

Bsharreh and its region

Bsharreh is dramatically located near the head of Qadisha valley on the edge of sheer cliffs which plunge down to the valley floor. Endowed with numerous rivers a deep valley steep slopes and high peaks which make it unique of its kind combining spectacularly beautiful natural sceneries with accessibility to the most important religion centers of maronite faith. commanding position between the Qadisha valley below and the Cedars above, it is the obvious base from which to explore the stunningly beautiful holy valley while the cedars is also within easy reach from here.. The entire area, a glacial moraine, forms a vast and haunting mountainscape where reflects changes from hour to hour and season to season. It is the birth place of Kahlil Gibran.

Bsharreh is the Buissera fief of the county of Tripoli during the Crusader period. During the Mamluk time its Moqqaddameen had assumed an important role. The moqqaddam was appointed by the



General view of Bsharreh

Maronite Patriarch in order to control the military security and financial problems between the denomination and the occupant army. He was also bestowed the title of Diacre.

The Municipality of Bsharreh was founded in 1880 and played an important role in the preservation of Bsharreh Forest.

Bsharreh is today a typical mountain town with narrow and hilly streets endowed with small shops. Its 13,000 citizens make their living from apple, pear and cherry orchards and from summer and winter tourism. Bsharreh boasts a number of interesting sites and the town's good restaurants and hotels make it an excellent base for touring the area.

CHAPEL OF SAYDET ED DARR

(Our Lady of Abundant Milk)

Midway between Bsharreh and Hadchir a path leads to a small rock-cut sanctuary venerated by nursing women. Its rock walls are covered with painted murals of the 14th century, the best preserved of which depicts the Baptism of Christ.

"Hoowie"

It is about a dramatically deep gap, carved by erosion and invaded by wheeling birds, numerous springs and mossy plants.

HADATH EL JOBBEH

The village is 1350 m above the sea level. The group of studies and underground researches of Lebanon discovered in 1988 there, in one of the cliffs of Qadisha valley, the cave of Asi-El-Hadat where 8 bodies dating back to the 13th century, mummified naturally, died of starvation and cold during a long



Bsharreh from the top

lasting Mamluk siege of the village.

DIMAN

In the 19th century Diman succeeded Deir Qannoubin as the residence of the Maronite patriarch. Today it is the patriarchal summer residence. The church is famous for its frescoes by the Lebanese painter Saliba Doueihy.

DEIR MAR SEMAAN

(Saint Simon Hermitage)

How to get there: A path from the road leads to the hermitage.

The walk takes around 15 minutes .

According to local tradition, this hermitage was founded in 1112 by Takla, daughter of a Bsharreh-born priest named Basil. The site has four rooms, set into natural caves in the cliffside. With its cisterns vestiges and frescoes traces, this is an excellent example of a typical rock-cut hermitage, and shows something of the daily life of the hermits of Qadisha valley.

HASROUN

Hasroun is one of the last villages in Lebanon to preserve its traditional red-roofed houses. From here a path leads to the valley of Qadisha, past the old church of Mar Mikhail (Saint Michael) and the Monastery of Mar Yaaqoub (Saint Jacob).

BQAA KAFRA

The highest village of Lebanon, Beqaa Kafra is



Qornet el Sawda

1750 meters high. With its rustic old houses and narrow streets, this village is famous as the birthplace of Lebanon's Saint Charbel, whose father's house was transformed into a church. St. Charbel's feast is celebrated on the third Sunday of July.

THE CEDARS

The Arz er-Rabb or the Cedars of the Lord are very few and very precious. The grove that you see today is a relic if the great forests that made Lebanon famous in ancient times. The Egyptians used cedar wood to build their temples and sun ships, Hiram of Tyre sent cedar to Solomon to build the temple in Jerusalem. Cedar wood was also used in building the Phoenician fleet. The oldest reach a height of 35 meters and a circumference of 14 meters. The Cedars is also an important ski resort.

QORNET ES SAWDA

At 3088 meters, this is the highest peak in Lebanon. The view from the summit stretches West to the sea and East to the Beqaa valley and Anti-Lebanon Mountains.

How to get there:

A road suitable for walking (two hours) or for four-wheel drive vehicles starts from Dahr el Qadib on the highest point of the road between the Cedars and Yammouneh.

SKIING IN THE CEDARS

The scenery and the quality of the snow make the Cedars an exceptional skiing venue the season usually lasts from December through April.

QADISHA GROTTO

Not far from the top of the old road between Bsharreh and the Cedars, a long path on the side of the cliff leads to this cave and waterfall. Here one can admire the small grotto with rushing waters, stalactites and stalagmites.

THE HOLY VALLEY QADISHA

One Day in Lebanon

Qadisha, one of the deepest and most beautiful valleys in Lebanon, is indeed a world -apart. At the bottom of this wild steep-sided gorge runs the Qadisha River whose source is in the Qadisha Grotto at the foot of the Cedars. And above the famous Cedar grove stands Qornet es Sawda, Lebanon's highest peak.

The word "Qadisha" comes from the Semitic root meaning "holy" and Wadi Qadisha is the "Holy Valley". Filled with caves and rock shelters inhabited from the third millennium B.C. to the Roman period the valley is scattered with cave chapels, hermitages and monasteries cut from rock. Since the Early Middle Ages generations of monks, hermits, ascetic and anchorites found asylum here. These religious men, who belonged to the various confessions that grew out of medieval controversies over the nature of Christ, included the Nestorians, Monophysites, Chalcedonians and Monothelites. Even Moslem Sufis were found in this valley. They prayed in many lan-

guages: Greek, Arabic, Syriac and Ethiopian.

At the town of Tourza the valley divides into two branches, each named for a monastery there: Wadi Qozhaya leading to Ehden and Wadi Qannoubin leading to the Cedars. A path goes along the bottom of the valley through an area called "Bain an-Nahrain" (Between the Two Rivers) where Wadi Qannoubin meets Wadi Qadisha. From here trails lead to the various sites. You can also start from the top of the valley and take one of the numerous paths to the bottom.

Some destinations may require a long walk on steep trails

SAYDET HAWQA (Our Lady of Hawqa)

How to get there: By car from Blawza to Hawqa then a 30 minute walk from Hawqa over a steep path. Or, by a path from the bottom of the valley

This little monastery, consisting of a chapel and a few monks' cells, was constructed within a shallow cave. Chroniclers date it to around the end of the 13th century. They also associate the monastery with an attack by armed Mamluks against the natural fortress of Aassi Hawqa, located in a cave above the monastery. In this fortress, accessible only by experienced rock climbers, there are some paintings and a long Christian inscription in Arabic dating to 1193.





Haroun

DEIR ES SALIB

(Monastery of the Cross)

How to get there: A difficult path descends from Hadchit (about 30 minutes), or you can take the path from the bottom of the valley

Built beneath a huge natural ledge, this monastery has a double chapel and a number of caves in the Cliffside which were used as hermits' cells. Now completely deserted and falling into ruin, some of its structures are still visible. In the 12th – 13th centuries the chapel walls were covered with frescoes in the Byzantine style. Still visible are fragments representing the Apostles, the Church Fathers, and scenes inspired by the New Testament including the Annunciation and the Crucifixion. Inscriptions in Arabic, not to be confused with modern graffiti, preserve the memory of a hermit who lived here.

DEIR MAR ANTONIOS QOZHAYA

(Monastery of St. Anthony Qozhaya)

How to get there: by car starting at Aarbet Qozhaya or Blawza

This popular hermitage



is one of the largest in the valley. Continuously in use since the Early Middle Ages, according to accounts, monastic life there had already been established by the mid-12th century. The structure was most recently renovated in 1926 and the church, partly carved from living rock, was last repaired in 1864. A new museum, completed in 1995, houses a collection of sacred and ethnographic objects, as well as an old printing press. The printing press, purchased in 1871, replaced the original older one that was portable & imported in 1585 from Europe. It is surrounded by number of 4th 5th century A.D. hermitages.

DEIR MAR ELISHAA

(Monastery of Saint Elishaa)

How to get there: a steep, winding road leads to the monastery.

Built into a shallow cave where the hermits' cells were fashioned, this hermitage was known to travelers in the 17th and 18th centuries. The church is set in the cliff, and includes four small chapels fitted into the rock. Beneath the church is the tomb of a local Capuchin, Father François de Chasteuil, who died in 1644. A Maronite bishop lived here in the 14th century and that it was here that the Lebanese Maronite Order was founded in 1665.



Wadi Qannoubin

DEIR QANNOUBIN

How to get there: A path goes from Blawza to the bottom of the valley and up to Qannoubin. The walk takes about an hour.

It gave its name to this part of the valley. Qannoubin, from Kenobion, means "monastery" or collectif life in Greek. According to local tradition this is a very ancient site. It is a model of simplicity and austerity. As the Maronite patriarchal seat from the 15th to the 19th centuries, it has long been an integral part of the valley. The monastery's church, half built into the rock, is decorated with frescos dated back to the beginning of the 17th or 18th century. Not far from there is the chapel-cave of St. Marina, celebrated saint of the valley, where the remains of 17 Maronite patriarchs are buried.

GIBRAN

Bsharreh is the birthplace of Gibran Khalil Gibran (1883-1931), author of *The Prophet* and many other famous works. One of Gibran's last wishes was to spend his final days there and to be buried in the small monastery of Mar Sarkis at the entrance of the town. The first part of his wish was not to be, but Gibran's tomb lies in the Monastery, which today serves as the Gibran Museum where his paintings, drawings and manuscripts are on display.

Poet, painter, philosopher and mystic, Gibran Khalil Gibran is best known for his book *The Prophet*, first published in 1923, translated in 25 languages. Reprinted over a hundred times, more than 7 million copies have been sold. Altogether his books, among them a *Tear and a Smile*, *The Broken wings*, *Spirits Rebellious*, *The Forerunner* and *Sand and Foam*, have been translated into over 20 languages including Chinese.

He met at Fred Holland Day





Gibran Museum

Gallery, Mary Haskell who had since the first second believed in his genius and thereafter financed his Beaux arts studies in Paris where his teacher was the famous Rodin. Is (Mary Haskell) the Al Mitra, the only person carrying a name besides al Mustafa in his masterpiece the Prophet? "I hope the world will once know that I owe you my being artist" wrote he in 1908. A love story grew up between him and the Lebanese May Ziyadeh through 20 years of correspondence but they have never met each others.

Gibran was born in 1883; he emigrated from Lebanon to Boston in 1894 with his mother, his half-brother Boutros, and his sisters Miriana and Sultaneh. His full name was Gibran Khalil Gibran but his teacher Mrs Beale in Boston told him that one "Gibran" was enough and changed the spelling of "Khalil" to "Kahlil". Since then he has been known in the west as Kahlil Gibran. He returned twice to Lebanon. In 1912 he moved to New York City & became the leading figure in a group of Arab poets known as "Arrabitah" (The Pen Board). It was during this period that he wrote The Prophet and many of other his published works and produced numerous paintings and drawings.

In winter the museum is open daily from 9 am to 5 pm, except Mondays. In summer, it is open every day, including Mondays.

...AMENITIES

If you don't want to return from the area empty-handed, you can bring back at least one of the numerous souvenirs made of cedar wood or some of the area's delicious fruits and vegetables especially during the summer season.

There are many restaurants in Bsharreh area, and even in the heart of the Quadisha valley. At the Cedars and around the edge of the valley, restaurants can be found at every turn.



Qadisha grotto

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