

Lebanon Directory

CONTENTS

Accommodation	380
Activities	381
Business Hours	383
Children	383
Climate	383
Courses	384
Customs	384
Dangers & Annoyances	384
Discount Cards	384
Embassies & Consulates	384
Festivals & Events	385
Gay & Lesbian Travellers	385
Holidays	385
Insurance	385
Internet Access	385
Legal Matters	385
Maps	385
Money	385
Photography & Video	386
Post	387
Shopping	387
Smoking	387
Solo Travellers	387
Telephone & Fax	387
Time	388
Toilets	388
Tourist Information	388
Travellers with Disabilities	388
Visas	388
Women Travellers	389
Work	389

This directory contains information specific to Lebanon; for more general information refer to the Syria Directory (p226).

ACCOMMODATION

All the accommodation options listed for Lebanon have been divided into budget, midrange and top-end categories; budget accommodation comes in at under US\$40 per double room, midrange between US\$40 and US\$90, and top end at \$90 and above. Prices are quoted for a room in high season, from around June to September, except for ski resort regions, where the prices represent rooms in ski season, between December and

March. Prices are listed in US dollars or in Lebanese lira (LL), depending on which is used by the establishment itself.

During festival and holiday periods such as Christmas, Easter and Eid al-Fitr, and throughout school summer holidays, room prices can rise by 50% or more, as Lebanon is swamped with returning expats and partying Gulf Arabs. It's worthwhile booking well in advance during these times, especially for Beirut's budget options, as they tend to fill up fast. See Holidays section for Syria (p231) and Lebanon (p385) for more details. During the low season – roughly October to May – prices can fall by 40%, and similarly in high season if the security situation is shaky. Even in high season, it's always worth asking about discounts on stays of more than two nights – competition between hotels in Beirut, particularly in the midrange and top-end categories, is fierce, meaning that you're often in a strong position to bargain.

It's important to remember that outside summer, many of Lebanon's summer hotspots shut up shop. On one hand, this can mean that only limited accommodation is available; on the other, that you'll likely get terrific service and good prices, since hotels won't be rushed off their feet. If in doubt, call in advance to check whether the place you're heading for is open.

Camping

The concept of camping in Lebanon is very slowly starting to grow in popularity. Still, there are very few camping options outside summer camps for children, or camping trips laid on for organised groups. For independent camping, there are just two choices: Camping Amchit Les Colombes (p311), a few miles north of Byblos, with pretty basic facilities but a good position overlooking the sea; and La Reserve (p316), a resort with its own relatively luxurious tents in a gorgeous location high up above the Adonis Valley, close to the Afqa Grotto.

Hostels

A great alternative to budget hotels, worth exploring especially if you're heading off the beaten track, is Lebanon's network of hos-

tels. The **Lebanese Youth Hostel Federation** (www.lyhf.org) lists nine hostels serving the country from north to south, though there is no hostel in Beirut itself. Most are situated in small rural villages, which you might otherwise miss out on your travels, and have beds for US\$10 to US\$15 per person, per night.

Hotels

BUDGET

In general, Lebanon isn't big on budget hotel accommodation; even in Beirut, there are few budget places and most have only a handful of rooms. Budget lodgings have also suffered the brunt of Lebanon's recent upheavals – which kept large numbers of tourists and travellers away – and several old, established places have sadly closed down.

This means that budget stays require a little extra planning and it might be necessary to take day trips to destinations where budget accommodation is scarce. Luckily, given Lebanon's diminutive size, this is easily done: few places are more than two or three hours drive from Beirut, traffic and mode of transport permitting.

When choosing a budget hotel, keep in mind the season in which you're travelling. If it's summer, check the room has a fan or air-conditioning, especially on the coast where humidity can be extremely high and temperatures unrelenting. Likewise, check that your room has some form of heating if you're travelling in winter, when even the lower regions are chilly in the mornings and evenings.

MIDRANGE

Beirut, in particular, has lots of midrange hotels, most situated in the Hamra area, which offer good value, a central location, and sometimes even a small swimming pool on the roof. Outside Beirut, midrange hotels can vary quite wildly in terms of facilities, so check exactly what you're being offered – in terms of air-con, satellite TV, heating or bathroom facilities – before accepting a room.

The very best midrange option in Lebanon can be arranged through L'Hote Libanais (p281), a Beirut-based organisation supplying quality B&B accommodation in real Lebanese family homes and tiny, characterful inns.

TOP END

Generic top-end hotel chains swamp Beirut, with all the bells and whistles you'd expect from international luxury brands. In other parts of the country, what you'd wish for from a top-end hotel might not be exactly what you get and you may find yourself disappointed with what's on offer. Most notably, swimming pools – even indoor ones – may be closed in low season or if there aren't many guests in residence, and hotel breakfasts might not be up to much. Two fabulous exceptions are Hotel Albergo (p283) in Beirut and Hotel Via Mina (p334) in Tripoli, two world-class boutique hotels guaranteed to wow you with dozens of winning touches.

Rental Accommodation

Long-term rental apartments are available in Beirut. You may see ads posted around the American University of Beirut (AUB) area (p271), often in English. Otherwise, grab a copy of the Ministry of Tourism's *Hotels in Lebanon* guide, which has furnished-apartment listings, or check the classified section of the *Daily Star* newspaper. Many more reasonably priced places fill up quickly at the beginning of university semesters (February and October) and are usually rented for their duration. Apartments are also available in coastal towns north of Beirut, but are usually booked out well in advance of every summer; similarly, long-term ski resort rentals are usually booked out for the winter season, particularly in places such as The Cedars (p342) and Faraya Mzaar (p299).

ACTIVITIES

If you decide to go it alone on any land-based activity, remember that there is a very real danger of land mines in parts of Lebanon, particularly in the south (for more information see *Staying Safe*, p244). Always seek local advice on the safety of your intended route.

Caving

Lebanon has a number of spectacular caving opportunities. The Jeita Grotto (p303) and Afqa Grotto (p314) may be Lebanon's most famous caverns but there are more than 400 other explored cavities throughout the country, including some holes with depths of up