

Tripoli (Trablos), 85 kilometers north of Beirut, has a special character all its own. Thanks to its historical wealth, relaxed lifestyle and thriving business climate, this is a city where modern and medieval blend easily into a lively and hospitable metropolis. Known as the capital of the North, Tripoli is Lebanon's second largest city.

Forty-five buildings in the city, many dating from the 14th century, have been registered as historical sites. Twelve mosques from Mamluke and Ottoman times have survived along with an equal number of madrassas or theological schools. Secular buildings include the hammam or bathing-house, which followed the classical pattern of roman-byzantine baths, and the khan or caravansary. The souks, together with the khans, form an agglomeration of various trades where tailors, jewelers, perfumers, tanners and soap-makers work in surroundings that have changed very little over the last 500 years.

## Tripoli in History

Habitation of the site of Tripoli goes back to at least the 14th century B.C., but it wasn't until about the 9th century B.C. that the Phoenicians established a small trading station there. Later, under the Persians, it was home to a confederation of the phoenician city states of Sidon, Tyre and Arados Island. Built on the trade and invasion route near the Abu Ali River, Tripoli's strategic position was enhanced by offshore islands, natural ports and access to the interior.

Under the successors of Alexander the Great dur-



General view

ing the Hellenistic period, Tripoli was used as a naval shipyard. There is also evidence that it enjoyed a period of autonomy at the end of Seleucid era.

Under Roman rule, starting with the takeover of the area by Pompey in 64-63 B.C., the city flourished and during this period the Romans built several monuments here. The byzantine city of Tripolis, which by then extended to the south, was destroyed, along with other mediterranean coastal cities, by an earthquake and tidal wave in 551.

After 635, Tripoli became a commercial and ship-building center under the Omayyads, it achieved semi-independence under the Fatimid Dynasty when it developed into a center of learning.

At the beginning of the 12th century the Crusaders laid siege to the city, finally entering it in 1109. The conquest caused extensive destruction, including the burning of Tripoli's famous library, the Dar-Il-Ilm, with its thousand of volumes.

During the Crusaders' 180 years rule the city was the capital of the "County of

Tripoli". But crusader Tripoli fell in 1289 to the victorious Mamluke Sultan Qalaoun, who ordered the old port city (today Al-Mina) destroyed and a new city built inland near the old castle. It was at this time that numerous religious and secular buildings were erected, many of which still survive today.

During the long Turkish Ottoman rule (1516-1918) Tripoli retained its prosperity and commercial importance and in these years more buildings were added to the city's architectural wealth.

## Archaeological Excavations

Tripoli has not been extensively excavated because the ancient site lies buried beneath the modern city of Al-Mina. However, a few accidental finds are now in museums. Excavations in Al-Mina revealed part of the ancient southern port quay and a necropolis from the end of the hellenistic period. A surrounding made in the Crusader castle uncovered late Bronze Age, Iron Age, roman, byzantine and fatimid remains.

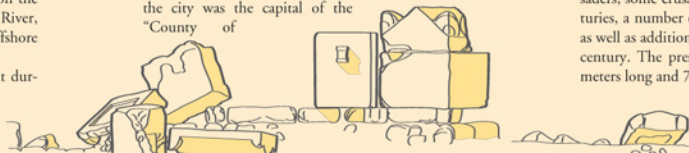
Since 2005 the Mondial Bank has begun a restoration and rehabilitation project of the Old Town.

### SELECTED SITES OF TRIPOLI

(Numbers in parentheses are the original historical registration numbers, which are displayed on many of the buildings. See list on pages (5) (Plan of the old city of Tripoli p. 4)

#### 1. The Citadel (1)

Overlooking the city is the imposing Citadel of Tripoli known as Qal'at Sinjil (Saint Gilles) which has been renovated and changed many times during its history. Today the castle's main features are an octagonal fatimid construction converted to a church by the crusaders, some crusader structures of the 12th-13th centuries, a number of 14th century Mamluke additions, as well as additions made by the Ottomans in the 16th century. The present state of this huge fortress (140 meters long and 70 meters wide) is largely the result of





Plan of Tripoli site

Plan of the site: Anasud Seif

1. Citadel of Tripoli or Citadel of Saint-Gilles (12th-19th c.)
  2. Great Mosque (1294-1315)
  3. Madrasa al-Shamsiyah (first half of the 14th c.)
  4. Anonymous Madrasa (14th c.)
  5. Madrasa al-Qartawiyah (1316-1326)
  6. Hammam al-Nouri (ca.1333)
  7. Madrasa al-Nouriyah (ca.1333)
  8. Madrasa al-Nasiriyah (first half of the 14th c.)
  9. Madrasa al-Khayriyah Hasan (first quarter of the 14th c.)
  10. Madrasa al-Tuwashiyah (ca. 1471)
  11. Khan al-Saboun (second half of the 16th -early 17th c.)
  12. Abd al-Wabed Mosque (1305-1306)
  13. al-Uwaysiyah Mosque (ca. 1460-1461)
  14. Madrasa al-Qadriyah (second half of the 15th c.)
  15. Hammam 'Izz ed-Dine (1294-1298)
  16. Khan al - Khayyatin (first half of the 14th c.)
  17. Khan al-Misriyin (first half of the 14th c.)
  18. Al-Attar Mosque (first half of the 14th c.)
  19. Madrasa al-Burtasiyah (first quarter of the 14th c.)
  20. Souk al-Haraj (14th c.)
  21. Al-Tawbar Mosque (14th c., restored in the 17th c.)
  22. Khan al-Adkar (early 14th c., restored in 18th c.)
  23. Al- Tahhim Mosque (second half of the 15th c.)
  24. Al- Muallaq Mosque (mid-14th c.)
  25. Hammam al-Jadid (ca. 1740)
  26. Al-Timar Fountain (1413)
  27. Madrasa al-Sagrafiyah (ca. 1359)
  28. Madrasa al- Kharouniyah (1373-1374)
  29. Arghoun Shah Mosque (late 14th c.-early 15th c.)
  30. Taynal Mosque (ca. 1336)
-  Entrance  
 Ticketing Office  
 Directorate General of Antiquities offices

extensive restoration work by Mustapha Barbar Agha, governor of Tripoli at the beginning of the 19th century.

### 2. Church of St. John of the pilgrims Mount

Significant remains of this crusader church were found in the maronite cemetery of Saint John about 200 meters south of the Castle on Abu Samra hill. There are two joined chapels, the larger of which has a semi-circular apse. The smaller one, with a rectangular apse, was reserved for funerary use. The church was surrounded by a large crusader cemetery.

### 3. The Great Mosque (2)

Begun in 1294 and completed in 1315, the Great Mosque was built on the ruined 12th century crusader cathedral of St. Mary of the Tower. Its large courtyard

is surrounded by porticos and a domed and vaulted prayer hall. Inside, one can still see elements of western architecture from the old church, including the northern entrance and the Lombard style bell tower which was transformed into a minaret.

The many foundation plaques and decrees inscribed in the Great Mosque and its surrounding madrasas not only inform us about the building, but reveal details of the daily life of the Mamluk period.

### 4. Taynal Mosque (30)

This important mosque was built in 1336 by Saif-ed-Din Taynal on the site of a ruined crusader carmelite church. The adjoining domed mausoleum holds the tomb of the founder. Some elements of the original structure were re-used in the mosque, for

example, the two rows of granite columns with late roman capitals which stand in the middle of the first prayer hall. The entrance of the second prayer hall is a unique example of the architectural decoration in Tripoli during the mamluk era.

### 5. Al-Muallaq Mosque (24)

The name means "hanging mosque", possibly because it is on the second floor. This small mosque, built in the middle of the 16th century, has a plain whitewashed interior with steps leading down to an attractive courtyard garden. The minaret is octagonal and unadorned.

### 6. Burtasiyah Madrasa-Mosque (19)

The beautiful Burtasiyah Madrasa-Mosque was built during the first quarter of the 14th century A.D. This domed structure has a square minaret erected above the entrance arch and is ornamented with double windows, which have black and white stone arches. The dark stone portal is decorated with stalactites and the mihrab is covered with an ornate golden mosaic.



Citadel of Tripoli





*Madrasat el Sagraqia*

### 7. Al-Qartāwiyat Madrasa (5)

This madrasa is known for the fine workmanship of its ceiling decorated with honey-comb patterns and stalactites, and its elegant façade of alternate black and white facings. Built during the first quarter of the 14th century A.D., Al-Qartāwiyat is probably Tripoli's most ornate building and the only one with a prayer hall covered by an oval dome.

### 8. Madrasa al Tuwashiyat (10)

Built during the second half of the 15th century, this structure and its elaborate mausoleum are constructed of sandstone in decorative black and white patterns. The portal is higher than the façade of the building and decorated with shell motifs embellished by radiating zigzag motifs, stalactites and twisted colonnettes.

### Khanqah

This unique building in Lebanon was constructed during the second half of the 15th century to house Muslim mystics or Sufis. It is designed with an open courtyard and pool. The courtyard is sur-

rounded by small rooms and a raised platform, or iwan, behind an arch of alternating black and white stones. The arch is supported by granite columns.

### 9. Hammam 'Izz ed-Dine (15)

This public bathing-house was given to the city by its mamluk governor 'Izz ed-Dine Aybak. The governor, who died in 1298, is buried in a mausoleum beside the hammam. In building these baths, he used choice remains from the crusader church and hospice of Saint James. The front portal is decorated with an inscribed fragment between two Saint James shell, and the inner door is surmounted by the pascal lamb. The Hammam 'Izz ed-Dine was in continual use until recently.

### 10. Hammam el-Abed (near Khan esSaboun)

Tripoli's only functioning hammam is Hammam el-Abed, probably built at the end of the 17th century. It has the typical pierced domes of mamluk and ottoman era public baths. The interior, with its cushions, central fountain and traditional fittings is a living museum.

### 11. Hammam al-Jadid (25)

Built around 1740, and called the "New Bath", this is by far the largest hammam in the city. Although it has not been in operation since the 1970's, its faded grandeur still stirs the imagination.

### 12. Khān Al-Khayyatīn (16)

The Khān Al-Khayyatīn or Tailors' Khan is one of the oldest in Tripoli, dating to the first half of the 14th century. It



*Soap of tripoli*



*Khan al-Khayyatīn*

was probably built on the remains of a byzantine and crusader monument in the center of the ancient commercial suburb which controlled passage over the Abu "Ali River. Thus, this khan has a different plan than the others in the city. The restored structure consists of a long passageway with tall arches on each side and ten transverse arches. Just at its western entrance stands a granite column surmounted by a marble corinthian capital.

### 13. Khan Al- Misriyyīn (17)

The Khan Al- Misriyyīn (Caravansary of the Egyptians) was probably built in the first half of the 14th century. The traditional arcaded two-story khan has an open courtyard with a fountain in the center.

### 14. Souk Al-Haraj (20)

A unique sight, this covered 14th century bazaar has a high vaulted ceiling supported by granite columns which may have originally been part of roman or crusader structures. A total of 14 granite shafts can be seen along the north, south and east sides. Today this space is occupied by sellers of floor mats, pillows and mattresses.



### 15. Lions' Tower

While most of the numerous coastal towers and fortifications which protected Tripoli during Mamluk times have disappeared or been encroached upon modern buildings, the mid-15th century Tower of the Lions is still remarkably preserved. It was given this name in the 19th century because of the lions carved in relief that once stood above the entrance. The tower is actually a fortress two stories high with lofty vaulted ceilings. The west portal is in the typical Mamluk black and white stone pattern. From the outside you can see how the builders placed Roman columns horizontally in the wall as reinforcements.

## Restoration and Rehabilitation

The Mondial Bank has since 2004 launched the campaign of rehabilitation and restoration of the old souks as well as of the facades of the french mandate buildings.

## Tripoli Today

Modern Tripoli, which has a population of about 500,000, is divided into two parts: El-Mina, (the port area and site of the ancient city) and the town of Tripoli proper.

The medieval city at the foot of the crusader castle is where most of the historical sites are located. Surrounding this is a modern metropolis which is occupied with commerce, banking and recreation. The area known as 'at-Tall', dominated by an ottoman clock tower (built in 1901/2) in the heart of downtown Tripoli, is the transportation center and terminus for most taxi routes. When shopping in the old souks or downtown area, remember that gold is a good buy. Other popular items are Tripoli's famous sweets and traditional olive-oil based soap, water pipes and brass work. Al Mina, the port area, is a good place to find seafood restaurants and fish markets. The city's most comfortable hotels and Western-style restaurants can be found in the beach resorts south of the city.

### TRIPOLI INTERNATIONAL FAIR

Tripoli has a permanent fairground designed by the famous Brazilian architect Oscar Niemeyer. Here important exhibitions, trade fairs and other events regularly take place. This is the first time that the Unesco interferes for the maintenance of such modern civil monument. The Tripoli festivals are celebrated there.

### IF YOU HAVE TIME

**Offshore Islands:** Just offshore is a string of small islands. The largest, known as the Island of palm trees or Rabbit's island, is now a nature reserve for green turtles and rare birds. Declared a protected area by UNESCO in 1992, camping, fire building or other depredation is forbidden. The island also holds roman and crusader remains.

**Qalamoun:** south Tripoli, is known for its brass industry. The roadside is lined with small, workshops and showrooms where brass bowls, candlesticks and other objects are hammered out in the old tradition.

### NOTES FOR VISITORS

- A Tourism information office (telephone 06-433590) is located on Abdel Hamid Karami square.
- Wear comfortable sturdy shoes for walking around the old town and the souks. Women should be prepared with head scarves if they wish to visit mosques.
- Although some of the monuments are kept locked, keys can usually be obtained from a nearby shop.

visit the website:  
[www.tripoli-lebanon.com](http://www.tripoli-lebanon.com)

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