

Transport

CONTENTS

Getting There & Away	390
Entering Syria & Lebanon	390
Air	390
Land	394
Overland Tours	396
Getting Around	396
Travel Between Syria & Lebanon	396
Syria	398
Lebanon	402

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Heading to Syria and Lebanon is fairly straightforward, especially if you are coming from Europe or the Middle East where there are a range of airlines and a number of direct flights to both Damascus and Beirut. From other regions, flights again are fairly straightforward, just expect a couple of stops on the way. There is also the option, for those with a bit of time, of travelling overland.

ENTERING SYRIA & LEBANON

Entering both countries is very easy from a bureaucratic standpoint: all you need is a non-Israeli stamped valid passport and a valid visa. Syria and Lebanon refuse to admit anyone who has ever visited their neighbour, Israel and the Palestinian Territories. The evidence immigration officials will be looking for is any kind of incriminating stamp in your passport. This can include arrival/departure

DEPARTURE TAX

When heading for the airport in Syria, make sure that you keep enough Syrian currency for the departure tax: \$200, paid after check-in. There is no tax to be paid when departing by a land border.

Airline passengers departing from Beirut Rafic Hariri International Airport must pay US\$33/49 if travelling economy/business class. The tax is usually included in your ticket price – ask your travel agent.

stamps from Ben-Gurion Airport, or similar stamps from border crossing points, such as Rafah and Taba on the Egyptian border or any of the crossings with Jordan.

There's also a question on some visa application forms that asks, 'Have you ever visited Occupied Palestine?' to which a yes response will see your application turned down flat. If you are doing a trip right through the Middle East, you can save yourself some potential trouble and leave Israel & the Palestinian Territories as the last stop on your itinerary. And should you plan on going there after Syria, keep it to yourself.

Immigration at the airports in both countries is quite efficient, but the customs staff at Beirut often check travellers' luggage.

The level of attention you receive entering either country by road is purely at the whim and boredom or stress level of the staff working at the border point. Regardless of their attitude, be unfailingly polite – despite the journey you've endured to get there.

See Departure Tax (left) for information regarding taxes.

Passport

Make sure that your passport is valid well beyond the period of your intended stay. If your passport is just about to expire, immigration may not let you into the country. Also, make sure it has sufficient space for any new visa stamps that you're liable to pick up.

You should get into the habit of carrying your passport at all times while in Syria and Lebanon as you often need to present it to change money, cash travellers cheques, buy long-distance bus tickets and, in some destinations, even to make telephone calls. In Lebanon there are still many Lebanese army checkpoints, although the officials rarely ask to see your ID these days. However, if you are stopped and you don't have any ID, it will create delays and hassles.

AIR Airports & Airlines SYRIA

Syria has two international airports, one in Damascus and the other in Aleppo, plus a third, in Lattakia, which is international

THINGS CHANGE...

The information in this chapter is particularly vulnerable to change. Check directly with the airline or a travel agent to make sure you understand how a fare (and ticket you may buy) works and be aware of the security requirements for international travel. Shop carefully. The details given in this chapter should be regarded as pointers and are not a substitute for your own careful, up-to-date research.

in name only. Damascus has regular connections to Europe, Africa, Asia and other cities in the Middle East, while Aleppo has more limited services. Most air travellers arrive in Damascus but there are some direct flights from Europe and other Middle Eastern destinations to Aleppo.

The **Damascus International Airport** (DAM; ☎ 011-543 0201/9) is 32km southwest of the city centre. There's a branch of the Commercial Bank of Syria (CBS) linked to Cirrus, Maestro, Visa and MasterCard and a sometimes 24-hour tourist office with free city maps, plus desks for the major car-hire companies. Note, the bank will *not* change Syrian pounds back into dollars or any other hard currency.

On the plus side, there is a duty-free store that takes Syrian pounds and US dollars, and is seriously cheap.

For information on how to get to and from the airport, see p118. Syria's national carrier **SyrianAir** (Syrian Arab Airlines; www.syriaair.com) flies to Europe, Delhi, Mumbai and Karachi in Asia, many Middle Eastern destinations and North Africa, and it's not a bad airline for short-haul travel.

The following major airlines offer services to and from Damascus:

- Air France** (AF; in Damascus ☎ 011-221 8990; www.airfrance.com)
- British Airways** (BA; in Damascus ☎ 011-331 0000; www.britishairways.com)
- Cyprus Airways** (CY; in Damascus ☎ 011-222 5630; www.cyprusairways.com)
- EgyptAir** (MS; in Damascus ☎ 011-223 2158; www.egyptair.com.eg; airline code MS)
- Emirates** (EK; in Damascus ☎ 011-9934; www.emirates.com)
- Etihad** (EY; in Damascus ☎ 011-334 4235; www.etihadairways.com)

- Gulf Air** (GF; in Damascus ☎ 011-222 1209; www.gulfairco.com)
- Lufthansa** (LH; in Damascus ☎ 011-221 1165; www.lufthansa.com)
- Royal Jordanian Airline** (RJ; in Damascus ☎ 011-231 5577; www.rja.com.jo)
- SyrianAir** (RB; Airport office ☎ 222 9001; www.syriaair.com)
- Turkish Airlines** (TK; in Damascus ☎ 011-221 2263; www.turkishairlines.com)

LEBANON

There is only one airport in Lebanon, **Beirut Rafic Hariri International Airport** (BEY; ☎ 01-628 000; www.beirutairport.gov.lb). There are no direct flights to the USA; though connections to Europe, Africa and Asia are frequent. The arrivals hall is well organised, and immigration procedures are reasonably straightforward, although customs can be slow if luggage is being checked. Facilities inside the airport are still somewhat thin on the ground, but some car-rental agencies and exchange places are open. For details on getting to and from the airport, see p291.

The national carrier, **Middle East Airlines** (MEA; in Beirut ☎ 01-737 000; www.mea.com.lb) has an extensive network, including flights to and from Europe and the Arab world. The airline has a pretty good safety record, is serviceable enough and good for regional connections.

The following airlines fly to and from Lebanon:

- Air France** (AF; in Beirut ☎ 01-977 977; www.airfrance.com)
- Cyprus Airways** (CY; in Beirut ☎ 01-362 237; www.cyprusairways.com)
- EgyptAir** (MS; in Beirut ☎ 01-973 330; www.egyptair.com.eg)
- Emirates** (EK; in Beirut ☎ 01-734 535; www.emirates.com)
- Gulf Air** (GF; in Beirut ☎ 01-323 332; www.gulfairco.com)
- Lufthansa** (LH; in Beirut ☎ 01-347 007; www.lufthansa.com)
- Malaysia Airlines** (MH; in Beirut ☎ 01-741 344; www.mas.com.my)
- Middle East Airlines** (ME; in Beirut ☎ 01-737 000; www.mea.com.lb)
- Royal Jordanian Airline** (RJ; in Beirut ☎ 01-379 990; www.rja.com.jo)
- Syrian Arab Airlines** (RB; in Beirut ☎ 01-375 632; www.syriaair.com)
- Turkish Airlines** (TK; in Beirut ☎ 01-999 849; www.turkishairlines.com)

Tickets

As Syria is one of the more popular Middle East destinations you will probably find discounted fares, particularly from Europe. Prices vary from one agency to the other, so take the time to call around. If you're planning to tour either Jordan or Turkey as well as Syria, you should consider flying to Amman or Istanbul, as a greater range of airlines serve those cities with a wider spread of fares.

For Beirut, it really depends where you're coming from. Online agencies will give a reasonable discount, but to save money you'll be taking a connecting flight or sometimes two.

BUYING TICKETS

Unless you have a travel agent who really knows their stuff and can get you good discounts, online booking is the way to go, whether it be through the airline themselves or through an agency such as Expedia. Surfing the internet is a quick and easy way to compare prices. The most important thing is to make sure you buy a ticket that works for your kind of travel – if you have a date by which you have to be back in your country of origin, a nonrefundable, nontransferable ticket (which is generally cheaper), if your trip is 'open-ended', a more expensive unrestricted or flexible fare is a better option. Always think carefully before you buy a ticket that cannot easily be refunded.

Most airlines offer frequent-flier deals that can earn you a free air ticket or upgrades. To qualify, you have to accumulate sufficient mileage with the same airline or airline alliance. Many airlines have 'black-out periods', or times when you cannot fly for free on your frequent-flier points. If you're in a frequent-flier programme, always try to use an airline that is a partner in that alliance should your normal airline not fly where you want to go.

STUDENT & YOUTH FARES

Full-time students and people under 26 have access to better deals than other travellers. The better deals may not always be cheaper fares but can include more flexibility to change flights and/or routes. You have to show a document proving your date of birth or a valid International Student Identity Card (ISIC) when buying your ticket and boarding the plane.

From Asia

For both Damascus and Beirut, flights generally land in Dubai first. Saudi Arabian, Emirates, Gulf Air and Qatar Airways all offer connecting flights to Damascus that add about US\$100 to a return flight to Dubai. For Beirut it's similar, with Gulf Air, Malaysia and Emirates offering the best deals. Return flights from Kuala Lumpur to both Damascus and Beirut start at around US\$1000 from online agencies, if you book well in advance.

From Australia & New Zealand

From Australia, low-season fares to Damascus and Beirut start at A\$2300 return with Emirates, with a stop in Dubai. Other airlines may have two stops. From New Zealand, return low-season fares with Emirates or Cathay Pacific start at NZ\$3000; expect a couple of stops. Depending on the airline, the stop in Asia is usually Singapore or Kuala Lumpur and then Dubai in the Middle East. Round-the-world tickets start at A\$2420 from Australia or NZ\$2880 from New Zealand.

From Canada

From Canada, flights are via one of the European capitals and sometimes via the USA as well. Return flights to either Damascus or Beirut with Air Canada and British Airways start from around C\$1500 from Vancouver or C\$1400 from Toronto.

From Continental Europe

Airlines including Air France, Austrian Airlines, Alitalia, KLM, Royal Jordanian Airline, Gulf Air, Middle East Airlines and SyrianAir offer regular flights to Damascus and/or Beirut from most European cities. KLM and Air France have direct flights to Beirut from Amsterdam and Air France and Austrian Airlines offer direct services to Damascus from Amsterdam. From Paris, Air France offers direct flights to Beirut and Damascus. Alitalia also has direct flights to both these cities from Milan as does Lufthansa from Frankfurt.

Depending on the airline and number of stops (direct flights are generally more expensive) return flights from these cities to either Damascus or Beirut go from around €200 to €500.

From the Middle East & North Africa

Middle East Airlines has regular flights to Beirut from the Middle East capitals of

CLIMATE CHANGE & TRAVEL

Climate change is a serious threat to the ecosystems that humans rely upon, and air travel is the fastest-growing contributor to the problem. Lonely Planet regards travel, overall, as a global benefit, but believes we all have a responsibility to limit our personal impact on global warming.

Flying & Climate Change

Pretty much every form of motor travel generates CO₂ (the main cause of human-induced climate change) but planes are far and away the worst offenders, not just because of the sheer distances they allow us to travel, but because they release greenhouse gases high into the atmosphere. The statistics are frightening: two people taking a return flight between Europe and the US will contribute as much to climate change as an average household's gas and electricity consumption over a whole year.

Carbon Offset Schemes

Climatecare.org and other websites use 'carbon calculators' that allow jetsetters to offset the greenhouse gases they are responsible for with contributions to energy-saving projects and other climate-friendly initiatives in the developing world – including projects in India, Honduras, Kazakhstan and Uganda.

Lonely Planet, together with Rough Guides and other concerned partners in the travel industry, supports the carbon offset scheme run by climatecare.org. Lonely Planet offsets all of its staff and author travel.

For more information check out our website: lonelyplanet.com.

Amman, Abu Dhabi, Kuwait and Dubai. It also offers flights to Beirut from the African cities of Cairo, Abidjan (Ivory Coast), Accra (Ghana) and Kano (Nigeria).

SyrianAir has regular connections to Beirut from many Middle East and North African cities including Amman, Abu Dhabi, Algiers, Bahrain, Cairo, Dhahran, Doha, Dubai, Jeddah, Khartoum, Kuwait, Muscat, San'a, Sharjah, Riyadh, Tehran and Tunis.

Both Turkish Airlines and Middle East Airlines have direct flights from Istanbul to Beirut. Turkish Airlines offers direct services from Istanbul to Damascus. Check the airlines' websites for fares between cities.

From the UK

From the UK there are a number of airlines offering flights to both Syria and Lebanon. Emirates, Etihad, British Airways (Damascus only) tend to offer the best routes. Other flight options from London to Damascus include KLM via Amsterdam, Alitalia via Milan or Air France via Paris. At the time of writing return flights from London to Damascus or Beirut started from around £415.

From the USA

Although there are no direct flights from the USA, there are quite a few options for

getting to either Syria or Lebanon. Flights to Damascus and Beirut are via one, sometimes two, European capitals (usually London or Paris) or another Middle East city (usually Dubai). Return fares from New York with airlines including British Airways, Emirates, Etihad, Royal Jordanian and Air France start from around US\$900 for a restricted fare, while return fares from Los Angeles start from US\$1300 for a restricted fare. Another option from the USA is to buy a return to London and from there buy a cheap fare to either Damascus or Beirut. If you are travelling to Syria or Lebanon as part of a bigger trip, expect to pay around US\$2500 for a round-the-world ticket that takes in Beirut or Damascus.

Discount travel agents in the USA are known as consolidators (although you won't see a sign on the door saying 'Consolidator'). San Francisco is the ticket consolidator capital of America, although some good deals can be found in Los Angeles, New York and other big cities.

A good place to scope fares is **Kayak** (www.kayak.com), while the following agencies are recommended for online bookings: www.expedia.com, www.sta.com (for travellers under the age of 26) www.travelocity.com

LAND Border Crossings

The only land borders open to Lebanon at the moment are those with Syria. Despite the Israeli withdrawal, the southern border is closed with no immediate sign of opening – especially considering that it's been dusted with a light sprinkling of unexploded bomblets from cluster bombs.

Whether leaving Syria by land (or air), have your yellow entry card, or the equivalent you received upon getting a visa extension, ready to hand in. There may be a small fine to pay if you don't have it – which could be awkward if you have made sure to spend your last Syrian pounds before crossing the frontier.

If you've overstayed your visa limit in Syria without getting the required visa extension, reports indicate you can get away with being a day or two over, but for anything more you must get an exit visa from an immigration office. If you don't, you risk being turned back.

BRINGING YOUR OWN VEHICLE

It's no problem to bring your own vehicle to Syria. A *carnet de passage en douane* is apparently no longer needed. Instead, drivers arriving with vehicles have to buy what amounts to a temporary customs waiver at the border. This costs about US\$50, plus possible bribes to grumpy customs officials. Third-party insurance must also be bought at the border, costing US\$36 a month. This supposedly also covers you for Lebanon, but double-check. The real value of these compulsory insurance deals is questionable, so make sure your own insurance company will cover you for Syria. There is also a US\$100 diesel tax payable if your vehicle uses diesel fuel.

If you are bringing a foreign-registered vehicle into Lebanon, there is a hefty charge levied at the border (refundable when you leave). This is calculated on a sliding scale depending on the value of the vehicle. Unless you have large amounts of cash to leave as a deposit, this ruling effectively makes it unfeasible to bring your own car into Lebanon. A better plan would be to arrive by bus or service taxi and then rent a car locally.

See also Car & Motorcycle for Syria (p400) and Lebanon (p403) for more specific details.

Iran

There is a service connecting Damascus (and Aleppo) to Tehran by rail. The route is Damascus, Aleppo, then into Turkey – Malatya, Lake Van (where there's a ferry) – and on into Iran – Tabriz, Tehran. The departure from Tehran is 8.15pm Saturday, arriving in Damascus at 7.20am Tuesday; the reverse journey departs Damascus at 7.21am on Saturday, arriving in Tehran at 6.45pm Monday. The first-class fare is €39.90. For departures from Aleppo, see p193.

Jordan

There are two border crossings between Syria and Jordan that are only 3km apart: at Nasib/Jabir and Deraa/Ramtha. Nasib/Jabir is the main post and if you're catching a service taxi or bus you'll use this one. If you're travelling by train or by local transport, you'll use Deraa/Ramtha. For details see Crossing Into Jordan, p131.

BUS

There is one JETT bus daily in each direction between Amman and Damascus. You need to book in advance as demand for seats is high. For details of departure times and prices from Damascus, see p117.

SERVICE TAXI

Service taxis are faster than the buses and depart much more frequently. Between Damascus and Amman costs JD5.500 (£385) either way. Service taxis run between Damascus and Irbid for JD4 (£300).

TRAIN

At the time of research there was talk of upgrading and revitalising the Hejaz Railway, a narrow-gauge line that was meant to link Damascus to Medina for the annual pilgrimage (see The Hejaz Railway, opposite). Services will be suspended while work takes place in 2008, and no date has been provided as to when services will resume. If it's anything like the interminably delayed Hejaz Station development in Damascus, it could be years. Train-watchers and nostalgics should be warned that the locomotive was a Romanian diesel-run machine, not a romantic, sooty steam job, although some travellers have had the luck to get the sooty version on the Syria leg. It remains to be seen what trains will be used when the line is rejuvenated.

THE HEJAZ RAILWAY

Begun in 1907, the Hejaz Railway was the last grand vision of the dying Ottoman Empire. It was an ambitious scheme to connect Damascus to Medina in Saudi Arabia by rail. Ostensibly, this was to facilitate the annual pilgrimage to Mecca but, perhaps more importantly, it was a way of consolidating Constantinople's hold on the region – the trains were as useful for troops as pilgrims.

This underlying military significance very quickly proved the undoing of the line. When war broke out in 1914 the Hejaz became a strategic target and it was this railway that was repeatedly blown up by Lawrence of Arabia.

The line never, in fact, reached Medina and with the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire that followed the Allied victory, there was never any need for it to be completed. In recent times desultory talks on the possibility of resurrecting the Hejaz Railway in its full glory have concluded that such a project would only be viable if the line were reconnected to the European rail network – a long-term goal of more visionary thinkers in the Middle East, but still some way from becoming reality.

Saudi Arabia & Kuwait

It is possible to go direct from Syria to Saudi Arabia by bus, via Jordan. There are also irregular services all the way to Kuwait. For details inquire at the Baramke terminal in Damascus.

Turkey

BUS

You can buy tickets in Istanbul for buses to Aleppo (approximately 24 hours) or Damascus (30 hours), costing US\$24 to US\$30, depending on which company you travel with and regardless of whether you are going to Aleppo or Damascus. Buses leave daily, usually with five or six departures between about 11am and early evening. The journey usually involves a change of bus at Antakya, the last major Turkish city before the border.

The buses cross at Bab al-Hawa, the most convenient and busiest border post between the two neighbours. The volume of traffic means delays are frequent, with waits of up to a couple of hours. One way to side step this is to buy a bus ticket in Istanbul to travel only as far as Antakya, and from there make your own way to Syria. Take a local bus from Antakya to Reyhanli from where you can catch a *dolmuş* (shared taxi; can be a minibus or sedan) to the border; after crossing on foot (a long and sweaty 2km in summer) you can try to pick up a lift on the Syrian side.

Alternatively, from Antakya you also have the option of catching a *dolmuş* south to Yayladağı (these go from beside the Etibank, opposite the entrance to the bus station),

from where you pick up a taxi or hitch the few kilometres further to the border. Once across (crossing takes just 15 minutes), you're only 2km from the Syrian mountain village of Kassab, from where regular microbuses make the 45-minute run to Lattakia on the Mediterranean coast. To get to Kassab from the border, walk about 10 minutes to the main road at the point where it curves sharply to your right, and then flag down any northbound microbus. Southbound minibuses will be heading from Kassab to Lattakia, but they'll probably be already full and won't pick you up here.

You can also cross from Gaziantep: take a *dolmuş* to Kilis, then another to the border, walk across then take a taxi for around US\$2 to Azaz in Syria from where a bus to Aleppo is just £20.

From northeast Syria it's also possible to cross into Turkey at Qamishle (see p224). From Damascus and Aleppo, there are direct buses to Istanbul and several other Turkish destinations, including Ankara. From Aleppo to Istanbul with Etihad buses, for instance, takes 17 hours and costs £2000.

TRAIN

Syria used to be the terminus for the *Tarsus Express*, the eastward extension of the famed *Orient Express*. The *Tarsus* set off from Istanbul's Haydarpaşa station and terminated at Aleppo, where travellers could then change trains and catch a service that went via Lattakia down through Beirut and to Haifa in Israel and the Palestinian Territories. Aleppo

was also the starting point for services to Baghdad and through to Tehran. Sadly, that sort of rail travel came to an end in the Middle East soon after WWII, when poor relations between the newly emerging states of the region meant minimal cooperation and locked-down borders.

However, a limited form of rail travel between Turkey and Syria has persisted, and there is one weekly service that continues to run between Istanbul and Aleppo/Damascus. It departs Haydarpaşa station at 8.55am Sunday morning, arriving 2.34pm in Aleppo (€25.20) the following day, terminating at Damascus at 8.06pm (€33.20). The sleeper supplement is €23/23 (Aleppo/Damascus) for a single or €15.40/15.40 per person in a double. For further details check the website for **Turkish Railways** (www.tcdd.gov.tr).

For details of train services from Aleppo on the Syrian side, see p193.

Also see the website www.seat61.com for other useful travel information, instructive photos and often amusing travel stories.

OVERLAND TOURS

For people with time to indulge, Syria can be visited as part of an overland trip taking in a combination of three, four or more countries – typically Turkey, Syria, Jordan and Egypt. You travel in a specially adapted ‘overland truck’ with anywhere between 16 and 24 other passengers and your group leader. Accommodation is usually a mix of camping and budget hotels and everyone is expected to pitch in.

Travelling in such a self-contained bubble, the success of the trip very much depends on the group chemistry. It could be one long party on wheels or six endless weeks of grin and bear it and judicious use of your iPod. And no, you don’t get to vote anyone off.

Following is a list of well-regarded tour operators:

Dragoman (www.dragoman.com) Istanbul to Cairo (or vice versa) through Turkey, Syria, Jordan and Egypt in four to 6½ weeks. Longer trips available as well.

Exodus (www.exodus.co.uk) Trips include a ‘Middle East Encompassed’, which comprises 16 days through Lebanon, Syria and Jordan.

Kumuka (www.kumuka.co.uk) Masses of routes offered, including dedicated explorations of Egypt, Jordan or Syria.

Oasis Overland (www.oasisoverland.co.uk) Syria, Jordan and Egypt in 21 days or Turkey, Syria, Jordan and Egypt in 37 days.

GETTING AROUND

TRAVEL BETWEEN SYRIA & LEBANON

You cannot get a Syrian visa in Lebanon, but you can get a Lebanese visa at the border when entering from Syria. For more details, see Visas, p388.

There are four different crossing points from Lebanon into Syria: Masnaa, on the Beirut–Damascus Hwy; Al-Qaa, at the northern end of the Bekaa Valley; Aarida on the coastal road from Tripoli to Lattakia; and Aabboudiye on the Tripoli to Homs route. Always check that the borders are open before setting off.

Air

At present there are no flights between Damascus and Beirut.

Bus

Buses to Syria from Beirut leave from the only ‘real’ bus station, Charles Helou, just east of Downtown.

You must go in person to buy your ticket and, if possible, it’s best to book a seat the day before you travel.

The first bus to Damascus leaves at 5.30am, and they run every half-hour until 7am, after which they leave hourly. Buses to Aleppo (ask for Halab) start at 7.30am and leave at half-hourly intervals until midday. There are also three buses a day (10.30am, 2pm and 5.30pm) to Lattakia, six to Homs (7.30am, 9.30am, 1.30pm, 5pm, 7pm and 9.30pm) and four to Hama (9.30am, 5pm, 7pm and 9.30pm).

Tripoli also has extensive bus services to Syria. A number of bus companies are clustered around Jamal Abdel Nasser Square in the city centre, many offering air-con and on-board videos. There are frequent departures to Homs, Hama and Aleppo in the morning, from around 9am until midday; there are not as many buses in the afternoon. Buses travelling to Lattakia and Damascus are fewer in number and tend to depart in the afternoon. For average prices and travel times, see Fares Between Syria & Lebanon, opposite.

From Damascus, private buses travel to Lebanon. Buses leave from the Baramke terminal, which is about a 15-minute walk to the west of Martyrs Square.

FARES BETWEEN SYRIA & LEBANON

Note that these prices and times are approximate, as at the time of research all of the services were suspended as all borders except the Damascus–Beirut border between Lebanon and Syria were closed due to the political troubles in Lebanon. It was thought the other borders would not be opened until the Lebanon parliament voted in a new President, which it had still not done as of early April 2008. Note also that travel times do not include the border crossings, which depend on the traffic; at times of political tension they can get very busy. How long it takes also depends on who is manning the border and what kind of mood they’re in.

Bus Route	Cost	Duration
Beirut–Aleppo	LL10,500/SE250	6hr
Beirut–Damascus	LL7000/SE175	3hr
Beirut–Hama	LL9000/SE250	6hr
Beirut–Homs	LL8500/SE250	4hr
Beirut–Lattakia	LL9000	4hr
Tripoli–Aleppo	LL8000/SE175	4hr
Tripoli–Hama	LL6500	2hr
Tripoli–Homs	LL6000/SE150	1½ hr
Tripoli–Lattakia	LL6000	2hr

Service Taxi

Route	Cost	Duration
Baalbek–Damascus	LL9000/SE300	1½ hr
Baalbek–Homs	LL9000	1½–2½ hr
Beirut–Aleppo	LL21,000/SE300	5hr
Beirut–Damascus	LL15,000/US\$10	3hr
Beirut–Hama	LL15,000	4hr
Beirut–Homs	LL15,000	3hr
Beirut–Lattakia	LL15,000	3hr
Beirut–Tartus	LL12,000	2hr
Tripoli–Hama	LL9000	2hr
Tripoli–Homs	LL7000	1½ hr
Tripoli–Lattakia	LL9000	2hr

From Aleppo, the buses leave from the bus station tucked away just behind Baron St, not two minutes from the Baron Hotel. Again, the services to Beirut are mainly privately operated buses.

Service Taxi & Taxi

If you do prefer to take a taxi, either service or private, in Beirut they depart from the Cola bus station and taxi stand or from Charles Helou bus station.

In Tripoli these services depart from Jamal Abdel Nasser Square. The service taxis leave when they are full but there is seldom a wait of more than 20 minutes or so. Service and private taxis travel to and from Damascus, where you can change to continue on to Jordan.

A private taxi from Beirut to Damascus costs about US\$70, although during tense periods politically when Beirutis head to Damascus to escape potential danger, taxi drivers will increase the prices.

Tours

See the Tours sections under Damascus (p103) and Beirut (p280) for details of tours around each individual city.

LOCAL TOUR OPERATORS

Local tour operators offer a variety of tours – most (with a couple of exceptions) offer one-day excursions starting and ending in Beirut.

There are some longer tours available which include Syria and/or Jordan.

Adonis Travel (www.adonistravel.com) Offers tours either within Lebanon or across Syria, Lebanon and Jordan.

Campus Travel (Map p272; ☎ 01-744 588; www.campus-travel.net; Maktabi Bldg, Rue Makhoul, Hamra, Beirut) Travel agency focusing on student travel. Arranges skiing trips, tours in Lebanon and to neighbouring countries, such as Syria and Jordan.

Esprit-Nomade (☎ 70-813 001; www.esprit-nomade.com) Offers hiking, rural tourism and responsible ecotourism with innovative programming in Lebanon.

Jasmin Tours (www.jasminotours.com) Based in Damascus, this company offers a variety of Syrian tours, including hiking, culture and nature tours. It also offers tours of Lebanon and Jordan.

Lebanese Adventure (☎ /fax 01-398 982, 03-360 027; www.lebanese-adventure.com; Sioufi, Achrafiye, Beirut) Different outdoor activities throughout Lebanon are arranged each weekend. It can also tailor-make excursions for a minimum of five people.

Liban Trek (☎ 01-329 975; www.libantrek.com; 7th fl, Yazbek B, Rue Adib Ishac, Achrafiye, Beirut) A well-established trekking club that arranges weekend treks throughout Lebanon. It also organises trips to Syria, Jordan, Egypt and Turkey, as well as other mountain sports.

Nakhal & Co (☎ 01-389 389; www.nakhal.com; Ghorayeb Bldg, Rue Sami al-Solh, Badaro, Beirut) Lebanon tours cover Aanjar, Baalbek, Beiteddine, Byblos, The Cedars, Sidon, Tripoli and Tyre. It also organises tours from Lebanon to Syria.

Saad Tours (☎ 01-429 429, 01-427 427; www.saad-tours.com; 8th fl, George Haddad Bldg, Rue Amin Gemayel, Sioufi, Achrafiye, Beirut) A consortium of tour operators that offers sightseeing trips in Lebanon and tours to Syria and Jordan.

Tania Travel (Map p272; ☎ 01-739 682; www.taniatravel.com; 1st fl, Shames Bldg, Rue Sidani, Hamra, opposite Jeanne d'Arc theatre, Beirut) It has tours to Aanjar, Baalbek, Bcharré, Beiteddine, Byblos, The Cedars, Deir al-Qamar, Sidon, Tyre and day trips to Damascus.

SYRIA

Air

The national carrier, SyrianAir (www.syriaair.com), operates a very reasonable (if monopolistic) internal air service and flights are cheap by international standards. Unless you're on a cash-rich, time-poor itinerary it may make more sense to catch the bus; the Damascus–Qamishle flight is perhaps the only exception to this.

Sample one-way fares (return fares are double) from Damascus:

Aleppo (ALP) £1200 (1 hr)

Lattakia (LTK) £811 (1 hr)

Qamishle (KAC) £1306 (1¼ hrs)

Bicycle

A growing number of independent travellers are choosing to cycle Syria, both as a destination in itself or as part of a wider bike tour around the Mediterranean, Middle East, or indeed overland from Europe to Asia. Cycling Syria can be hard work for several reasons: Syrians are not used to long-distance cyclists, which means you need to pay extra attention on the roads; the extreme temperatures, especially in summer, need to be taken into account; plus, you need to carry a fairly hefty amount of gear, including complete tools and spares, because you cannot rely on finding what you need on the way.

On the plus side, cyclists manage to meet more people and therefore are the recipients of wonderful Syrian hospitality – receiving fantastic welcomes everywhere they go, showered with invitations to stop and eat or drink and frequently offered accommodation for the night.

PRACTICALITIES

Carry a couple of extra chain links, a chain breaker, spokes, a spoke key, two inner tubes, tyre levers, a repair kit, a flat-head and Phillips screwdriver, and Allen keys and spanners to fit all the bolts on your bike. Check the bolts daily and carry spares. Fit as many water bottles to your bike as you can or wear a hydration pack – the desert heat is unforgiving.

Make sure the bike's gearing will get you over the hills, and confine your panniers to 15kg maximum. May to mid-June and September to October are the best times for cycling; in between, bring lots of extra water. In your panniers include: a two-person tent (weighing about 1.8kg) that can also accommodate the bike where security is a concern; a sleeping bag rated to 0°C and a Therm-a-Rest; small camping stove with gas canisters; MSR cooking pot; utensils; Katadyn water filter (2 microns) and Maglite. Wear cycling shorts with chamois bum and cleated cycling shoes. Don't fill the panniers with food as it is plentiful and fresh along most routes.

It's also a good idea to carry a Dog Dazer or something similar. Wild, biting mutts are a big problem, particularly on the Desert Hwy out to Palmyra and Deir ez-Zur. If nothing else, carry a big stick or a pouch of stones.

Bus

Syria has a well-developed road network and, partly because the rate of private car ownership is at a low level, public transport is frequent and very cheap. Distances are short, so journeys are rarely more than a few hours. About the longest single bus ride you can take is the nine-hour trip from Damascus to Qamishle in the northeast.

A couple of different classes of bus ply the same routes, the best being the 'luxury' buses, followed in distant second by the Pullmans.

LUXURY BUSES

At one time the state-owned bus company, Karnak, had a monopoly on the road, but today a crop of private companies, running what are commonly referred to as 'luxury' buses or 'luxury Pullmans' rules the roads. Routes are few and the many operators are all in fierce competition. Consequently, fares vary little and the buses are all pretty much the same: large, newish, air-con – comfortable. Travelling with **Kadmous** (www.alkadmous.com) is highly recommended.

CHEAP PULLMANS

The orange-and-white buses of the state-run Karnak company were once the deluxe carriers on the Syrian highways – however

competition has forced them off the roads. So now the cheap category of buses left is the Pullmans (not 'luxury Pullmans'). These are old, battered stock – in the more extreme cases genuine rust buckets – for which a punt on a ticket is akin to a gamble on whether the vehicle's going to make it or not. This is the cheapest way of covering long distances between towns. These vehicles have their own 'garages', quarantined well away from those of the luxury buses. At the same 'old bus' stations you'll usually find boxy minibuses, which run the same long-distance routes offering a bare minimum of comfort at an even cheaper price. You pay your money and take your chances.

MINIBUS & MICROBUS

While buses – of whatever vintage – connect the major towns and cities, short hops and out-of-the-way places are serviced by fleets of minibuses and microbuses. Minibuses on many of the shorter routes, for example, Hama–Homs, Tartus–Lattakia and Homs–Lattakia.

The term microbus (pronounced 'mee-crobaas' or just 'mee-cro') is a little blurred, it typically refers to those modern (mostly Japanese), little vans that are white with a sliding side door, and squeeze in about 12. These have set routes but no schedules, leaving when full. Passengers are picked up/set down anywhere along the route; just yell out

BUS STATIONS & TICKETING

Most Syrian towns and cities have a central or main bus station, which is home base for the various 'luxury' companies. There's often a second or third station too, devoted to second and third ranks of buses. These stations, known locally as *karaj* (garage) are basic affairs, no more than an asphalt lot with a row of prefab huts serving as booking offices for the various companies. Annoyingly, there's no central source of information giving departure times or prices, so it's simply a case of walking around and finding out which company has the next bus to your desired destination.

With so many companies, departures are frequent, and it's rarely necessary to book in advance. Just show up at the station and something will be heading off your way sometime, usually about right now.

Beware the touts – particularly persistent at Aleppo, Damascus and Homs – who will attempt to steer you to the bus company paying the greatest commission, irrespective of the time of the next bus. Start by heading straight for the Kadmous or Al-Ahliyah office, and if they don't have a bus departing any time soon, then walk around and start asking the times of the other companies' buses.

Buying tickets is straightforward, but you need your passport so the ticketing person can enter your details in the log. It's wise to carry your passport at all times anyway, in case of random ID checks. Seats are assigned.

for the driver to stop or flag him down from the roadside. Destinations may be written in Arabic on the front of the bus. At the microbus station just listen out for somebody shouting the name of your destination.

SERVICE TAXI

Share taxis, which are also called service taxis (*ser-vees*), are often old American Desotos and Dodges from the '50s and '60s, although there are fewer of these on the roads than there were in the past, unfortunately. There's a chronic shortage of spare parts but ingenuity and improvisation keep them running. Although more modern vehicles have begun to appear, most drivers persist with their old favourites – largely for their robustness and size (good for squeezing people in).

Share taxis only operate on some major routes and in some cases seem to have succumbed to competition from minibuses. Share taxis can cost a lot more than the buses: unless you're in a hurry, or you find yourself stuck on a highway and it's getting late, there's really no need to use them.

Car & Motorcycle DRIVING LICENCE

Theoretically, to drive a car or motorcycle in Syria you do require an International Driving Permit (IDP), but on the ground your own national licence should generally be sufficient. If you do decide to drive into Lebanon, you will need an IDP, the vehicle's registration papers and liability insurance. It is possible to service most common makes of vehicle in Lebanon. Petrol, available in the usual range of octanes and lead-free, is sold at most petrol stations.

FUEL & SPARE PARTS

Standard unleaded costs around S£28 a litre. It is advisable that you bring a good set of spare parts and some mechanical knowledge, as within Syria you will not always be able to get the help that you may need. While there are plenty of motorcycles in Syria, most are not the common Japanese brands, but Chinese copies, so you'll need to bring plenty of spare parts with you.

HIRE & INSURANCE

Europcar and Hertz are the only international car-hire firms in Syria and both are recommended over the local companies for safety and insurance reasons.

Hertz's cheapest standard rate is US\$49/309 per day/week for a Renault Clio, including all insurance and unlimited mileage. Europcar is more expensive, starting at US\$62/412 per day/week for a Peugeot 106 (plus insurance). The local companies can be cheaper.

There's also a minimum rental of two/three days for limited kilometres/unlimited kilometres, which is standard with rental companies in Syria. Europcar also charges an additional fee of 75% of the daily rate if the car is returned to a town other than where it was rented.

A plethora of local companies has appeared since the early 1990s but many don't offer full insurance. Another problem with local agencies is maintenance. Vehicles are prone to breakdowns and poor back-up service translates to you hanging around for a day or two waiting for your hire car to be fixed or replaced.

You need to be at least 21 years old to rent a car in Syria, although some places require that you be 23. Most companies will require a deposit in cash of up to US\$1000, or you can leave your credit card details.

Budget (Map pp82-3; ☎ 499 9999; opposite Four Seasons Hotel, Damascus)

Europcar Saahat Umawiyeen, Damascus (Map p80; ☎ 222 9300; Sheraton Damascus Hotel & Towers); Sharia Shoukri al-Quwatli, Damascus (Map p80; ☎ 222 9200; Le Meridien Damas); Damascus International Airport (☎ 011-543 1536).

Hertz Damascus (Map pp82-3; ☎ 011-223 2300; www.hertz.com; Cham Palace); Damascus International Airport (☎ 011-23 2300).

Cars & Drivers

An alternative option is to hire a car and driver for a day. You can usually manage to get a big old Mercedes taxi or a modern smaller car to ferry you around for a full day – no insurance necessary and no deposit. You should be able to arrange something similar through your hotel, but make it clear how many hours you want to be out and where you wish to go, and get a firm agreement on this and the price beforehand. The standard rate for a full day is US\$100 for the car and driver (regardless of how many passengers

there are), but try to negotiate, especially if you want one for several day trips. We've had drivers recommended by hotels who've fallen asleep at the wheel, didn't know where they were going and had to stop at every village or had a recurring habit of steering us towards souvenir shops. If you want one for a few days, we suggest giving them a one-day test drive and see how it goes.

ROAD RULES

Traffic runs on the right-hand side of the road, while the speed limit is generally 60km/h in built-up areas, 70km/h on the open road and 110km/h on major highways.

The roads are generally quite reasonable in Syria, but if you're travelling extensively, you will come across places that are signposted in Arabic only. The best advice is to find someone and ask – point at your destination in the book if necessary. Always take care when driving into villages and other built-up areas, as cars, people and animals all jostle for the same space.

Long-distance night driving is not really recommended, as not all drivers believe in using headlights, and general lighting is poor. Truckers testing their manhood by overtaking in a suicidal fashion are a major concern, as are wayward children; sheep and goats accompanied by an inattentive shepherd; camels; and farmers and their tractors.

Hitching

Although, generally speaking, Lonely Planet does not advocate hitching because of the small but potentially serious risk it involves, unless you have your own transport hitching can be considered as an option to access some of Syria's more remote sites. In fact, as so many locals don't own cars, it is an accepted means of getting around. Money is never expected and any attempt to pay is unequivocally refused.

Despite the hospitality of many Syrians, people who choose to hitch will be safer if they travel in pairs and let someone know where they are planning to go. Women should never hitch alone.

Local Transport BUS

All the major cities have a local bus and/or microbus system but, as the city centres are compact, you can usually get around on

SYRIA: ROAD DISTANCES (KM)

Aleppo	---																				
Ath-Thaura	150	---																			
Bosra	501	651	---																		
Damascus	355	505	146	---																	
Deir ez-Zur	321	201	567	421	---																
Hama	146	296	355	209	401	---															
Homs	193	343	308	162	354	47	---														
Lattakia	187	337	494	348	508	147	186	---													
Maalula	311	466	204	58	420	167	120	306	---												
Palmyra	353	194	366	220	201	207	160	346	230	---											
Qala'at al-Hosn	252	402	367	221	414	106	156	179	179	219	---										
Safita	261	421	386	240	432	125	78	120	120	238	32	---									
Seidnaya	339	489	176	30	420	196	149	335	335	250	208	227	---								
Suweida	462	614	39	107	528	316	269	455	167	327	328	347	137	---							
Tartus	287	437	404	258	450	143	96	90	90	256	73	31	245	365	---						
	Aleppo	Ath-Thaura	Bosra	Damascus	Deir ez-Zur	Hama	Homs	Lattakia	Maalula	Palmyra	Qala'at al-Hosn	Safita	Seidnaya	Suweida	Tartus						

Damascus to Beirut = 127km

foot. This is just as well because neither the buses nor the minibuses have signs in English (and often no signs in Arabic), though they can be useful (and cheap) for getting out to distant microbus or train stations, especially in Damascus.

SERVICE TAXI & TAXI

Taxis in most cities are plentiful and cheap. In Damascus they have meters, although many drivers are deliberately unaware of their existence. Despite this, if you get into a taxi and ask how much it is to the bus station (or wherever) you will often be told the correct fare and bargaining will get you nowhere. If you are catching taxis, always ask at your hotel how much the fare should be before you leave. To avoid the hassle, in Damascus there is a new taxi company, **Star Taxi** (x9207), with good drivers, vehicles, meters that work and services to the airport, Jordan and Lebanon.

Although they are not in evidence in Damascus, some other cities, notably Aleppo, are served by local service taxis that run a set route, picking up and dropping off passengers along the way for a set price. For the outsider, there is no obvious way to distinguish them from the normal taxi. If you can read Arabic, it's easy. Regular taxis have a sign on the doors reading 'Ujra medinat Halab, raqm...' (City of Aleppo Taxi, Number...), while service taxis have a similar-looking sign reading 'Khidma Medinat Halab' (City of Aleppo Service) followed by the route name.

Should you end up sharing with other people and the taxi doesn't take you exactly where you want to go, you're probably in a service taxi.

Train

Syria has potentially an excellent railway network, with more than 2000km of track connecting most main centres. The main line snakes its way from Damascus north to Aleppo via Homs and Hama before swinging southeast via Raqqa to Deir ez-Zur. At that point it turns northeast to Hassake and finally to Qamishle. Trains also operate on a couple of secondary lines, one of which runs from Aleppo to Lattakia, down the coast to Tartus and then on to Homs to connect with the Damascus line.

However, the reality is that train travel is rarely an attractive option. The first draw-

back is that there are never more than three or four services a day between any given destinations (often fewer) and some arrive and depart in the dead hours of morning. Not only does this disrupt your sleep, it also means that most journeys are made in complete darkness so you don't see any scenery. Rolling stock is 1970s Russian with all the levels of comfort that implies. To compound matters, the stations are often awkwardly located a few kilometres from the centre of town and are poorly catered to, with little or no public transport (Aleppo and Lattakia, to name two, are exceptions).

Nevertheless, there are some good options. The line between Aleppo and Lattakia passes through, under and over some beautiful scenery as it snakes its way across the barrier of the Jebel an-Ansariyya and down to the coast. There are four services a day, all travelling during daylight hours. Readers have also commended the overnight service from Aleppo down to Damascus on sleek new trains, which seems a sensible way to cover ground if you're short on time (it saves wasting a day on a bus), plus it saves on at least one night's hotel bill.

Steam train buffs might appreciate the summer service up the Barada Gorge – see p125. It goes nowhere in particular but there's fun in getting there.

LEBANON

Lebanon is a tiny country; although there are no internal air services, you don't really need them. You can drive from one end of the country to the other in half a day, depending on traffic congestion. Most visitors use the ever-useful service taxis (servees) to get around. A huge number run on set routes around the country, although you may have to use more than one to get to where you want to go. If you're going to less-travelled areas, taxis can add up and it could be worth your while to rent a car.

Buses and minibuses also link the larger Lebanese towns, and there are two bus companies with extensive routes throughout Beirut and the outlying areas.

Bicycle

The terrain in Lebanon is extremely steep once you leave the coastal strip and it really suits a mountain bike. The state of some of the urban roads also demand a rugged

all-terrain type bike. Keep in mind that the traffic problems described under Road Rules (p404) will also present a hazard to the cyclist and extreme care should be taken when riding anywhere in Lebanon. Having said that, the scenery is beautiful and the air in the mountains clear, although it would be best to avoid the summer months, when heat exhaustion can be a real hazard.

Bus

Buses travel between Beirut and Lebanon's major towns; see Bus & Microbus (p290) in the Beirut chapter for details.

Car & Motorcycle

DRIVING LICENCE

Most foreign (or national) licences are acceptable in Lebanon. However, an International Driving Permit (IDP) is theoretically required, and therefore recommended.

FUEL & SPARE PARTS

Petrol, including unleaded, is readily available and reasonably priced (about LL1100 per litre for unleaded).

HIRE & INSURANCE

If your budget can cover renting a car, it is the best way to see the most beautiful areas of Lebanon. Cars can easily be rented in Lebanon and, if you shop around, for surprisingly reasonable prices. If there are three or four of you, it becomes a very feasible way to travel, even if you're on a tight budget. Most of the big rental agencies are in Beirut (see p291 for a selection of car-rental companies), although a few can be found in other cities. If you shop around, you can find a small two- or three-door car for as little as US\$40 per day with unlimited kilometres. A more luxurious model (Mercedes, for example) will be more like US\$250 per day. If you want a local driver, it will set you back an additional US\$30 to US\$60 per day.

All companies require a refundable deposit if you are not a credit-card holder, and offer free delivery and collection during working hours. The minimum age for drivers is 21 years, but some rental agencies will charge extra if you are under 25. You cannot take hire cars over the border into Syria.

LEBANON: ROAD DISTANCES (KM)

Amioun	---																		
Baalbek	97	---																	
Batroun	24	113	---																
Bcharré	37	60	53	---															
Beirut	82	83	58	111	---														
Beiteddine	125	88	97	154	43	---													
Byblos	47	119	223	75	36	78	---												
Hermel	117	62	133	80	146	150	155	---											
Jezzine	153	109	129	182	71	29	107	179	---										
Jounieh	61	101	37	90	21	64	14	167	92	---									
Marjeyun	185	115	160	175	102	85	138	185	56	124	---								
Sidon	123	124	99	152	41	42	77	187	30	62	61	---							
Tripoli	222	109	33	49	91	134	55	102	162	70	193	132	---						
Tyre	161	163	137	190	79	80	115	225	48	101	79	38	170	---					
Zahlé	133	36	105	96	47	52	79	99	73	65	78	88	138	126	---				
Amioun		Baalbek	Batroun	Bcharré	Beirut	Beiteddine	Byblos	Hermel	Jezzine	Jounieh	Marjeyun	Sidon	Tripoli	Tyre	Zahlé				

Beirut to Damascus = 127km

ROAD RULES

The first rule of driving in Lebanon is: forget the rules. Driving is on the right side of the road, unless the vehicles in front are not fast enough, in which case one drives on the left. The horn is used liberally because nobody uses their mirrors. In other words, anarchy rules: if you like aggressive driving, you'll do just fine. If you're a nervous driver, you might be too intimidated to nose your way out of the car-rental garage. If you do take the plunge (and it's surprisingly easy to unlearn the rules of the road), stay extremely alert, particularly on mountain roads, where cars hurtle around hairpin bends without a thought to oncoming traffic. The only other thing to remember is that you must stop at ALL military checkpoints. See the boxed text Checkpoint Etiquette (p370) for tips on getting through them with your dignity intact and your underwear unsoiled.

Hitching

Hitching is not very common in Lebanon – the tourists who venture off the service-taxi routes tend to either rent cars or private taxis. This may be to your advantage if you decide to try hitching a lift. The novelty of foreigners increases your chances of a lift – it helps if you look foreign. The usual precautions apply, though: never hitch alone if you are a woman. With many private cars instantly turning into taxis when they see a foreigner, there is a chance that the driver will expect payment. There does not seem to be a very polite way out of this situation, except to ask first if the driver is going to charge you for the ride. Travellers who decide to hitch should understand that they are taking a small but potentially serious risk. People who do choose to hitch will be safer if they travel in pairs and let someone know where they are planning to go.

Local Transport

BUS

Beirut and its environs now have two bus services, one operated by the privately owned Lebanese Commuting Company (LCC), the other by the state-owned

OCFTC. They both operate a hail and ride system and have a fare of LL750 for all except the most distant destinations (such as Byblos and far-off suburbs). For route details, see Public Transport in the Beirut chapter (p291).

SERVICE TAXI & TAXI

Most routes around towns and cities are covered by service taxi and you can hail one at any point on the route. The only way to find out if the driver is going where you want is to hail him and ask. If the driver is not going where you want he'll (and it's nearly always a 'he') respond by driving off. If he's going in your direction the acknowledgment to get in may be as imperceptible as a head gesture. You can get out at any point along their route by saying '*anzil huun*' (I get out here), to the driver. Occasionally when the drivers have an empty car they will try and charge you a private taxi fare. To let him know that you want to take the taxi as a service taxi, be sure to ask him '*servees?*'.

Taxis are usually an elderly Mercedes with red licence plates, generally with a taxi sign on the roof and smoke belching from both the interior and the exhaust. The fare for all routes around towns is LL1000, unless the driver feels that you should pay LL1500 for the pleasure of his company. The fare to outlying parts of towns is LL2000. Try and pay at the earliest opportunity during your trip. It's a good idea to keep a few LL1000 notes handy for these trips.

If you do wish to take a service taxi as a private taxi, make sure the driver understands exactly where you are going and negotiate a price before you get in. Prices vary according to destination, and the typical fares are listed in the Getting There and Away section of each destination. If you have a lot of sightseeing to do in out-of-the-way places, you can hire a taxi and driver by the day. Haggling skills come to the fore here, but expect to pay at least US\$50 per day plus tip.

You can order taxis by phone from a number of private companies; they'll take you anywhere in Lebanon and some also have services to Syria and Jordan. See p292 for contact numbers.

Health

Dr Caroline Evans

CONTENTS

Before You Go	405
Insurance	405
Recommended Vaccinations	405
Medical Checklist	406
Internet Resources	406
Further Reading	406
In Transit	406
Deep Vein Thrombosis (DVT)	406
Jet Lag & Motion Sickness	406
In Syria & Lebanon	407
Availability & Cost of Health Care	407
Infectious Diseases	407
Traveller's Diarrhoea	409
Environmental Hazards	409
Travelling with Children	410
Women's Health	410

Prevention is the key to staying healthy while travelling in the Middle East. Infectious diseases can and do occur in the region, but these are usually associated with poor living conditions and poverty and can be avoided with a few precautions. The most common reason for travellers needing medical help is as a result of accidents – cars are not always well maintained and poorly lit roads are littered with potholes. Medical facilities can be excellent in large cities, but in remoter areas they may be more basic.

BEFORE YOU GO

A little planning before departure, particularly for pre-existing illnesses, will save you a lot of trouble later. See your dentist before a long trip; carry a spare pair of contact lenses and glasses (and take your optical prescription with you); and carry a first-aid kit.

It's tempting to leave it all to the last minute – don't! Many vaccines don't ensure immunity for two weeks, so visit a doctor four to eight weeks before departure. Ask your doctor for an International Certificate of Vaccination (otherwise known as the yellow booklet), which will list all the vaccinations you've received. This is mandatory for

countries that require proof of yellow fever vaccination upon entry, but it's a good idea to carry it wherever you travel.

Travellers can register with the **International Association for Medical Advice to Travellers** (IMAT; www.iamat.org). Its website can help travellers to find a doctor with recognised training. Those heading off to very remote areas may like to do a first-aid course (Red Cross and St John Ambulance can help) or attend a remote medicine first-aid course such as the one offered by the **Royal Geographical Society** (www.rgs.org).

Bring medications in their original, clearly labelled, containers. A signed and dated letter from your physician describing your medical conditions and medications, including generic names, is also a good idea. If carrying syringes or needles, be sure to have a physician's letter documenting their medical necessity.

INSURANCE

Find out in advance if your insurance plan will make payments directly to providers or reimburse you later for overseas health expenditures (in many countries doctors expect payment in cash); it's also worth checking that your travel insurance will cover repatriation home or to better medical facilities elsewhere. Your insurance company may be able to locate the nearest source of medical help, or you can ask at your hotel.

In an emergency contact your embassy or consulate. Your travel insurance will not usually cover you for anything other than emergency dental treatment.

Not all insurance covers emergency air evacuation home or to a hospital in a major city, which may be the only way to get medical attention for a serious emergency.

RECOMMENDED VACCINATIONS

The World Health Organization recommends that all travellers, regardless of the region they are travelling in, should be covered for diphtheria, tetanus, measles, mumps, rubella and polio, as well as hepatitis B. While making preparations to travel, take the opportunity to ensure that all of your routine vaccination cover is complete. The

consequences of these diseases can be severe and outbreaks do occur in the Middle East.

MEDICAL CHECKLIST

Following is a list of items that you should consider packing in your medical kit.

- Antibiotics (if travelling off the beaten track)
- Antidiarrhoeal drugs (eg loperamide)
- Acetaminophen/paracetamol (Tylenol) or aspirin
- Anti-inflammatory drugs (eg ibuprofen)
- Antihistamines (for hay fever and allergic reactions)
- Antibacterial ointment (eg Bactroban) for cuts and abrasions
- Steroid cream or cortisone (for allergic rashes)
- Bandages, gauze and gauze rolls
- Adhesive or paper tape
- Scissors, safety pins and tweezers
- Thermometer
- Pocket knife
- DEET-containing insect repellent for the skin
- Permethrin-containing insect spray for clothing, tents and bed nets
- Sun block
- Oral rehydration salts
- Iodine tablets (for water purification)
- Syringes and sterile needles (if travelling to remote areas)

INTERNET RESOURCES

There is a wealth of travel health advice on the Internet. For further information, the website for **Lonely Planet** (www.lonelyplanet.com) is a good place to start. The **World Health Organization** (www.who.int/ith) publishes a superb book, *International Travel and Health*, which is revised annually and is available online at no cost. Another website of general interest is **MD Travel Health** (www.mdtravelhealth.com), which provides complete travel health recommendations for every country, updated daily, also at no cost.

The website for **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention** (www.cdc.gov) is undoubtedly a very useful source of traveller's health information.

FURTHER READING

Lonely Planet's *Travel With Children* is packed with useful information including pretrip planning, emergency first aid,

immunisation and disease information, and what to do if you get sick on the road. Other recommended references include *Traveller's Health* by Dr Richard Dawood (Oxford University Press), *International Travel Health Guide* by Stuart R Rose MD (Travel Medicine Inc) and *The Travellers' Good Health Guide* by Ted Lankester (Sheldon Press), an especially useful health guide for volunteers and long-term expatriates working in the Middle East.

IN TRANSIT

DEEP VEIN THROMBOSIS (DVT)

Deep vein thrombosis occurs when blood clots form in the legs during plane flights, chiefly because of prolonged immobility. The longer the flight, the greater the risk. Though most blood clots are reabsorbed uneventfully, some may break off and travel through the blood vessels to the lungs, where they may cause life-threatening complications.

The chief symptom of deep vein thrombosis is swelling or pain in the foot, ankle or calf, usually but not always on just one side. When a blood clot travels to the lungs, the clot may cause chest pain and difficulty breathing. Travellers with any of these symptoms should immediately seek medical attention.

To prevent the development of deep vein thrombosis on long flights you should walk about the cabin, perform isometric compressions of the leg muscles (ie contract the leg muscles while sitting), drink plenty of fluids, and avoid alcohol and tobacco.

JET LAG & MOTION SICKNESS

Jet lag is common when crossing more than five time zones; it results in insomnia, fatigue, malaise or nausea. To avoid jet lag try drinking plenty of fluids (nonalcoholic) and eating light meals. Upon arrival, seek exposure to natural sunlight and readjust your schedule (for meals, sleep etc) as soon as possible.

Antihistamines such as dimenhydrinate (Dramamine) and meclizine (Antivert, Bonine) are usually the first choice for treating motion sickness. Their main side-effect is drowsiness. A herbal alternative is ginger, which works like a charm for some people.

IN SYRIA & LEBANON

AVAILABILITY & COST OF HEALTH CARE

The health-care systems in the Middle East are varied. Reciprocal arrangements with countries rarely exist and you should be prepared to pay for all medical and dental treatment.

Medical care is not always readily available outside major cities. Medicine, and even sterile dressings or intravenous fluids, may need to be bought from a local pharmacy. Nursing care may be limited or rudimentary as this is something families and friends are expected to provide. The travel assistance provided by your insurance may be able to locate the nearest source of medical help, otherwise ask at your hotel. In an emergency contact your embassy or consulate.

Standards of dental care are variable and there is an increased risk of hepatitis B and HIV transmission via poorly sterilised equipment. Keep in mind that your travel insurance will not usually cover you for anything other than emergency dental treatment.

For minor illnesses such as diarrhoea, pharmacists can often provide valuable advice and sell over-the-counter medication. They can also offer advice on when more specialised help is needed.

Medical Facilities

DAMASCUS

Shami Hospital (Map p80; ☎ 373 5090-04; Sharia Jawaher an-Nehru) This private hospital has an excellent reputation among expats; many doctors speak English.

ALEPPO

Al Razi (City Hospital) (☎ 2676-000-02; Abou Firas Al Hamadani) Well-respected hospital close to the centre.

BEIRUT

American University of Beirut Hospital (Map p272; ☎ 01-350 000, 354 911; Rue Sourati) Considered one of the best hospitals in the Middle East, with English and French spoken.

INFECTIOUS DISEASES

Diphtheria

Diphtheria is spread through close respiratory contact. It causes a high temperature and severe sore throat. Sometimes a mem-

brane forms across the throat requiring a tracheostomy to prevent suffocation. Vaccination is recommended for those likely to be in close contact with the local population in infected areas.

The vaccine is given as an injection alone, or with tetanus, and lasts 10 years.

Hepatitis A

Hepatitis A is spread through contaminated food (particularly shellfish) and water. It causes jaundice, and although it is rarely fatal, can cause prolonged lethargy and delayed recovery. Symptoms include dark urine, a yellow colour to the whites of the eyes, fever and abdominal pain. Hepatitis A vaccine (Avaxim, VAQTA, Havrix) is given as an injection: a single dose will give protection for up to a year while a booster 12 months later will provide a subsequent 10 years of protection.

Hepatitis A and typhoid vaccines can also be given as a single dose vaccine, hepatyrix or viatim.

Hepatitis B

Infected blood, contaminated needles and sexual intercourse can all transmit hepatitis B. It can cause jaundice, and affects the liver, occasionally causing liver failure. All travellers should make this a routine vaccination. (Many countries now give hepatitis B vaccination as part of routine childhood vaccination.) The vaccine is given singly, or at the same time as the hepatitis A vaccine (hepatyrix).

A course will give protection for at least five years. It can be given over four weeks, or six months.

HIV

HIV is spread via infected blood and blood products, sexual intercourse with an infected partner and from an infected mother to her newborn child. It can be spread through 'blood to blood' contacts such as contaminated instruments during medical, dental, acupuncture and other body piercing procedures and sharing used intravenous needles.

Countries in the region that require a negative HIV test as a visa requirement for some categories of visas include the United Arab Emirates, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Qatar and Saudi Arabia.

Leishmaniasis

Spread through the bite of an infected sand fly, leishmaniasis, in its cutaneous form, can cause a slowly growing skin lump or ulcer. In its visceral form it may develop into a serious life-threatening fever usually accompanied by anaemia and weight loss. Infected dogs are also carriers of the infection. Sand-fly bites should be avoided whenever possible by using DEET-based repellents.

Malaria

The prevalence of malaria varies throughout the Middle East. Many areas are considered to be malaria-free, while others have seasonal risks. The risk of malaria is minimal in most cities, however check with your doctor if you are considering travelling to any rural areas. It is important to take anti-malarial tablets if the risk is significant. For up-to-date information about the risk of contracting malaria in a specific country, contact your local travel-health clinic.

Anyone who has travelled in a country where malaria is present should be aware of the symptoms of malaria. It is possible to contract malaria from a single bite from an infected mosquito. Malaria almost always starts with marked shivering, fever and sweating. Muscle pains, headache and vomiting are common. Symptoms may occur anywhere from a few days to three weeks after the infected mosquito bite. The illness can start while you are taking preventative tablets if they are not fully effective, and may also occur after you have finished taking your tablets.

Poliomyelitis

Polio is generally spread through contaminated food and water. It is one of the vaccines given in childhood and should be boosted every 10 years, either orally (a drop on the tongue) or as an injection. Polio may be carried without symptoms, although it can cause a transient fever and, in rare cases, potentially permanent muscle weakness or paralysis.

Rabies

Spread through bites or licks on broken skin from an infected animal, rabies is fatal. Animal handlers should be vaccinated, as should those travelling to remote areas where a reliable source of post-bite vaccine is not

available within 24 hours. Three injections are needed over a month. If you are infected and you have not been vaccinated, you will need a course of five injections starting within 24 hours or as soon as possible after the injury. Vaccination does not provide you with immunity, it merely buys you more time to seek appropriate medical help.

Rift Valley Fever

This haemorrhagic fever is spread through blood or blood products, including those from infected animals. It causes a 'flu-like' illness with fever, joint pains and occasionally more serious complications. Complete recovery is possible.

Schistosomiasis

Otherwise known as bilharzia, this is spread through the fresh water snail. It causes infection of the bowel and bladder, often with bleeding. It is caused by a fluke and is contracted through the skin from water contaminated with human urine or faeces. Paddling or swimming in suspect fresh water lakes or slow-running rivers should be avoided. There may be no symptoms. Possible symptoms include a transient fever and rash, and advanced cases of bilharzia may cause blood in the stool or in the urine. A blood test can detect antibodies if you have been exposed and treatment is then possible in specialist travel or infectious disease clinics.

Tuberculosis

Tuberculosis (TB) is spread through close respiratory contact and occasionally through infected milk or milk products. BCG vaccine is recommended for those likely to be mixing closely with the local population. It is more important for those visiting family or planning on a long stay, and those employed as teachers and health-care workers. TB can be asymptomatic, although symptoms can include a cough, weight loss or fever months or even years after exposure. An X-ray is the best way to confirm if you have TB. BCG gives a moderate degree of protection against TB. It causes a small permanent scar at the site of injection, and is usually only given in specialised chest clinics. As it's a live vaccine it should not be given to pregnant women or immunocompromised individuals. The BCG vaccine is not available in all countries.

Typhoid

This is spread through food or water that has been contaminated by infected human faeces. The first symptom is usually fever or a pink rash on the abdomen. Septicaemia (blood poisoning) may also occur. Typhoid vaccine (typhim Vi, typherix) will give protection for three years. In some countries, the oral vaccine Vivotif is also available.

Yellow Fever

A yellow fever vaccination is not required for any areas of the Middle East. However, the mosquito that spreads yellow fever has been known to be present in some parts of the Middle East. It is important to consult your local travel-health clinic as part of your predeparture plans for the latest details. Any travellers from a yellow fever endemic area *will* need to show proof of vaccination against yellow fever before entry into Syria and Lebanon. This normally applies to travellers arriving directly from an infected country, or travellers who have been in an infected country during the last 10 days. However it's a good idea to carry a certificate if you have been in an infected country any time in the last month, to avoid any possible difficulties with immigration. There is always the possibility that without an up-to-date certificate you will be vaccinated and detained in isolation at your port of arrival for up to 10 days, or even repatriated. The yellow fever vaccination must be given at a designated clinic, and is valid for 10 years. It is a live vaccine and must not be given to immunocompromised or pregnant travellers.

TRAVELLER'S DIARRHOEA

To prevent diarrhoea, avoid tap water unless it has been boiled, filtered or chemically disinfected (iodine tablets). Eat only fresh fruits or vegetables if cooked, or if you have peeled them yourself, and avoid dairy products that might contain unpasteurised milk. Buffet meals are risky – food should be piping hot; meals freshly cooked in front of you in a busy restaurant are more likely to be safe.

If you develop diarrhoea, be sure to drink plenty of fluids, preferably an oral rehydration solution containing lots of salt and sugar. A few loose stools don't require treatment but, if you start having more than four or five loose stools a day, you

should start taking an antibiotic (usually a quinolone drug) and an anti-diarrhoeal agent (such as loperamide). If diarrhoea is bloody, persists for more than 72 hours, or is accompanied by fever, shaking chills or severe abdominal pain, you should seek medical attention.

ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARDS Heat Illness

Heat exhaustion occurs following heavy sweating and excessive fluid loss with inadequate replacement of fluids and salt. This is particularly common in hot climates when taking unaccustomed exercise before full acclimatisation. Symptoms include headache, dizziness and tiredness. Dehydration is already happening by the time you feel thirsty.

A good indicator is the colour of your urine – aim to drink enough water to keep it pale and diluted. The treatment for heat exhaustion is fluid replacement with water or fruit juice or both, and cooling by cold water and fans. Treat salt loss with salty fluids such as soup or broth, and add a little more table salt to foods than usual.

Heatstroke is much more serious than heat exhaustion. This occurs when the body's heat-regulating mechanism breaks down. An excessive rise in body temperature leads to sweating ceasing, irrational and hyperactive behaviour and eventually loss of consciousness and death. Rapid cooling by spraying the body with water and fanning is an ideal treatment. Emergency fluid and electrolyte replacement by intravenous drip is usually also required.

Insect Bites & Stings

Mosquitoes may not carry malaria, but can still cause irritation and infected bites. Using DEET-based insect repellents will prevent bites. Mosquitoes also spread dengue fever.

Bees and wasps only cause real problems to those with a severe allergy (anaphylaxis). If you have a severe allergy to bee or wasp stings you should carry an adrenaline injection or something similar.

Sand flies are located around Mediterranean beaches. They usually only cause a nasty itchy bite but can carry a rare skin disorder called cutaneous leishmaniasis (see p408). Bites may be prevented by using DEET-based repellents.

Scorpions are frequently found in arid or dry climates. They can cause a painful bite which is rarely life threatening.

Bed bugs are often found in hostels and cheap hotels. They lead to very itchy, lumpy bites. Spraying the mattress with an appropriate insect killer will do a good job of getting rid of them.

Scabies are also frequently found in cheap accommodation. These tiny mites live in the skin, particularly between the fingers. They cause an intensely itchy rash. Scabies is easily treated with lotion available from pharmacies; people you come into contact with also need treating to avoid spreading scabies.

Snake Bites

Do not walk barefoot or stick your hand into holes or cracks. Half of those bitten by venomous snakes are not actually injected with poison (envenomed).

If bitten by a snake, do not panic. Immobilise the bitten limb with a splint (eg a stick) and apply a bandage over the site, firm pressure, similar to a bandage over a sprain. Do not apply a tourniquet, or cut or suck the bite.

Get the victim to medical help as soon as possible so that antivenin can be given if necessary.

Water

Tap water is not safe to drink in the Middle East. Stick to bottled water or boil water for 10 minutes, or use water purification tablets or a filter. Do not drink water from rivers or lakes, this may contain bacteria or viruses that can cause diarrhoea or vomiting.

TRAVELLING WITH CHILDREN

All travellers with children should know how to treat minor ailments and when to seek medical treatment. Make sure the children are up to date with routine vaccinations, and discuss possible travel vaccines well before departure as some vaccines are not suitable for children aged under one year old.

In hot, moist climates any wound or break in the skin may lead to infection. The area should be cleaned and then kept dry and clean. Remember to avoid contaminated food and water. If your child is vomiting or experiencing diarrhoea, lost fluid and salts must be replaced. It may

be helpful to take rehydration powders for reconstituting with boiled water. Ask your doctor about this.

Encourage children to avoid dogs or other mammals because of the risk of rabies and other diseases. Any bite, scratch or lick from a warm-blooded, furry animal should immediately be thoroughly cleaned. If there is any possibility that the animal is infected with rabies, seek immediate medical assistance.

WOMEN'S HEALTH

Emotional stress, exhaustion and travelling through different time zones can all contribute to an upset in the menstrual pattern. If using oral contraceptives, remember some antibiotics, diarrhoea and vomiting can stop the pill from working and lead to the risk of pregnancy – remember to take condoms with you just in case. Condoms should be kept in a cool dry place or they may crack.

Emergency contraception is most effective if taken within 24 hours of unprotected sex. The **International Planned Parenthood Federation** (www.ippf.org) can advise you on the availability of contraception in different countries.

Tampons and sanitary towels are not always available outside major cities in the Middle East.

Travelling during pregnancy is usually possible but there are important things to consider. Have a medical check-up before embarking on your trip. The most risky times for travel are during the first 12 weeks of pregnancy, when miscarriage is most likely, and after 30 weeks, when complications such as high blood pressure and premature delivery can occur. Most airlines will not accept a traveller after 28 to 32 weeks of pregnancy, and long-haul flights in the later stages can be very uncomfortable. Antenatal facilities vary greatly between countries in the Middle East and you should think carefully before travelling to a country with poor medical facilities or where there are major cultural and language differences from home. Take written records of the pregnancy including details of your blood group in case you need medical attention while away. Ensure your insurance policy covers pregnancy, delivery and postnatal care, but remember insurance policies are only as good as the facilities available.

Language

CONTENTS

Arabic of the Levant	411
Pronunciation	411
Tricky Sounds	413
Transliteration	413
Accommodation	413
Conversation & Essentials	413
Directions	414
Health	415
Emergencies	415
Language Difficulties	415
Numbers	415
Paperwork	416
Shopping & Services	416
Time & Date	416
Transport	417
Travel with Children	418

Arabic is the official language of both Syria and Lebanon. Though French is also widely spoken, and English is rapidly gaining ground, any effort to communicate in Arabic will be well rewarded. No matter how bad your pronunciation or grammar might be, you'll often get the response (usually with a big smile): 'Ah, you speak Arabic very well!'. Greeting officials, who are often less than helpful, with *salaam alaykum* (peace be upon you), often works wonders.

Learning a few basics for day-to-day travelling doesn't take long at all, but to master the complexities of Arabic would take years of consistent study. The whole issue is complicated by the differences between Classical Arabic (*fus-ha*), its modern descendant MSA (Modern Standard Arabic) and regional dialects. The classical tongue is the language of the Quran and Arabic poetry of centuries past. For long it remained static, but in order to survive it had to adapt to change, and the result is more or less MSA, the common language of the press, radio and educated discourse. It is as close to a *lingua franca* (common language) as the Arab world comes, and is generally understood – if not always well spoken – across the Arab world.

For most foreigners trying to learn Arabic, the most frustrating aspect is the spoken language (wherever you are), as there's virtually no written material to refer to for back up. Acquisition of MSA is a long-term investment, and an esoteric argument flows back and forth about the relative merits of learning MSA first (and so perhaps having to wait some time before being able to communicate adequately with people in the street) or learning a dialect. All this will give you an inkling of why so few non-Arabs, or non-Muslims, develop the urge to embark on a study of the language.

ARABIC OF THE LEVANT

The Arabic dialects of Syria and Lebanon belong to a group known as Levantine Arabic. As it happens, these spoken varieties are not too distant from MSA, but in any case, the words and phrases we offer in this language guide reflect local speech, with any significant differences between the two dialects marked either (Leb) or (Syr). For a more comprehensive guide to Levantine Arabic and the other principal languages and Arabic dialects of the Middle East, get a copy of Lonely Planet's compact but comprehensive *Middle East Phrasebook*.

PRONUNCIATION

Pronunciation of Arabic in any of its guises can be tongue-tying for someone unfamiliar with the intonation and combination of sounds. Pronounce the transliterated words slowly and clearly.

This language guide should help, but bear in mind that the myriad rules governing pronunciation and vowel use are too extensive to be covered here.

Vowels

Technically, there are three long and three short vowels in Arabic. The reality is a little different, with local dialect and varying consonant combinations affecting their pronunciation. This is the case throughout the Arabic-speaking world. More like five short and five long vowels can be identified; in this guide we use all but the long 'o' (as in 'or').

THE STANDARD ARABIC ALPHABET

Final	Medial	Initial	Alone	Transliteration	Pronunciation
ا		ا	ا	aa	as in 'father'
ب	ب	ب	ب	b	as in 'bet'
ت	ت	ت	ت	t	as in 'ten'
ث	ث	ث	ث	th	as in 'thin'
ج	ج	ج	ج	j	as in 'jet'
ح	ح	ح	ح	H	a strongly whispered 'h', like a sigh of relief
خ	خ	خ	خ	kh	as the 'ch' in Scottish <i>loch</i>
د	د	د	د	d	as in 'dim'
ذ	ذ	ذ	ذ	dh	as the 'th' in 'this'; also as d or z
ر	ر	ر	ر	r	a rolled 'r', as in the Spanish word <i>caro</i>
ز	ز	ز	ز	z	as in 'zip'
س	س	س	س	s	as in 'so', never as in 'wisdom'
ش	ش	ش	ش	sh	as in 'ship'
ص	ص	ص	ص	ṣ	emphatic 's'
ض	ض	ض	ض	ḍ	emphatic 'd'
ط	ط	ط	ط	ṭ	emphatic 't'
ظ	ظ	ظ	ظ	ẓ	emphatic 'z'
ع	ع	ع	ع	'	the Arabic letter 'ayn'; pronounce as a glottal stop – like the closing of the throat before saying 'Oh-oh!' (see Tricky Sounds, opposite)
غ	غ	غ	غ	gh	a guttural sound like Parisian 'r'
ف	ف	ف	ف	f	as in 'far'
ق	ق	ق	ق	q	a strongly guttural 'k' sound; also often pronounced as a glottal stop
ك	ك	ك	ك	k	as in 'king'
ل	ل	ل	ل	l	as in 'lamb'
م	م	م	م	m	as in 'me'
ن	ن	ن	ن	n	as in 'name'
ه	ه	ه	ه	h	as in 'ham'
و	و	و	و	w	as in 'wet'; or
oo				oo	long, as in 'food'; or
ow				ow	as in 'how'
ي	ي	ي	ي	y	as in 'yes'; or
ee				ee	as in 'beer', only softer; or
ai/ay				ai/ay	as in 'aisle'/as the 'ay' in 'day'

Vowels Not all Arabic vowel sounds are represented in the alphabet. For more information on the vowel sounds used in this language guide, see Pronunciation on p411.

Emphatic Consonants To simplify the transliteration system used in this book, the emphatic consonants have not been included.

a	as in 'had'
aa	as the 'a' in 'father'
e	short, as in 'bet'; long, as in 'there'
i	as in 'hit'
ee	as in 'beer', only softer
o	as in 'hot'
u	as in 'put'
oo	as in 'food'

Consonants

Pronunciation for all Arabic consonants is covered in the alphabet table opposite. Note that when double consonants occur in transliterations, both are pronounced. For example, *al-hammam* (toilet), is pronounced 'al-ham-mam'.

TRICKY SOUNDS

Arabic has two sounds that are very tricky for non-Arabs to produce: the 'ayn and the glottal stop. The letter 'ayn represents a sound with no English equivalent that comes even close. It is similar to the glottal stop (which is not actually represented in the alphabet), but the muscles at the back of the throat are gagged more forcefully and air is released – it has been described as the sound of someone being strangled. In many transliteration systems 'ayn is represented by an opening quotation mark, and the glottal stop by a closing quotation mark. To make the transliterations in this language guide (and throughout the rest of the book) easier to use, we have not distinguished between the glottal stop and the 'ayn, using the closing quotation mark to represent both sounds. You should find that Arabic speakers will still understand you.

TRANSLITERATION

It's worth noting here that transliteration from the Arabic script into English – or any other language for that matter – is at best an approximate science.

The presence of sounds unknown in European languages and the fact that the script is 'incomplete' (most vowels are not written) combine to make it nearly impossible to settle on one universally accepted method of transliteration. A wide variety of spellings is therefore possible for words when they appear in Latin script – and that goes for places and people's names as well.

The whole thing is further complicated by the wide variety of dialects and influences, and the problems Arabs themselves

often have in deciding on an appropriate spelling. In Jordan, for example (where English is likely to play a part), the transliteration of the same Arabic words may be very different from what would be rendered in Lebanon and Syria, where French is a key factor. Not even the most venerable of western Arabists have been able to come up with a satisfactory solution.

While striving to reflect the language as closely as possible and aiming at consistency, this book generally anglicises place, street and hotel names and the like the way the locals have done. Don't be surprised if you come across several versions of the same thing.

ACCOMMODATION

I'd like to book a ...	<i>biddee ehjuz ...</i>
Do you have a ...?	<i>fi ...?</i>
(cheap) room	<i>ghurfa (rkheesa)</i>
single room	<i>ghurfa mufrada</i>
double room	<i>ghurfa bi sareerayn</i>

for one night	<i>li layli waHde</i>
for two nights	<i>layltayn</i>
May I see it?	<i>mumkin shoofa?</i>
It's very noisy/dirty.	<i>kteeer dajeh/wuskha</i>
How much is it per person?	<i>'addaysh li kul waHid?</i>

How much is it per night? *'addaysh bel layli?*

Where is the bathroom? *wayn al-Hammam?*

We're leaving today. *niHna musafireen al-youm*

address	<i>al-'anwaan</i>
air-conditioning	<i>kondishon/mookayif</i>
blanket	<i>al-bataaniyya/al-Hrem</i>
camp site	<i>mukhayam</i>
electricity	<i>kahraba</i>
hotel	<i>funduq/otel</i>
hot water	<i>mai sukhni (Leb)</i> <i>mai saakhina (Sy)</i>
key	<i>al-miftaH</i>
manager	<i>al-mudeer</i>
shower	<i>doosh</i>
soap	<i>saboon</i>
toilet	<i>twalet (also bet al-mai in Syria)</i>

CONVERSATION & ESSENTIALS

Arabs place great importance on civility and it's rare to see any interaction between people that doesn't begin with profuse greetings, enquiries into the other's health and other niceties.

Arabic greetings are more formal than in English and there is a reciprocal response to each. These sometimes vary slightly, depending on whether you're addressing a man or a woman. A simple encounter can become a drawn-out affair, with neither side wanting to be the one to put a halt to the stream of greetings and well-wishing. As an *ajnabi* (foreigner), you're not expected to know all the ins and outs, but if you come up with the right expression at the appropriate moment they'll love it.

The most common greeting is *salaam alaykum* (peace be upon you), to which the correct reply is *wa alaykum as-salaam* (and upon you be peace). If you get invited to a birthday celebration or are around for any of the big holidays, the common greeting is *kul sana wa intum bikher* (I wish you well for the coming year).

After having a bath or shower, you will often hear people say to you *na'iman*, which roughly means 'heavenly' and boils down to an observation along the lines of 'nice and clean now, eh'.

Arrival in one piece is always something to be grateful for. Passengers will often be greeted with *il-Hamdu lillah al as-salaama* – 'thank God for your safe arrival'.

Hi.	<i>marHaba</i>
Hi. (response)	<i>marHabtain</i>
Hello.	<i>ahlan wa sahan</i> or just <i>ahlan</i> (Welcome)
Hello. (response)	<i>ahlan beek/i</i> (m/f)

It's an important custom in Lebanon and Syria to ask after a person's or their family's health when greeting, eg *kayf es-saHa?* (How is your health?), *kayf il'ayli?* (How is the family?). The response is *bikher il-Hamdu lillah*, (Fine, thank you).

Goodbye.	<i>ma'a salaama/Allah ma'ak</i>
Good morning.	<i>sabaH al-khayr</i>
Good morning. (response)	<i>sabaH 'an-noor</i>
Good evening.	<i>masa' al-khayr</i>
Good evening. (response)	<i>masa 'an-noor</i>
Good night.	<i>tisbaH 'ala khayr</i>
Good night. (response)	<i>wa inta min ahlu</i>

Yes.	<i>aiwa/na'am</i>
Yeah.	<i>ay</i>

No.	<i>la</i>
Please. (request)	<i>min fadlak/fadleek</i> (m/f) or <i>iza bitreed/bitreed</i> (m/f) (Leb)
Please. (polite)	<i>law samaHt/samaHti</i> (m/f)
Please. (come in)	<i>tafadall/tafadali</i> (m/f)/ <i>tafaddaloo</i> (pl)
Thank you.	<i>shukran</i>
Thank you very much.	<i>shukran kteer/shukran jazeelan</i>
You're welcome.	<i>'afwan</i> or <i>tikram/tikrami</i> (m/f)
One moment, please.	<i>lahza min fadlak/i</i> (m/f)
Pardon/Excuse me.	<i>'afwan</i>
Sorry!	<i>aasif/aasifa!</i> (m/f)
No problem.	<i>mafi mushkili/moo mushkila</i>
Never mind.	<i>ma'alesh</i>
Just a moment.	<i>lahza</i>
Congratulations!	<i>mabrouk!</i>

Questions like 'Is the bus coming?' or 'Will the bank be open later?' generally elicit the response: *in sha' Allah* – 'God willing' – an expression you'll hear over and over again. Another common one is *ma sha' Allah* – 'God's will be done' – sometimes a useful answer to probing questions about why you're not married yet.

How are you?	<i>kayf Haalak/Haalik?</i> (m/f)
How're you doing?	<i>kayfak/kayfik?</i> (m/f)
Fine thank you.	<i>bikher il-Hamdu lillah</i>
What's your name?	<i>shu-ismak/shu-ismik?</i> (m/f)
My name is ...	<i>ismi ...</i>
Pleased to meet you. (when departing)	<i>tsharrafna/fursa sa'ida</i> (Leb/Syr)
Nice to meet you. (lit: you honour us)	<i>tasharrafna</i>
Where are you from?	<i>min wayn inta/inti?</i> (m/f)
I'm from ...	<i>ana min ...</i>
Do you like ...?	<i>inta/inti bitHeb ...?</i> (m/f)
I like ...	<i>ana bHeb ...</i>
I don't like ...	<i>ana ma bHeb ...</i>

I	<i>ana</i>
you	<i>inta/inti</i> (m/f)
he	<i>huwa</i>
she	<i>hiyya</i>
we	<i>niHna</i>
you	<i>into</i>
they	<i>homm</i>

DIRECTIONS

How do I get to ...?	<i>keef boosal ala ...?</i>
Can you show me (on the map)?	<i>mumkin tfarjeeni ('ala al-khareeta)?</i>

SIGNS

Entrance	مدخل
Exit	خروج
Open	مفتوح
Closed	مغلق
Prohibited	ممنوع
Information	معلومات
Hospital	مستشفى
Police	شرطة
Men's Toilet	حمام للرجال
Women's Toilet	حمام للنساء

How many kilometres?	<i>kam kilometre?</i>
What street is this?	<i>shoo Hash-shari hayda?</i> (Leb) <i>shoo Hal shanki had?</i> (Syr) <i>'ala yasaar/shimaal</i> <i>'ala yameen</i> <i>muqaabil</i> <i>dughri</i> <i>tanee mafraq</i> <i>min hon</i> <i>hon/honeek</i> <i>amaam/iddaam</i> <i>qareeb</i> <i>ba'eed</i> <i>shimaal</i> <i>janub</i> <i>sharq</i> <i>gharb</i>
on the left opposite straight ahead at the next corner this way here/there in front of near far north south east west	

HEALTH

I'm ill.	<i>ana maareed/a</i> (m/f)
My friend is ill.	<i>sadeeqi maareed</i> (m) <i>sadeeqati maareeda</i> (f) <i>beeyujani hon</i>
It hurts here.	
I'm ...	<i>andee ...</i>
asthmatic	<i>azmitrabo</i>
diabetic	<i>sukkari</i>
epileptic	<i>saraa/alsaa'a</i>
I'm allergic ...	<i>andee Hasasiyya ...</i>
to antibiotics	<i>min al-mudad alHayawi</i>
to aspirin	<i>min al-aspireen</i>
to penicillin	<i>min al-binisileen</i>
to bees	<i>min al-naHl</i>
to nuts	<i>min al-mukassarat</i>

antiseptic	<i>mutahhi</i>
aspirin	<i>aspireen/aspro</i> (brand name)
Band-Aids	<i>plaster</i>

EMERGENCIES

Help me!	<i>saa'idoonee!</i>
I'm sick.	<i>ana mareed/mareeda</i> (m/f)
Call the police!	<i>ittusil bil poles!</i> (Leb) <i>ittusil bil shurta!</i> (Syr) <i>duktoor/tabeeb</i> <i>al-mustash-fa</i> <i>al-poles/ash-shurta</i> (Leb/Syr) <i>imsheel/rouh min hoon!</i> <i>aayb!</i>
doctor hospital	
police	
Go away!	
Shame (on you)! (said by woman)	

condoms	<i>kaboot</i>
contraceptive	<i>waseela lee mana' al-Ham</i>
diarrhoea	<i>is-haal</i>
fever	<i>Harara</i>
headache	<i>wajaa-ras</i>
hospital	<i>mustashfa</i>
medicine	<i>dawa</i>
pregnant	<i>Hamel</i>
prescription	<i>wasfa/rashetta</i>
sanitary napkins	<i>fuwat saHiyya</i>
stomachache	<i>wajaa fil battu</i>
sunblock cream	<i>krem waki min ashilt al-shams</i>
tampons	<i>kotex</i> (brand name)

LANGUAGE DIFFICULTIES

Do you speak English?	<i>bitiHki ingleezi?</i>
I understand.	<i>ana afham</i>
I don't understand.	<i>ana ma bifham</i>
I speak ...	<i>ana baHki ...</i>
English	<i>ingleezi</i>
French	<i>faransi</i>
German	<i>almaani</i>

I speak a little Arabic.	<i>ana baHki arabi shway</i>
I don't speak Arabic.	<i>ana ma beHki arabi</i>
I want an interpreter.	<i>biddee mutarjem</i>
Could you write it down, please?	<i>mumkin tiktabhu, min fadlak?</i>
How do you say ... in Arabic?	<i>kayf t'ul ... bil'arabi?</i>

NUMBERS

0	<i>sifr</i>	٠
1	<i>waHid</i>	١
2	<i>itnayn/tintayn</i>	٢
3	<i>talaata</i>	٣
4	<i>arba'a</i>	٤
5	<i>khamasa</i>	٥
6	<i>sitta</i>	٦
7	<i>saba'a</i>	٧

8	tamanya	ا
9	tis'a	ا
10	'ashara	ا .
11	yeedaa'sh	ا .
12	yeetnaa'sh	ا .
13	talaatash	ا .
14	arbatash	ا .
15	khamastash	ا .
16	sittash	ا .
17	sabatash	ا .
18	tamantash	ا .
19	tasatash	ا .
20	'ashreen	ا .
21	wāHid wa 'ashreen	ا .
22	itnayn wa 'ashreen	ا .
30	talaateen	ا .
40	arba'een	ا .
50	khamseen	ا .
60	sitteen	ا .
70	saba'een	ا .
80	tamaneen	ا .
90	tis'een	ا .
100	miyya (meet before a noun)	ا . .
200	miyyatayn	ا . .
1000	'alf	ا . . .
2000	'alfayn	ا . . .
3000	talaat-alf	ا . . .

PAPERWORK

date of birth	tareekh al-meelad/-wilaada
name	al-ism
nationality	al-jenseeya
passport	jawaz al-safar (or simply paspor)
permit	tasriH
place of birth	makan al-meelad/-wilaada
visa	visa/ta'shira

SHOPPING & SERVICES

I'm looking for ...	ana abHath ... aa'n
Where is the ...?	wayn/fayn ...?

bank	al-bank
beach	ash-shaati'/al-plaaj/al-baHr
chemist/pharmacy	as-sayidiliyya (Syr) al-farmashiya (Leb)

city/town	al-medeena
city centre	markaz al-medeena
customs	al-jumruk
entrance	al-dukhoof/al-madkhal
exchange office	al-masref/al-saraf
exit	al-khurooj
hotel	al-funduq/al-otel
information desk	isti'laamaat
laundry	al ghaseel
market	al-sooq

mosque	al-jaami'/al-masjid
museum	al-matHaf
newsagents	al-maktaba
old city	al-medeena al-qadeema/ al-medeena l'ateeqa
passport & immigration office	maktab al-jawazaat wa al-hijra
police	ash-shurta
post office	maktab al-bareed
restaurant	al-mata'am
telephone office	maktab at-telefon/ maktab al-haalaf
temple	al-ma'abad
tourist office	maktab al-siyaHa

I want to change ...	baddee sarref ...
money	masaari
travellers cheques	sheeket siyaHiyya

What time does it open?	emta byeftaH?
What time does it close?	emta bi sakkir?

I'd like to make a telephone call.	fini talfen 'omol maarooF (Leb) mumkin talfen min fadlak(Syr)
------------------------------------	--

Where can I buy ...?	wayn/fayn feeni eshtiree ...?
What is this?	shu hayda/hada? (Leb/Syr)
How much?	addaysh? (also bikam in Syr)
How many?	kim waHid?
How much is it?	bi addaysh?
That's too expensive.	hayda kteer ghaalee (Leb) hada ghalee khetere (Syr)
Is there ...?	fee ...?
There isn't (any).	ma fee
May I look at it?	feeni etallaa 'alaya? (Leb) mumkin shoof? (Syr)

big/bigger	kbeer/akbar
cheap	rkhees
cheaper	arkhas
closed	msakkar
expensive	ghaali
money	al-fuloos/al-masaari
open	maftuH
small/smaller	sagheer/asghar

TIME & DATE

What's the time?	addaysh essa'aa?
When?	emta?
now	halla'
after	b'adayn
on time	al wakat
early	bakkeer
late	ma'qar
daily	kil youm

today	al-youm
tomorrow	bukra
day after tomorrow	ba'ad bukra
yesterday	imbaariH
minute	dageeqa
hour	saa'a
day	youm
week	usboo'
month	shahr
year	sana
morning	soubeH
afternoon	ba'ad deher
evening	massa
night	layl

Monday	al-tenayn
Tuesday	at-talaata
Wednesday	al-arba'a
Thursday	al-khamees
Friday	al-jum'a
Saturday	as-sabt
Sunday	al-aHd

The Western Calendar Months

The Islamic year has 12 lunar months and is 11 days shorter than the Western (Gregorian) calendar, so important Muslim dates will occur 11 days earlier each (Western) year.

There are two Gregorian calendars in use in the Arab world. In Egypt and westwards, the months have virtually the same names as in English (January is *yanaayir*, October is *octobir* and so on), but in Lebanon and eastwards, the names are quite different. Talking about, say, June as 'month six' is the easiest solution, but for the sake of completeness, the months from January are:

January	kanoon ath-thani
February	shubaat
March	azaar
April	nisaan
May	ayyaar
June	Huzayraan
July	tammooz
August	'aab
September	aylool
October	tishreen al-awal
November	tishreen ath-thani
December	kaanoon al-awal

The Hejira Calendar Months

1st	MoHarram
2nd	Safar

3rd	Rabi' al-Awal
4th	Rabay ath-Thaani
5th	Jumaada al-Awal
6th	Jumaada al-Akhira
7th	Rajab
8th	Shaban
9th	Ramadan
10th	Shawwal
11th	Zuul-Qeda
12th	Zuul-Hijja

TRANSPORT

Public Transport

Where is ...?	wayn/fayn ...?
airport	al-mataar
bus station	maHattat al-baas/ maHattat al-karaj
ticket office	maktab at-tazaakar
train station	maHattat al-qitaar
What time does ... leave/arrive?	ay saa'a biyyitla/'biyusal ...?
boat/ferry (small) boat	al-markib/as-safeena
bus	ash-shakhtura
plane	al-baas
train	al-teeyara
	al-qitaar

Which bus goes to ...?	aya baas biyruH 'ala ...?
I want to go to ...	ana badeh ruH ala ...
Does this bus go to ...?	hal-baas biyruH 'ala ...?
How many buses per day go to ...?	kam baas biyruH ben nahar ...?
How long does the trip take?	kam sa'a ar-riHla?
Please tell me when we get to ...	'umal ma'arooF illee lamma noosal la ...
Stop here, please.	wa'if hoon 'umal ma'arooF
Please wait for me.	'umal ma'arooF unturnee (Leb) 'umal ma'arooF istanna (Syr)
May I sit here?	mumkin a'ood hoon?
May we sit here?	mumkin ni'ood hoon?

1st class	daraja oola
2nd class	daraja taaniya
ticket	at-tazaakar
to/from	ila/min

Private Transport

I'd like to hire a ...	biddee esta'jer ...
Where can I hire a ...?	wayn/fayn feeni esta'jer ...?
bicycle	bisklet
camel	jamal
car	sayyaara

donkey	<i>Hmaar</i>
4WD	<i>jeep</i>
horse	<i>Hsaan</i>
motorcycle	<i>motosikl</i>
tour guide	<i>al-dalee as-siyaaHi/ al-murshid as-siyaaHi</i>

Is this the road to ...?

Hal Haza al-tareeq eela ...?

Where's a service station?

wayn/fayn maHaltet al-benzeen?

Please fill it up.

min fadlak (emla/abee) Ha

I'd like (30) litres.

biddee talaateen leeter

diesel	<i>deezel</i>
leaded petrol	<i>benzeen bee rasa</i>
unleaded petrol	<i>benzeen beedoon raras</i>

(How long) Can I park here?

(kam sa'a) mumkin aas-f hon?

Where do I pay?

fayn/wayn mumkin an add'aa?

I need a mechanic.

bidee mekaneesyan

The car/motorbike has broken down (at ...)

al-sayyaara/-mutusikl it'atlit ('an ...)

The car/motorbike won't start.

al-sayyaara/-mutusikl ma bit door

I have a flat tyre.

nzel al-doolab

I've run out of petrol.

mafi benzeen or al-benzeen khalas

I've had an accident.

aamalt hads

TRAVEL WITH CHILDREN

Is there a/an ...? *fee ...?*

I need a/an *biddee ...*

car baby seat *kursee sayyaara leel bebe'*

disposable nappies *pamperz (brand name)*

nappies/diapers *Ha fa daat*

formula (baby's milk) *Haleeb bebe'*

highchair *kursee atfaal*

potty *muneeyai*

stroller *arabeyet atfaal*

Do you mind if I breastfeed here?

mumkin aradda hon?

Are children allowed?

Hal yousmah leel atfaal?



Also available from Lonely Planet:
Middle East Phrasebook

Glossary

Abbasids – Baghdad-based successor dynasty to the *Umayyads*. It ruled from AD 750 until the sacking of Baghdad by the Mongols in 1258.

abd – servant of

abeyya – woman's cloak

ablaq – alternating courses of coloured stone

abu – father, saint

acropolis – citadel of an ancient city (usually Greek)

ain – well, spring

al-muderiyya – town hall

Amal – Shiite militia turned political party

Amorites – Western Semitic people who emerged from the Syrian deserts around 2000 BC and influenced life in the cities of Mesopotamia and Phoenicia until 1600 BC

apse – semicircular recess for the altar in a church

Arab League – league of 22 independent Arab states,

formed in 1945, to further cultural, economic, military, political and social cooperation between the states

architrave – the lowest division of the *entablature*, extending from column to column. Also the moulded frame around a door or window.

Arz ar-Rab – ‘Cedars of the Lord’. The local name for a small remaining group of cedar trees near Bcharré.

AUB – American University of Beirut

Ayyubids – an Egyptian-based dynasty founded by *Saladin*

bab (s), abwab (pl) – gate, door

bahr – river

baksheesh – tip

baladi – local, rural

beit – house

bey – term of respect

Bilad ish-Sham – the area of modern Syria, Lebanon and Palestine

bir – spring, well

birket – lake

burj – tower

caliph – Islamic ruler. The spiritual and temporal leader of the Sunni Muslim community, or ‘umma’ (note the institution of the caliphate was abolished in 1924). Also spelt ‘khalif’.

capital – the top, decorated part of a column

caravanserai – see *khan*

cardo maximus – the main north–south street of a Roman-era town

cella – inner part of temple that houses the statue of a god or goddess

centrale – government phone office

chador – one-piece head-to-toe black garment worn by Muslim women

chai – tea

Chalcolithic – period between the Neolithic and Bronze Ages, in which there was an increase in urbanisation and trade and the occasional use of copper

cornice – the upper portion of the *entablature* in classical or Renaissance architecture

cuneiform – wedge-shaped characters of several different languages, including Babylonian

dabke – an energetic folk dance that is the national Lebanese dance

decumanus maximus – the main east–west street of a Roman-era town

deir – monastery, convent

donjon – castle keep or great tower

Druze – a religious sect based on Islamic teachings. Its followers are found mainly in Lebanon, with some in Syria and Israel.

eid – Islamic feast

Eid al-Adha – Feast of Sacrifice, which marks the end of the pilgrimage to Mecca

Eid al-Fitr – Festival of Breaking the Fast, which is celebrated at the end of *Ramadan*

emir – Islamic ruler, military commander or governor

entablature – upper part of the classical temple, comprising the architrave, frieze and cornice, supported by the colonnade

exedra – a room or outdoor area with seats for discussions

ezan – call to prayer

Fakhreddine – a Lebanese nationalist hero. Appointed by the Ottomans in 1590 to pacify the Druze, he unified the Mt Lebanon area. Also spelt Fakh ad-Din.

Fatimids – a Shiite dynasty from North Africa that claimed to be descended from Fatima, daughter of the Prophet Mohammed, and her husband Ali ibn Abi Taleb

frieze – central part of the *entablature*

funduq – hotel

furn – oven

Green Line – line that divided Beirut's eastern (Christian) half from its western (Muslim) half

hajj – pilgrimage to Mecca

hakawati – storyteller

halawat al-jibn – a soft cheese-based, doughy delicacy drenched in honey or syrup and often topped with ice cream

hamam – pigeon
hammam – bathhouse
hara – small lane, alley
haram – the sacred area inside a mosque
haramlik – family or women's quarters
hejab – woman's headscarf
Hejira – migration. Usually refers to Mohammed's flight from Mecca in AD 622. Also the name of the Islamic calendar.
Hezbollah – Party of God, radical Shiite political party based in Lebanon. Its guerilla arm, Islamic Jihad, was largely responsible for expelling Israel from the south of Lebanon.
Hyksos – Semitic invaders from Western Asia, probably from Asia Minor (ie Anatolia) famed for their horsemanship. They introduced the horse to Pharaonic Egypt and ruled there from 1720 to 1550 BC.
hypocaust – raised floor in Roman bathhouses, heated by circulating hot air beneath it
hypogeum – underground burial chamber

iconostasis – screen with doors and icons set in tiers, used in eastern Christian churches
iftar – breaking of the day's fast during *Ramadan*
imam – a man schooled in Islam and who often doubles as the *muezzin*
Islamic Jihad – armed wing of *Hezbollah*
iwan – vaulted hall, opening into a central court, in the *madrasa* of a mosque

jalabiyya – full-length robe worn by men and women alike
jebel – mountain or mountain range
jezira – island
jihad – literally 'striving in the way of the faith'; holy war

Kaaba – the rectangular structure at the centre of the grand mosque in Mecca (containing the black stone) around which pilgrims walk
kalybe – open-fronted shrine
kanjar – dagger
karaj/karajat – garage/garage of
Karnak – Syrian government-run buses
khan – a travellers' inn
kineesa – church
kiyaas hammam – goat-hair bags used as loofahs
kubri – bridge
kufeyya – distinctive black-and-white or red-and-white headdress worn by traditional Muslim and Bedu Arabs
kursi – a wooden stand for holding the Quran
kuttab – Quranic school
Levant – literally 'where the sun rises'. Region of the Eastern Mediterranean from Egypt to Greece.
loggia – colonnaded arcade providing a sheltered extension of a hall

madrasa – school where Islamic law is taught
mahatta – station
maktab amn al-aam – general security office
Mamluks – military class of ex-Turkish slaves, established about AD 1250, that ruled much of Syria and Lebanon from Egypt and remained in power in the latter until 1805
manakeesh – a type of flat bread
mar – saint
maristan – hospital
Maronite – Lebanese Christians who embrace the Monothelite Doctrine that Christ had two natures but only a single divine will
mashrabiyya – ornately carved wooden panel or screen
matar – airport
medina – old walled centre of any Islamic city
meghazils – spindles
mezze – starters, appetisers
mihrab – niche in the wall of a mosque that indicates the direction of Mecca
minaret – tower of a mosque from which *ezan* is made
minbar – pulpit in a mosque
muezzin – mosque official who calls the faithful to prayer five times a day from the *minaret*
muqarnas – stalactite-type stone carving used to decorate doorways and window recesses
murex – a kind of mollusc from which the famous purple dye of Tyre comes
mutasarriifa – an Ottoman administrative unit, eg Mt Lebanon

nahr – river
nargileh – water pipe
nave – central part of a church
nebaa – spring
Neolithic – literally 'new stone' age. Period, based on the development of stone tools, that witnessed the beginnings of domestication and urbanisation.
nymphaeum – monumental fountain

oud – literally 'wood'. Used for both a kind of lute and wood burned on an incense burner.

pasha – lord. Also a term used more generally to denote a person of standing.
Phalangist – member of the Lebanese Christian paramilitary organisation, founded in 1936
PIO – Palestinian Liberation Organisation
propylaeum – monumental temple gateway

qa'a – reception room
qahwa – coffee or coffeehouse
qala'at – fortress
qasr – palace

rais – waiter
rakats – cycles of prayer during which the Quran is read and bows and prostrations are performed
Ramadan – ninth month of the lunar Islamic calendar, during which Muslims fast from sunrise to sunset
raur – headland

saahat – square
sabil – public drinking fountain
Saladin – founder of the Ayyubid dynasty, warlord who retook Jerusalem from the Crusaders. Also spelt Salah ad-Din.
saray – palace
Seleucids – royal dynasty (312–64 BC) whose rule extended from Thrace to India at its peak. Founded by Seleucus, a Macedonian general in Alexander the Great's army.
serail – Ottoman palace. Also spelt 'seraglio'.
servees – service taxi
sharia – road, way
Sharia'a – Islamic law, the body of doctrine that regulates the lives of Muslims
sheesha – water pipe
Shiism – a branch of Islam that regards the prophet Mohammed's cousin Ali and his successors as the true leaders
shwarma – meat sliced off a spit and stuffed in a pocket of pita-type bread with chopped tomatoes and garnish. Equivalent to the Turkish döner kebab.
SLA – South Lebanon Army
souq – bazaar, market

speos – rock-cut tomb or chapel
stela (s), stelae (pl) – stone or wooden commemorative slab or column decorated with inscriptions or figures
Sufi – follower of the Islamic mystical orders, which emphasise dancing, chanting and trances in order to attain unity with God
sultan – the absolute ruler of a Muslim state
sumac – reddish, lemony dried herb, delicious in salad
Sunni – main branch of Islam. Based on the words and acts of the Prophet Mohammed, with the *caliph* seen as the true successor.

tabla – small hand-held drum
tell – artificial mound
tetrapylon – four-columned structure

ulema – group of Muslim scholars or religious leaders, a member of this group
Umayyads – first great dynasty (661–750) of Arab Muslim rulers, based in Damascus
umm – mother of
Unifil – United Nations Interim Force In Lebanon

wadi – desert watercourse, dry except in the rainy season
waha – oasis
waqf – religious endowment

zaatar – thyme-like herb
zawiya – hospice and religious school
zikh – long sessions of dancing, chanting and swaying carried out by Sufis to achieve oneness with God

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