering Lebanon; check for the latest information with your embassy before setting off. For information on road rules etc see opposite.

## Sea

There is no regular public sea transportation from Lebanon. Boats connect Beirut to other countries but the majority are middle-market cruise ships operating during summer months only (mid-March to end of October). You *may* be able to get a passage with them. For more information and schedules contact **Aeolus Travel** (Map pp418-19; ☎ 564 666; www.aeoluslb.com; Rue Pasteur, Rmeil; ☎ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-1pm Sat). It's located opposite the Subaru car showroom.

The company works with Louis Cruise Lines, Salamis Lines, Silver Sea and Aida Cruises, which generally follow the route: Beirut–Limassol (Cyprus)–Greek Islands–Limassol–Beirut. It takes between nine and 12 hours from Beirut to Limassol and prices (usually for two-person packages) include a three-star cabin and full board. Discounts of between 10% and 50% are available either for advance or last-minute bookings. In the peak season (July to August) prices are highest. At present there are no boats to Italy, Egypt or Turkey (go first to Cyprus and change).

## GETTING AROUND

There are no air services or trains operating within Lebanon, but the country is so small (you can drive from one end to the other in half a day) that you don't really need them. Additionally the bus, minibus and service taxi network is extensive, reasonably efficient and cheap.

## Bicycle

Lebanon's steep terrain and the state of many urban roads demand a rugged, all-terrain-type bicycle. There are no designated bike lanes or routes and cars treat bicycles with contempt and derision. Beware of travelling in summer months, when heat exhaustion is a real danger. Other hazards and annoyances include the heavily congested roads and the pure anarchy on them (see opposite). See also p455 and p423 for further information and for bike hire and purchase.

## Bus

Buses travel between Beirut and all of Lebanon's major towns. There are three main bus pick-up and drop-off points in Beirut: **Charles Helou bus station** (Map pp418-19) Just east of downtown, for destinations north of Beirut (including Syria). **Cola transport hub** (Map pp418-19) In fact a bustling intersection. Generally serves the south, and the Bekaa Valley. **Dawra transport hub** Lying east of Beirut and covering the same destinations as Charles Helou, it's usually a port of call in and out of the city.

Charles Helou is the only formal station and is divided into three signposted zones:

**Zone A** For buses to Syria.

**Zone B** For buses servicing Beirut (where the route starts or finishes at Charles Helou).

**Zone C** For express buses to Jounieh, Byblos and Tripoli.

Zones A and C have ticket offices where you can buy tickets for your journey. In the other stations (Cola and Dawra) ask any driver for your bus (if they don't find you first).

Some buses in Lebanon are poorly maintained and go too fast; accidents do happen. In general, however, they're reasonably safe, comfortable and reliable and are very cheap by Lebanese standards. The networks are extensive. There's just one class and bus passes are not available. A typical journey from Beirut to Tripoli (85km north of Beirut) costs LL2000, ie about LL24 a kilometre.

There's also a growing number of independently owned minibuses which cover the same routes but are slightly more expensive than the regular buses, but they're comfortable and frequent. Tickets are bought on the minibuses.

See the relevant town and city sections for further details about getting there by bus.

## Car & Motorcycle

You should think carefully before deciding to drive in Lebanon (see Road Hazards, p462).

## DRIVING LICENCE

In theory, you require an International Driving Permit (IDP), but in practice a home driving licence should suffice for most nationalities. Note that, if you plan to drive into Lebanon, you will need an IDP.

## FUEL & SPARE PARTS

Petrol (including unleaded) and spare parts for most makes of car are easily available.

## HIRE

Most of the big rental agencies are in Beirut. If you can afford one, a hired car is probably the best way to see some of Lebanon's most beautiful scenery. To reduce the cost, try and find a small group.

To hire a car in Lebanon, drivers must be over 21 years old (in some places, over 23), have been in possession of a licence for at least three years, have adequate insurance cover and own a credit card or have a large amount of cash (to cover the deposit). You can't take hired cars over the border to Syria.

Car hire starts at approximately US\$25 to US\$30 per day for a Renault Clio, rising to US\$500 per day for a Porsche Boxer convertible. For car hire up to three days, there's a mileage limit of 150km per day; for three days or more it's usually unlimited. Drivers and guides both cost from US\$20 per day extra (but note that you must pay for their accommodation, and food is expected).

In the low season and if hiring a car for five days or more, discounts of up to 40% are sometimes available. During the high season (15 June to 15 September, Christmas, Easter and the major Lebanese holidays) cars can be hard to come by; reserve at least two weeks in advance.

Car hire companies in Beirut, some of which have branches open 24 hours at the airport, include the following:

**Avis** (Map pp418-19; ☎ 01-363 848; www.avis.com.lb; Kurban Tours, Phoenicia Intercontinental, Rue Fakhred-Dine, Minet el-Hosn, Beirut; ☎ 9am-6pm)

**Budget Rent a Car** (Map pp418-19; ☎ 01-740 741; www.budget-rental.com; Dunes Shopping Center, Rue Verdun, Verdun, Beirut; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Sat)

**City Car** (Map p422; ☎ 01-803 308; www.citycar.com.lb; Al-Oraifi Bldg, Rue Kalaa, Ras Beirut; ☎ 8am-7pm Mon-Sat, 9am-noon Sun)

**Europcar** Ain al-Mreisse (Map pp418-19; ☎ 01-363 636; www.lenacar.com; Nsouli Bldg, Rue Ain al-Mreisse, Ain al-Mreisse, Beirut; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Sat); airport branch (☎ 01-629 888; ☎ 24hr)

## INSURANCE

Though prices may include insurance, you may still be liable for the first US\$300 or more in case of damage; check. Though there's an option to pay for extra cover, even that probably won't save you much in the long run.

## ROAD HAZARDS

Despite the attempts of traffic police to organise the flow of cars, very few drivers follow road regulations. Many Lebanese purchase their licences for as little as US\$100. Some intersections in Beirut do have traffic lights, but they are usually treated as give-way signs at best. Look out also for road-mending projects (which are often unmarked).

In the cities, watch the service taxis that stop without warning in the middle of the road to let passengers in or out. On the highways, lanes are ignored.

In the mountains many roads are narrow, with hairpin bends, and it's not unusual for drivers to recklessly overtake on hidden bends.

Keep an eye out for pedestrians, who often walk in the middle of the roads or streets or haphazardly cross highways and roads. Accidents are frequent.

In the winter (particularly from December to February) snow on the higher roads (such as from Masnah to Syria) can cause problems, and some roads (such as from Bcharré to the Cedars) are closed from November to mid-June. Chains can be rented from garages or ski resorts (LL10,000 per day).

## ROAD RULES

None! In fact the first rule of driving in Lebanon is: forget rules. Officially, the Lebanese system is based on French road law, which includes the priority from the right rule (in which oncoming traffic has to give way to traffic coming from the right except on major highways). Don't be tempted to drink, however. Breathalysers are sometimes used in the event of an accident, and if over the limit you may get yourself into serious trouble. Don't forget also that you *must* stop at military checkpoints. Driving is on the right.

## Local Transport

### BUS

Some towns, including Beirut, have both government and privately owned buses that operate a hail and ride system. Fares are generally LL500 for all except the most distant destinations.

### TAXI & SERVICE TAXI

Taxis are usually elderly Mercedes with red licence plates and a taxi sign on the roof.

For travellers considering day trips from Beirut, hiring them is not a bad option, as they are comfortable, solid in case of accidents and have seat belts, a rare thing in Lebanon.

Most routes around Lebanese towns and cities are covered by service taxis, or 'shared taxis' (see p672). You can hail them at any point on their route and also get out wherever you wish by saying '*anzil huun*' (drop me off here). Be sure to ask '*servees?*' before getting in as (if it's an empty car) the driver may try to charge you a private taxi fare.

The fixed fare for service taxis for routes around towns is generally LL1000, and to outlying parts LL2000. Outside towns, the fares range from LL2000 to LL8000, depending on the destination. Try to pay at the earliest opportunity during your trip and keep some LL1000 notes handy for this.

If you do want to engage the car as a private taxi, make sure the driver understands exactly where you want to go and negotiate the fare before you get in (fares are suggested in relevant sections). If you're planning several journeys, it may be cheaper to hire a car for a half or full day. You'll need to negotiate hard; expect to pay around US\$50 for a whole day.

## Tours

Several Lebanese operators organise tours within Lebanon, and to Syria and Jordan from Lebanon. They cover most of Lebanon's highlights, are reasonably priced and usually include lunch, guide (in English or French), entrance fees and pick-up/drop-off at your hotel, and are comfortable (transport is in air-con coaches or minibuses). A day trip costs from US\$30 per person for shorter trips and US\$50 to US\$60 for longer trips.

Tour operators:

**Kurban Tours** (Map pp418-19; ☎ 01-363 848; www.kurbantravel.com; Phoenicia Intercontinental, Minet al-Hosn; 🕒 8am-6pm Mon-Sat)

**Nakhal** (☎ 01-382 444; www.nakhal.com; Sami as-Solh St, Ghorayeb Bldg; 🕒 7am-6pm Mon-Fri, 7am-2pm Sat) Lies around 550m south of the Law Courts on Sami as-Solh St.

**Tania Travel** (Map p422; ☎ 01-739 679; www.tania.travel.com; Rue Sidani, Hamra; 🕒 8am-6pm Mon-Sat) On the 1st floor opposite the old Jeanne d'Arc theatre.

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