



Lebanon

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Best for Nature

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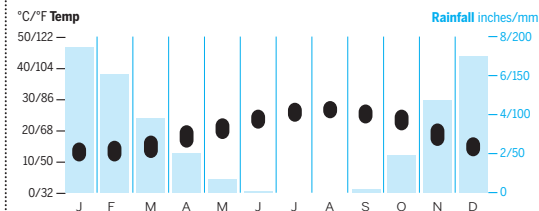
Why Go?

Its name is a byword for conflict but Lebanon, the original land of milk and honey, is a friendly, welcoming and culturally rich country with one slipper in the Arab world and one Jimmy Choo planted firmly in the West. It's home to a bubbling-hot nightlife in Beirut, a notorious Hezbollah (Party of God) headquarters in backwater Baalbek, a fistful of flash ski resorts, and a dozen cramped and poverty-stricken Palestinian refugee camps.

Hike the Qadisha Valley and it's hard to imagine that a conflict has ever existed here; wander past the pockmarked shell of Beirut's Holiday Inn and you'll wonder if there will ever be lasting peace. Lebanon is chaotic and fascinating – scarred by decades of civil war, invasions and terrorist attacks, yet blessed with serene mountain vistas, majestic ancient ruins and a people who are resilient, indomitable and renowned for their hospitality. Heed travel warnings but don't miss the compelling and confusing wonders of Lebanon.

When to Go

Beirut



Dec–Apr Skiing – and après-ski parties – in the mountains.

May–Sep The perfect time to go hiking along wild trails and through cedar forests.

Jul–Aug Baalbek's famous arts festival brings the ancient Roman ruins to life.

AT A GLANCE

- » **Currency** Lebanese lira (also known as the Lebanese pound; LL)
- » **Mobile Phones** Good coverage; local SIM cards are widely available
- » **Money** ATMs widely available; credit cards accepted in larger establishments
- » **Visas** Available at the airport for many nationalities

Fast Facts

- » **Capital** Beirut
- » **Country code** 961
- » **Language** Arabic (English and French widely spoken)
- » **Official name** Republic of Lebanon
- » **Population** 4 million

Exchange Rates

Australia	A\$1	LL1552
Euro Zone	€1	LL1988
Israel & the Palestinian Territories	1NIS	LL397
Syria	S£1	LL26.24
UK	UK£1	LL2436
USA	US\$1	LL1502

For current exchange rates, see www.xe.com.

Resources

- » **Lebanon Ministry of Tourism** (www.lebanon-tourism.gov.lb)
- » **Lebanon Tourism** (www.lebanontourism.org)
- » **LebanonTourism.com** (www.lebanontourism.com)

Connections

There aren't many choices for getting into or out of Lebanon. The only land crossings are into Syria, as the Israel–Lebanon land border has been closed for years. Although there are several border crossings into Syria, they aren't always open (see p395 for more details). Lebanon's only airport is in Beirut. It's small but efficient, handling an extensive network of international flights to and from Europe and the Arab world.

ITINERARIES

One Week

Begin your trip in **Beirut**, indulging in the capital's funky bars and cooler-than-cool cafe scene. After two days of hedonism, visit the fairy-tale cave of **Jeita Grotto** before continuing north to pretty **Byblos**, where ancient ruins are sprinkled beside an azure sea. Spend a relaxing day in Byblos or drive up to the **Qadisha Valley** for a long nature hike. Next, move on to **Tripoli**, explore its medieval souqs and munch on its famous sweets. If the road is open, cross the mountains to **Baalbek** – the fabled 'Sun City'. If the road is closed, you'll have to go through Beirut to get to Baalbek. On day seven, detour to **Aanjar's** Umayyad city ruins on the return to Beirut.

Two Weeks

If it's winter, spend two days skiing at **the Cedars**, with a visit to the Gibran Museum in **Bcharré**. If it's summer, spend an extra day hiking in the **Qadisha Valley**. Set aside two days to explore **Sidon** and **Tyre**, southern cities with tumultuous pasts and a wealth of ancient remains, then head over to **Deir al-Qamar** to soak up the small-town atmosphere and the wonders of the **Beiteddine Palace**. Backtracking to Beirut, spend your final days relaxing poolside at one of its chi-chi beach clubs.

Essential Food & Drink

- » **Felafel** Deep-fried balls of chickpea paste and/or fava beans.
- » **Shwarma** Thin slices of marinated meat garnished with fresh vegetables, pickles and tahina (sesame-seed paste), wrapped in pita bread.
- » **Mezze** Small dishes usually served as starters, often including the three staples of hummus, *muttabal* (aubergine dip) and tabbouleh.
- » **Zaatar** A blend of Middle Eastern herbs, sesame seeds and salt, used as a condiment on meats, vegetables, rice and bread.
- » **Arak** Aniseed-flavoured liquor, best served with water and ice.