

# Mt Lebanon & the Chouf Mountains

## جبل لبنان وجبال الشوف



Mt Lebanon, the traditional stronghold of the Maronites, is the heartland of modern Lebanon, comprising several distinct areas that together stretch out to form a rough oval around Beirut, each home to a host of treasures easily accessible on day trips from the capital.

Directly to the east of Beirut, rising up into the mountains, are the Metn and Kesrouane districts. The Metn, closest to Beirut, is home to the relaxed, leafy summer-retreats of Brummana and Beit Mery, the latter host to a fabulous world-class winter festival. Further out, mountainous Kesrouane is a lunar landscape in summer and a skier's paradise, with four resorts to choose from, during the snowy winter months.

North from Beirut, the built-up coastal strip hides treasures sandwiched between concrete eyesores, from Jounieh's dubiously hedonistic 'super' nightclubs and gambling pleasures to the beautiful ancient port town of Byblos, from which the modern alphabet is believed to have derived. Inland you'll find the wild and rugged Adonis Valley and Jebel Tannourine, where the remote Afqa Grotto and Laklouk, yet another of Lebanon's ski resorts, beckon travellers.

To the south, the lush green Chouf Mountains, where springs and streams irrigate the region's plentiful crops of olives, apples and grapes, are the traditional home of Lebanon's Druze population. The mountains hold a cluster of delights, including one real and one not-so-real palace – Beiteddine and Moussa respectively – as well as the expansive Chouf Cedar Reserve and Deir al-Qamar, one of the prettiest small towns in Lebanon.

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### HIGHLIGHTS

- Absorb 7000 years of history at the ruins at **Byblos** (p306), followed by 40 years of history at the **Byblos Fishing Club** (p312)
- Remember how to tell your stalactites from your stalagmites at the spectacular **Jeita Grotto** (p303)
- Take a heart-stopping ride on Jounieh's **Téléferique** (p304)
- Hit the slopes and après-ski parties of wintertime **Faraya Mzaar** (p299)
- Gape at the incredible mosaics at **Beiteddine Palace** (p320)
- Get back to nature with a hike among the cedars at the **Chouf Cedar Reserve** (p323)



