



Lebanon Traveler

A publication of Hospitality Services in a joint venture with Beyond Beirut - Issue 2 March 2012

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Lebanon Traveler

unveils Lebanon's hidden treasures



Lebanon has much to be proud of. The Ministry of Tourism is delighted to showcase and offer a glimpse into this wonderful country through the pages of the Lebanon Traveler magazine.

Lebanon Traveler is a crucial marketing tool and introduces Lebanon, a progressive and attractive land full of remarkable destinations and amazing experiences, to the world. One look at the pages of the magazine is enough to uncover an untold plethora of tastes and sounds, told through stories engraved upon the land and its people, that are sure to enchant those in search of exploration and discovery.



The Lebanon Traveler magazine is essential at this time to introduce new tourism initiatives extending beyond Beirut. It creates awareness about Lebanon's many touristic attractions, such as the picturesque villages, and will stimulate the economy through investment in all regions and the creation of jobs. The stories presented in the magazine are enchanting and eye opening and it is only a matter of time before projects, such as expanding rural lodgings and hitherto untouched destinations, will attract the interest of investors and tourists alike for the good of the Lebanese economy.



There is much to learn from every step taken across Lebanon, as the beauty of its natural scenery and the temptations of its cities mold with the kindness of its people to produce an unforgettable experience. And, the Lebanon Traveler Magazine is an excellent tool for achieving the potential that the country holds.



Fady Abboud
Minister of Tourism
Lebanon



Your feedback as a reader and as a user of this information is very important for us to develop quality sustainable tourism in Lebanon. Enjoy and share your experience on info@lebanontraveler.com



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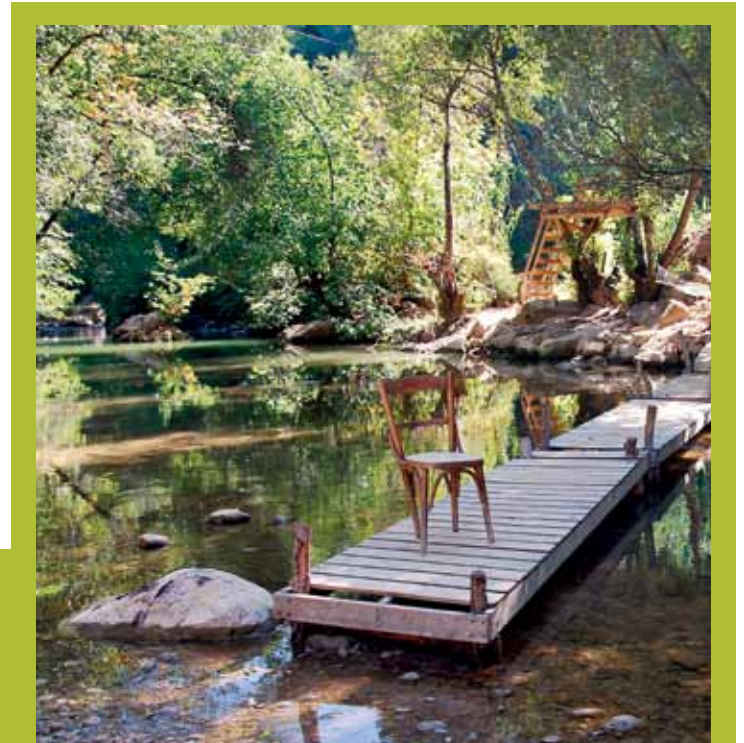


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Tripoli is the country's second largest city and has many historic and interesting sites. See our list of recommended "must visits"...

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The combination of challenging downhill skiing, apres-ski, relaxation and the aesthetics of Mzaar can prove hard to resist. So it's no surprise that Lebanon is called the Switzerland of the Middle East.



e Dima Faour Klingbeil

February 2012

Discovering Lake Chawan



One Sunday, we left the hustle and bustle of the city and drove in the direction of the village of Ychsoush, North Lebanon, to explore a lake that has always sparked my curiosity, Lake Chawan. I had been waiting for a long time to discover this natural attraction.

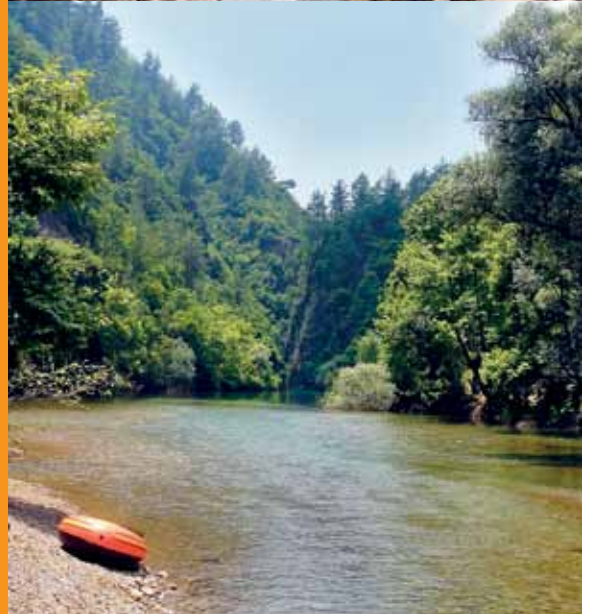
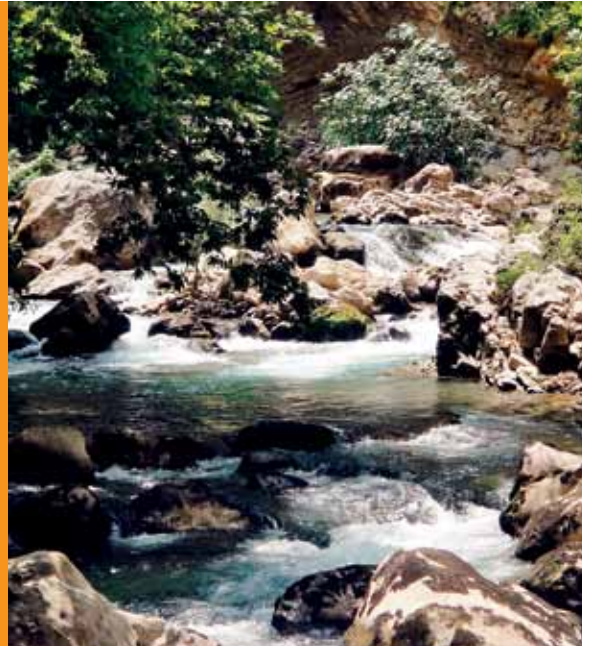
As we drove off the highway passing by Nahr Ibrahim, a river that flows between the mountains into the Mediterranean, I was overcome with a sudden and immense feeling of bonding and oneness with nature. As we drove up the winding roads, green and breathtaking mountains engulfed, as did a delicious refreshing earthy fragrance. In Yahchouch, we stopped to ask for directions to the village of Chawan.

We continued past rows of village houses to a church in the middle of a small forest, where we decided to park. As we walked down to the riverbank we passed by old chairs and wooden benches hidden in the dense bushes overlooking the river and covered with bamboo sunshades. This unobtrusive venue serves as a resting point. A word of caution however: this trail is not child friendly. Be cautious, walk away from the cliff and follow blue signs on the rocks. The trek to the lake takes one to one and a half hours. The hike is magnificent but the terrain extremely narrow, at some stage one side is a sheer cliff overlooking the lake. We came across a handwritten sign in Arabic "al bouhaira" meaning the lake.

We then wandered through a natural shady, bushy and sometimes rocky trail before going down a footpath to cross a little downhill stream. It was serene. One could hear the sounds of nature. Gone was the commotion of the city. As we continued the trail took us past bushes that seemed to reach the ridges and peaks of the surrounding mountains, then instinctively, I turned to my left and my heart skipped a beat as I saw a translucent turquoise glow in the heart of a valley surrounded by steep green mountains. I ran the remaining way until I reached the gently shimmering water.

As I gazed at the scenery around I felt that I never wanted to leave. The water was crystal clear and glistened like a mirror reflecting the green mountains. The white pebbles at the bottom of the lake showed clearly. Near the shore the water was transparent and at the edge of the mountain it was darker, varying from green to turquoise. There were a few people lying and relaxing along the shore. Some were in the water. Others probably came with a little boat that was resting on the shore. Yet, it was calm. Finally, I made my way back to my little family leaving behind a precious discovery that I will treasure.

Share your nature experience with us and let others learn by writing to readerexperiences@lebanontraveler.com ■



Encouraging responsible tourism



Beyond Beirut, a Lebanese NGO working towards sustainable tourism development, organized the first Annual National Forum for Sustainable Tourism Development, the first of its kind to promote dialogue and linkages between local tourism stakeholders among themselves, and between local and national tourism stakeholders.

It took place on October 5th 2011 and was implemented in collaboration with the Ministry of Tourism and in partnership with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

The opening session featured speeches by Fady Abboud, Lebanon's Minister of Tourism, Jean Abboud, president of the Association of Travel and Tourism Agents in Lebanon (ATTAL), and Heath Cosgrove, USAID/Lebanon Economic Growth Office Director.

The forum aimed at working towards the expansion of sustainable tourism across the value chain to all regions of Lebanon, and featured conference sessions and an exhibition of rural tourism



products and services. Besides key local stakeholders, the forum hosted international speakers linked to prestigious world organization such as the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC), the International Ecotourism Society (TIES) and the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), as well as regional initiatives such as Siyaha in Jordan.

More than 160 stakeholders from the tourism industry attended the forum, with representatives from tour operators, travel agents, universities, NGOs, municipalities and private initiatives.

The forum generated a number of recommendations that address sustainable tourism on a national level and suggested ways for Beyond Beirut to support the rural tourism sector:

The forum recommended on a national level

- Development of a National Strategy on Sustainable Tourism
- Revival of the National Tourism Board
- Development of a plan to preserve the environment

The Forum recommended for Beyond Beirut

- Develops into a quality assurance and certification body
- Provides business development services
- Develops into a marketing structure for experiential tourism in Lebanon
- Facilitates tourism SMEs' access to loans

This forum was made possible with funds from from the American people through USAID. Sponsors of the forum included ATTAL, Saad Transport and LebHotels. Media partners included MTV, the Daily Star, Al Mughtareb , Lebanon Traveler and Tourism Around the World. ■





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Optimism on the horizon for international tourism in 2012

By Scott Wayne, President, SW Associates, a Washington DC-based consulting practice dedicated to sustainable development through tourism.

Not long ago, the saying “when the US sneezes, the rest of the world catches a cold,” was an accurate depiction of the interdependence, or perhaps dependence, of world economies on the US economy. And, where economies go, so goes tourism, supposedly. Well, over the past year, as the US kept “sneezing,” much of the European Union caught a cold, which probably would have happened regardless of the US. So, the two main sources of international tourism for the world looked like a bedraggled couple dragging their feet to work and back.

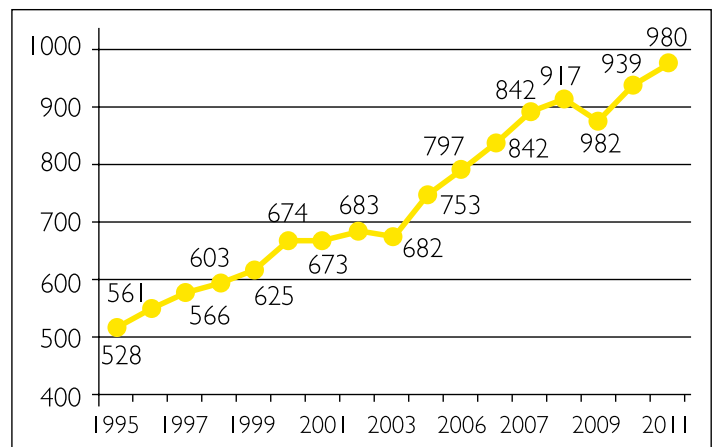
Fortunately, for tourism in most of the world, 2011 was not that bad. The tourism trends bode well for 2012 and beyond for most of the world, including Lebanon. Note the emphasis on tourism trends – politics in the Middle East can always cast shadows over tourism, but longer term, the resilience of tourism and the Lebanese always seems to triumph over the politics.

While US tourism demand does not seem to have the effect on other countries as in the past, the US still earns the most from international tourism (USD 103.5 billion in 2010 and an estimated 5% increase of USD 5 billion in 2011), spends the most on international tourism after Germany (USD 75.5 billion) and receives the most international tourists after France (59.6 million in 2010). And, in the latest report from the US Department of Commerce, over 58 million Americans traveled outside the US in

2011. And Europe, despite severe economic problems in several countries, also showed increases in international tourism – up 6% in 2011 to over 500 million international tourist arrivals. In fact, for most of the world, except North Africa and the Middle East, international tourist arrivals in 2011 were positive.

The UN World Tourism Organization forecast for 2012 is the landmark of one billion international tourist arrivals, the result of relatively steady long-term growth in international tourism.

World: Inbound Tourism
International Tourist Arrivals (million)



Source: World Tourism Organization (UNWTO)

The UNWTO recently published the results of its survey of the UNWTO Panel of Tourism Experts. Prospects for 2012 were cautiously optimistic with respondents expecting continued growth, but those in the public sector were more positive than those in the private sector; which is not surprising given that the public sector is often more insulated from economic ups and downs than businesses. Both groups, however, were the most optimistic about emerging economies, especially Africa and Asia and the Pacific.

This year will see continued fast growth in international tourist arrivals, spending and receipt from the faster emerging "BRICS" countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa), but also watch for fast growth in the "SLIMMA" countries (Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Malaysia, Mexico and Argentina). At the World Travel Market in November 2011, Reed Travel Exhibitions WTM Chairman, Fiona Jeffrey said in the WTM 2011 Industry Report, "As important as the BRICS nations are now, and will be in the future, there are other emerging countries for the travel and tourism industry to look at. The SLIMMA nations are the ones the industry has identified as the nations to look out for in both inbound and outbound tourism for a variety of reasons including investment in infrastructure, natural beauty and high disposable incomes."

The growth in Asia is being watched by destinations around the world. ITB Berlin and IPK International reported in January 2012 that Asian travel for 2011 was up by 6% over 2010 and is forecast to rise by another 5% in 2012. IPK conducts extensive surveys of travelers throughout Asia, the results of which appeared in their Asian Travel Monitor and in the upcoming ITB World Travel Trends Report. The following are some highlights from the two reports: 32% of travelers in Asia intend to increase travel in 2012. Increased demand for "edutainment" parks, adventure holidays, luxury travel and sports tourism.

Inbound travel to Japan has not recovered from the earthquake, down more than 30%. Japanese outbound travel fell by only 6%. The fastest growing spenders were led by China (+38%), Russia (+21%), Brazil (+32%) and India (+32%). In 2010, the Chinese spent almost USD 55 billion on international travel, the Japanese USD 28 billion, Russians USD 26.5 billion, Koreans USD 17.7 billion, Brazilians USD 16.4 billion, and Indians USD 16.4 billion.

In the first three quarters of 2011, the top spending markets in Asia were:

China 3rd biggest spenders with a 38% increase in spending over the same period in 2010

Japan 7th in international tourism expenditures although outbound market spending declined by 8.6%, the Japanese still rank

South Korea 14th biggest spenders with a 12.3% increase

India 23rd biggest spenders with a 32% increase

Thailand 36th biggest spenders with a 1.4% decrease.

(Source: UNWTO Barometer, January 2012)

Although overall economic growth and increased disposable income are helping to drive this rapid growth, certain product trends are also helping globally and especially in South Asia.

Globally, more people are seeking richer travel experiences. While the longtime mainstay "product" of sun and sand vacations will continue to be popular, more destinations are offering more variety of cultural and nature-based experiences to match just about any interest. Cultural tourism - experiencing local culture, including art, food, music, theater and religions - is, according to the Organization for Cooperation and Development's Tourism Committee, an increasingly important element of the tourism product as it creates distinctiveness in a crowded global marketplace.

There has been a steady stream of reports and articles focusing on the fast growth of Chinese travel. The following are some highlights, which we found interesting and useful:

From WTM

- Euromonitor International reported that the Chinese are expected to spend USD 57 billion on accommodation domestically and internationally this year.
- About 58 million Chinese traveled outside China in 2010 with outbound forecast to grow by 20%.
- Chinese tourism investment in the Caribbean is rapidly increasing. Over the past decade, Chinese tourism expenditures have gone from USD 13 billion to USD 58 billion; a 30% growth from 2009 to 2010.

From ChinaTravelTrends.com (December 2011)

"[F]or destinations and companies not located on the beaten track, the much hyped deluge of Chinese tourists has, until now, been little more than a mirage... With the start of the second wave of China's outbound tourism, all this is changing. The New Chinese Tourists, knowledgeable, sophisticated, travel-savvy and predominantly below 45 years of age, are entering the scene. New Chinese tourists look for deeper experiences and closer contact with local host populations during their self-organized trips. By the end of 2011, the China Outbound Tourism Research Institute (COTRI) is estimating that Chinese outbound trips will total 65 million".

What can all of this mean for travel to Lebanon? Well, assuming there is political stability to attract visitors - not an unknown prospect in past years - then Lebanon could position itself as a destination en-route between Asia and Europe for the growing interest of Asian tourists in visiting Europe. A Chinese fortune cookie of food for thought and not beyond the realm of possibilities.



Scott Wayne has advised Beyond Beirut, the Lebanon Business Linkages Initiative & the Lebanon Mountain Trail Project. Previously, he was the North America director for WTTC, UNWTO's first chief of communications and author for Lonely Planet.

sw-associates.net ■



10 things to do in Tripoli



1. Stay overnight

Hotel Koura

This family-run-establishment is one of the best budget hotels in the area. The rooms are comfortable and the lounge serves as a dining area. Breakfast is included in the price and the owner, Pierre Jabour, can organize day trips upon request.

+961 3 371041, +961 6 425451

alkourahotel.com

Chateau des Oliviers (Villa Nadia)

This hotel is set in a mansion on a hill just south of the city. It boasts the unique taste of Nadia Dibo, its owner, consisting of 15 rooms, 4 suites, and one royal suite. Those with balconies have extraordinary views overlooking Tripoli, the mountains and the sea.

+961 6 411170, +961 3 151512

chateau-des-oliviers.com



2. The Old Souks and Khans

Khan Al Saboun (Soap Market)

Traditionally made with olive oil, honey and other natural ingredients, the soaps supplied to the hammams in Tripoli make them an essential part of the city's economy. Make sure to visit Sharkasi Soap Factory above the Souk and Badr Hassoun's shop to discover the soap production process and sample over 400 kinds of soaps on offer. Do not miss the huge soap carved into the shape of an open volume of the Quran. The Khan Al Saboun was originally a military barrack during the Ottoman period and was eventually transformed into a market for olive and olive oil based products in the 18th century.

+961 6 874483

khanalsaboun.com

Khan Al Khayatine (Tailor's Market)

The Khan Al Khayatine souk in Tripoli was built in the first half of the 14th century and renovated in 1974. It is the oldest souk of the city and has narrow winding alleys featuring tailor shops where you will find beautiful traditional clothing. Beautiful colors, unique textures and special designs are in display. The costumes for Lebanon's most renowned dance troupes are made here.



The Pottery Workshop

In Al Mina, Abu George the potter still turns his hand-made pottery on a traditional wheel. You wonder how much longer such skilled artisans will ply their trade as you watch the balanced symmetry of an elongated pot emerge from a rough lump of clay. None of his children are interested in learning the trade and he fears he will be one of the last to handcraft these increasingly rare artifacts.

+961 6 600290, +961 3 517267

Al Azm Cultural Center

This center is a haven for all artists. Established in 1994, it is the first and most active cultural center in Tripoli, where creative people meet to share and discuss their work. The center organizes concerts, seminars and workshops to enhance the cultural life of the city. Make sure to check it out to uncover the local artist scene.

+961 6 444448

azmsaade.net



3. Architecture

The Taynal Mosque

The green-domed mosque, built ca. 1336 by Governor Saif el-Din Taynal has a spectacular feature: the towering portal, tallest in the city, built inside the large vaulted vestibule that precedes the main prayer room. A relatively small door, within this huge portal, opens onto a large main prayer hall, also arched and vaulted with an elegantly carved wooden minbar (pulpit) dating from 1336. The Taynal Mosque lies south of the Old City. Built on the site of a ruined Crusader Carmelite church, some of its material was incorporated into the mosque, notably two rows of Egyptian granite Roman columns capped with Corinthian capitals.

Al Madrassa Qartawiyya

Built by a Mamluk governor of the same name in the early 13th century, over the baptistery of an old cathedral, the Madrassa is well known for its fine workmanship evident in its elegant black and white façade topped by a honey-combed patterned half dome above the portal. Its back wall, also black and white, is adorned with beautiful Arabic calligraphy. The Madrassa is also known for having the only oval dome in Tripoli, which tops the prayer room.

Burj Es Sabaa (Lion Tower)

This miniature fortress at the far-eastern end of the Tripoli harbor (called Al Mina) is named after the lions decorations that decorated it once upon a time. It is an exceptional example of Mamluk military architecture with a striking black and white portico and older Roman columns used to reinforce the walls horizontally. If you do get there before 4 pm, ask the guardian of the place to take you to the top of the tower where you can catch a wonderful view of the abandoned Tripoli train station.





4. Shopping

Souk Harraj

This is the only covered souk in Tripoli. Granite columns, thought to be of Roman or Crusader origin, support the high vaulted ceiling of this 14th century edifice. Harraj, is the Arabic word for negotiate and at this souk you are encouraged to negotiate the price for items on offer such as mattresses, pillows and other bedding materials.

Saeh Library

One of the best-kept secrets of Tripoli, the Saeh library is a treasure island for book lovers. Dive into the shelves and dusty boxes to find infinite treasures of early edition books by Balzac and Hemingway, as well as many out of print magazines.

saehlib.com



5. Religion

The Great Mosque

The construction of the Great Mosque began in 1294, on the site of the destroyed St Mary of the Tower church. It was completed in 1315, and probable traces of the 700-year structure can still be seen in its distinctive square minaret thought to have been the church's bell tower. To enter, women are expected to wear one of the gowns provided and cover their heads. To the left the late 13th C Shamsiyah Madrasa, among the oldest in Tripoli, has above it the home of its founder, Judge Shamseddin al Iskandari. A typical wooden manzala (closed balcony) decorates its façade. The minaret of the Great Mosque is in fact the square Lombard bell tower of St. Mary's church that once stood on the site.

Al Muallaq Mosque

This is a small simple yet unique mosque due to its unusual position over a vaulted passage. Located upstairs on the second floor of the building, it was built in the 16th century. It has a plain interior and leads down to a delightful courtyard garden where you can visit the tomb of its creator Mahmood Lutfi al Zaim.

Church Street

There are few churches remaining in Tripoli, as most were destroyed in 1279 when the Mamluk Sultan conquered the Crusader city. A few remain in the Church Street, hence the name. As you walk around, you will find Saint Nicolas that was originally a soap factory. The oldest Maronite church in Tripoli, St Micheal which was built in 1889, is located a little further. However, the oldest church of Tripoli is Saydet al Hara in Tabbaneh, which dates back to the 13th century. It was recently restored after the damages it sustained during the Lebanese civil war.

The Cathedral of St George (Al Mina)

Built in 1735 during the Ottoman period, this large and impressive building is patterned on a Crusader style basilical church. Below the church is a very old grotto, whose exact purpose and its origins are not known.

6. Nature

Palm Island Reserve

The Palm Island Reserve consists of three islands and covers a rough area of 5km² of land and sea. Declared a protected site by UNESCO in 1992 and dedicated as a nature reserve in 1993, the island is populated with endangered species of rabbits, monk seals and turtles. It is also a stop for over 300 species of migratory birds. The largest island, Nakheel, features around 2,500 palm trees with paths laid out for visitors. After your stroll, you can take a swim or enjoy a picnic. The islands are open to the public from July to September. Negotiate your boat trip at the Mina, pack some food and float away to the preserved nature islands.

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epc@cyberia.net.lb

Al Mina

The history of the Al Mina port goes back way before the medieval times; however, few traces of this history remains. The port is today a promenade for natives and tourists alike, to rest after a long day of walking around the old city and enjoy local dishes and desserts.





7. Modern structures

Tripoli International Fair

Tripoli is full of history but also has a special place for modern architecture. Commissioned in 1963, and designed by world famous architect Oscar Niemeyer, the Tripoli International Fair, also known as the Rachid Karamé Fair, was abandoned mid-construction at the outbreak of the civil war. Today the fair ground hosts many big events.

safadi-foundation.org

8. Hamman

Hamman Al Abd

Built in the 17th C, Hamman el Abed is today's only operational bathhouse in Tripoli. Open from 8am to 10 pm, it is unfortunately only open for men, unless you reserve ahead of time for a group of women. The hamman was built in the 17th century and has the typical pierced domes of the Mamluk and Ottoman era public bath. The interior with its cushions and central fountain is a vision by itself. Traditionally bathhouses were open to both sexes (different hours) and here prospective mothers-in-laws could view and select brides-to-be.

+961 3 724556

Hamman Al Jadid

By far the largest hamman of the city, Hamman Al Jadid was built in 1740 and has not been operational since the early 1970s. However, it is the city's best-preserved establishment. A gift to the city by Asaad Pasha al Azem, governor of Damascus, no expense was spared in its construction. A huge glass pierced dome dominates the main chamber and brings a dim light to a pool and fountain below.

+961 3 684930



9. History

Ottoman Clock Tower

Walking through Al Tell square to view the renovated Ottoman Clock Tower, gifted to the people of Tripoli in 1901/2 by Sultan Abdel Hamid to commemorate the 25th anniversary of his Sultanate, we stop to admire some of the beautifully restored Ottoman buildings that surround the square.

Citadel St Gilles

The citadel St Gilles dominated the city of Tripoli and is one of its greatest landmarks. In 1102 AD, Raymond de St Gilles occupied the hill and decided to built a fortress on the beautiful location. The original castle was burnt down in 1289. Emir Essendir Kurgi rebuilt it with some additions in the 19th century. Today, the foundations are the only original remains. Explore alone or hire a guide, it is well worth a visit.

Madrassa Al Tawahiyat

This law school with its attached mausoleum dates back to 1471. Located on the main street of the gold souk, it is built of sandstone in alternating black and white patterns and has an unusual, finely decorated portal that towers above the building's ornate façade.

Butrusiya Mosque and Madrassa

Built by the Kurdish prince, Sharafeddin Issa ben Omar al Butrasi, the construction is distinguished by the mosaic in its half dome, its square minaret, its black and white stonework and the intricately decorated and inlaid mihrab.

10. Food

Dabboussi

For a unique vegetarian moghrabiyeh sandwich
+961 6 447668

Ich Ich

For ice cream made the traditional way in many flavors
(near Al Mina)

Dannoun

For a delicious fowl fatteh and hommos
+961 6 433987

Silver Shore

For an unforgettable samke harra
+961 6 601384

Tripoli tourism information office

+961 6 433590

tripoli-lebanon.com ■



A day on the trails

Pure forests, towering cliffs and lush valleys make Ehmej a perfect destination for nature hiking adventures in the company of a resourceful local guide as Sabina Llewellyn-Davies.

The hills surrounding the village of Ehmej in the north of Lebanon feature some of the country's most stunning hiking trails. Located at an altitude of 1,140 meters the climate here is really superb and spring is one of the best times to hike here when the hills are in full bloom with wild flora.

According to excavations, the village of Ehmej dates back to the Roman age. Ancient inscriptions carved into rock depict the region's historic initiatives to preserve nature. A decree imposed by the Roman Emperor Hadrian (117 to 138) forbid its citizens to cut down juniper, oak, cedar and pine trees.

Last year, twelve trail maps were developed as part of the EMLED program (Empowering Municipalities Through Local Economic Development) to increase ecotourism to this area. The program was funded by the USAID (United States Agency for International Development) and implemented by RI (Relief International) in collaboration with IRG (International Resources Group).

The Ehmej trail maps give directions and point out natural and historic attractions along route. They are evaluated as moderate to difficult and range between 6 and 14 km in length so there is something for everyone really.





Places of natural interest

- Hafroune for its historic legends
- Quornet El Raheb (The Monk's Peak) known for its many hidden caves
- Wadi Naznazi (The Valley of the Dripping Water)

Local food specialties

Cider and wine making

Boutros Abi Khalil

+961 3 504292

Specialty of the region

Matmoura, a Lebanese potato dish

Rachid Abi Semaan

+961 71 705968

Where to stay

Contact the Ehmej information center for accommodation. Here you can also pick up the trail maps or download them from ehmej-eco.org

+961 9 504250 / 70 227730

How to get to Ehmej

Take the north highway leading to Byblos. Once there exit the highway and take the internal road that climbs toward Ehmej going through the villages of Hboub, Braij, Raas Osta, Annaya and Kfarbaal to arrive at Ehmej.

Trail

Length	14 km
Uphill	600m cumulative
Difficulty	Difficult



Rony Ghobry, born and bred in Ehmej, has been leading hiking tours for around ten years now. He is also a snowboard, climbing and rappelling instructor, as well as a caving guide. Interested in nature since he was a child, he has developed a wide knowledge of flora and fauna over the years and has built up an archive of old photos and documents on his hometown.

“Ehmej means the hidden place in the Arabic language, derived from the verb ahmaj which means to hide something. This place is so diverse: flora, herb, trees, archeological sites, hidden sinkholes, water springs and there are many historical legends related to special places,” says Rony.

The Ehmej hiking trails lead to nearby villages such as Jaj, Douma, Aquoura, Tannourine, and Jabal Moussa (the Adonis Valley). All of the trails have their own special splendor; admits Rony, but, his personal favorite is trail 2, the Jabal Hafroun trail which passes through the Valley of Beauty “where most hikers dream of living,” says Rony.

At the moment there is no signage for the trails but there are plans to mark them with wooden signs and to link two of them to the Lebanon Mountain Trail at Tannourine and Aquoura. Trail maps are available from the Ehmej information center or visitors can benefit from the services of a resourceful local guide, such as Rony.

In spring, expect a stunning display of wild flowers such as Anthemis palaestina, Orinthogalum umbellatum, Orinthogalum montanum, Cyclamen persicum, Ranunculus asiaticus, Euphorbia helioscopia, Helichrysum sanguineum, Iris sofarana and the like, and if you are wondering what on earth these are, then just ask a guide to point them out for you along the trail.

Ehmej faces environmental challenges, such as recent road development, which has eased car access, but vilified natural resources. In order to protect the environment the municipality is planting more trees in the vicinity. Construction has also driven away wild animals and unfortunately, few can be seen these days. But, Rony has sighted hyena, wild boars, fox, porcupine, hedgehogs and squirrels on hikes.

It is clear that Rony is passionate about his region and invites visitors to discover Ehmej for themselves. “To hike with me in Ehmej is an unforgettable memory. Unspoiled forests, cliffs, and valleys, Ehmej is the perfect destination for your adventure travel all year round,” he says. “Stunning views and friendly villagers make Ehmej an ideal destination for escaping the city, being only one hour from Beirut and 25 minutes from Byblos.” A warm welcome from the local community, fantastic far stretching views, and the amazing whiff of wild oregano and thyme growing on the surrounding hills are guaranteed. ■



To arrange for a visit
Please contact
Rony Ghobry
+961 3 365027
or ehmej-eco.org

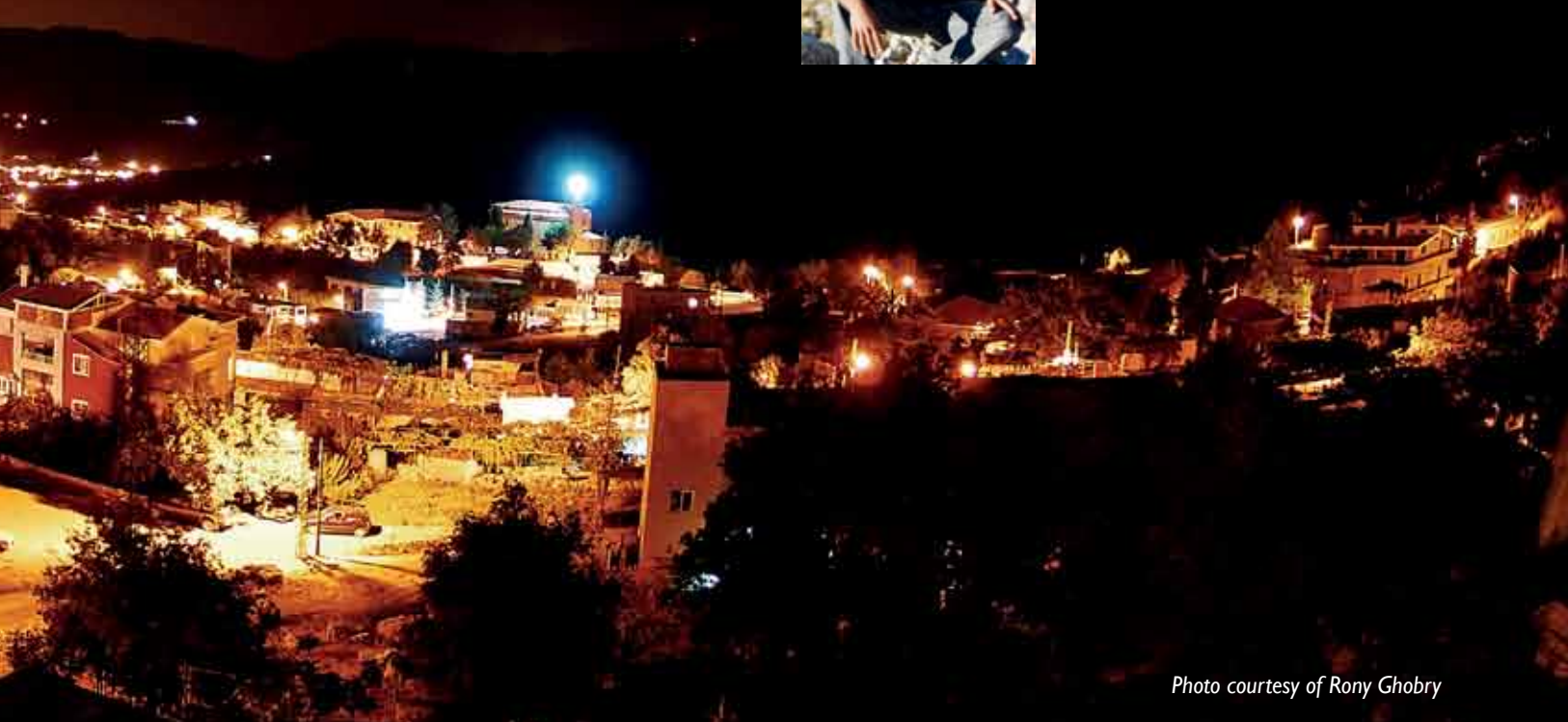


Photo courtesy of Rony Ghobry



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Stepping into the past

Visiting the Hamadeh Palace in the picturesque village of Baakline perched on Lebanon's Shouf mountains is an unforgettable experience.

As you step over the threshold, Talaat Hamadeh, one of the palace's inheritors and a descendant of the original family, immediately transports you back in time. As you listen to the sound of Talaat's voice, you will stop to wonder whether he had been there first, back in the time of Maan princes, or if the intricate arches had first laid their foundations to one day accommodate, the most timeless, peaceful and elegant hosts you could encounter. (The Emir Fakhr-al-Din ibn Maan being the 1st prince of the State of Lebanon between the 17th and 19th centuries under the Ottoman Empire).

The first stone of the palace, which is on the ministry of tourism's National Heritage List, was set in 1604 (1012 Hijri). It is set in an estate made up of a number of houses, all belonging to the same family. A side entrance leads directly into the inner courtyard, revealing a mixture of architectural influences



that Talaat highlights with his dulcet voice, unearthing in you an interest for architecture that you never thought you had. The stones will speak to you and you will start seeing on the “mandaloun” ladies of times past, waiting for the moonlight to enter their rooms through the “kamariye”, for a last chat in muffled tones before surrendering to the starry Shouf night.

Talaat will then invite you to enter a sea blue walled room, bearing the portraits of the three members of the Hamadeh family who held the position of “Sheikh Akl”, the spiritual leader of the Druze sect. The room is flooded with an exquisite yet discreetly revealing light that unleashes visions of gathered elders discussing, over a cup of hot tea from the stove, matters of importance to the community. On the right side wall, a door, or more precisely an opening through thick walls, leads you to a surprise.

You will pause to decide if you are entering a real room or if Talaat is allowing you the privilege to see a reflection of the timeless personal space he inhabits. In here, Talaat has accumulated objects of the past and he smiles while watching you react to the story they tell our collective memory. Nested with other personal remembrances you thought were gone forever, an old radio awakens tunes of Oum Koulthoun’s Thursday night songs from their deep sleep. Although you were total strangers before entering this shrine to time he has painstakingly protected for years, Talaat has managed to connect with you.

Besides reception rooms that house objects collected from around the estate and portraits of the Hamadeh family, Talaat will eventually lead you into a long and slender room where supporting arches challenge each other to reflect skilled craftsmanship and a sense of strength, stability and security. He has ridden the walls of the arches of their inner coat and the stone appears to play with the light coming in from narrow windows on the sidewalls. Talaat has not yet decided what he wants to do with the room. He is thinking of transforming it into a museum showcasing more objects found on the estate. The room could easily be a venue for committee meetings, concerts or art installations.



Talaat will then lead you to the main entrance of the estate, passing through a paved way that dates back a few hundred years. The location of the rings, used to tie horses in the courtyard, are still visible. The entrance door with its metal inserts opens onto the internal reception courtyard where Talaat's elders used to gather, seated on stone benches lining the sidewalls.

The visit will probably conclude with a cup of coffee in the courtyard surrounded by flourishing vegetation in summer, or with a cup of hot tea from the stove in Talaat's office in winter. The door he opens for you is adorned with brightly colored patterns that were in fashion centuries ago. Talaat will take you on a trip through history and will tell you the story of these old stones that have survived time trapping him in their embrace. What a wonderful way to make the country's history come alive.



To arrange for a visit to the Hamadeh Palace contact

Talaat Hamadeh
+961 71 585058

The visit is free of charge.







'Baysour'

Photo courtesy of Raymond Yazbeck, +961 3 377098

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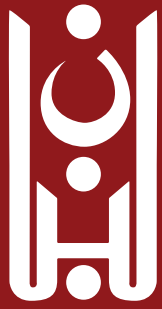
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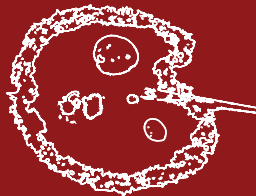
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Snowshoe adventures

Snowshoeing offers the freedom to explore secluded landscapes, snow covered trees, animal tracks...and incredible views from high vantage points discovers Sabina Llewellyn-Davies.

Photos courtesy of Rima Rantasi and Iskandar Tohme

Just imagine it...the solitude of a white winter landscape, the only background sounds are icicles falling from trees and birds chirping. Lebanon is an ideal destination for snowshoe enthusiasts in search of backcountry escapades, boasting expansive hillsides and snow-covered peaks in the winter months.

Today, snowshoeing is the fastest-growing snow activity. But, it has been around for thousands of years. Primarily used by hunters to traverse snow-covered landscapes in search of food the first snowshoes were primitive, made from wood and animal skins. The saying goes, "if you can walk, you can snowshoe" and this really is true. There are a few techniques, which you need to master, such as going up and down hills, traversing, plus the correct pole usage. But, if you are physically fit, you can become a snowshoeing expert in no time.

Snowshoeing can basically be done anywhere there is snow and no marked trails are needed. Just as with hiking, it's best not to go out into the snow alone to ensure safety, so always go with a friend, or a local guide to direct you to the best viewpoints. Or join one of Lebanon's hiking groups, which organize snowshoe outings most winter weekends.

Snowshoeing has become the winter sport of choice for many nature enthusiasts seeking solitude, put off by the mayhem of crowded roads leading to the ski resorts. And, snowshoeing is unlikely to break your bones or your budget. It is not a risky activity and there is no need to pay for lift tickets. Required gear includes the snowshoes themselves, which you can always rent, plus appropriate footwear and clothing.



At the end of a snowshoeing day, the best reward is to watch the sunset views over the snowcapped mountains while enjoying a mug of hot herbal tea laced with local honey, poured from a friend's thermos flask. Just be sure not to stay out on a freezing mountain after dark, unless you are in the company of a fully trained local mountain guide.





What you need to get started

- Snowshoes and poles can be rented from all major sport shops for around USD10. Winter lodgings (see below) can also arrange for hire
- Insulated waterproof boots or leather waterproof hiking boots
- Microlight thermal underwear and polyester fleece insulating mid-layers. A waterproof, breathable shell jacket and pants to keep you dry. Keep your head and hands covered to prevent loss of body heat and to protect from sunburn.
- Wool or synthetic socks
- Knee-high gaiters from waterproof fabric to keep snow out of your boots
- Cap or woolen hat and sunglasses
- Sunscreen is a must as burning UV rays are especially intense when reflected off snow



Where to go and stay

Try to avoid the busy ski resorts and seek the solitude of the Lebanon's backcountry and nature reserves. Horsh Ehdn, Tannourine and Barouk are perfect destinations due to news of high towering snow covered trees. An overnight stay in the region, with a warm home cooked supper to welcome you after a day in the snow, will just add to the Lebanese winter wonderland experience.

The **Tannourine Reserve**, one of the largest and densest cedar forests in Lebanon, boasts around 6,000 trees and is so rich in biodiversity. Forest ranger George Sarkis operates a guesthouse close to the reserve and he can organize guided snowshoe trips.
Guesthouse George Sarkis + 961 6 500007

The **Kfardibane** region offers expansive trails for snowshoeing, all the way up to the Roman temple of Faqra and onto the wondrous Jsr Faqra et-Tabiyi, a natural bridge. Stay at the Auberge Beity in Kfardibane, a hostel run by the charismatic Josephine who offers generous hospitality and a hearty breakfast.
Auberge Beity +961 9 214871
beity.org

The **Barouk Forest** in the Chouf region is renowned for its incredible biodiversity and you are sure to spot the tracks of wild animals on snow blanketed trails. Discover the trails with a forest ranger, whose services can be booked for the day at the main entrance. Stay at the Myrna Boustani guesthouse in the village of Barouk, which offers cozy and comfortable rooms in a lovely traditional house.

Myrna Boustani guesthouse +961 3 633862



The **Cedar Forest of Bcharre** features the oldest trees in Lebanon and is a must visit for anyone visiting the country. The area is not vast but a snowshoe hike here is perfect for those looking for a more leisurely outing plus incredible carvings in the Cedar trees. The La Cabane wooden lodge is located right on the slopes and offers cozy accommodation and snowshoe hire upon request.

La Cabane + 961 6 678067

The **Horsh Ehdn Nature Reserve** is on the northwestern slopes of Mount Lebanon and features magnificent cedars, junipers, fir, and wild apple trees. Overnight at charming wooden lodges located right at the entrance of the reserve and operated by Remonda Sayde Yammine who can arrange for snowshoe hire. Don't leave without tasting her delicious harisse, a spicy wheat and chicken stew and the regional meat specialty of ras kibbe.

La Reserve Horsh Ehdn +961 3 751292

Where to ski

The Cedars

Lebanon's oldest ski resort, The Cedars opened its first ski lift in 1953. With chalets, clubs and restaurants, this popular ski resort is the perfect winter getaway. The stunning scenery and the quality of the snow make it an exceptional skiing venue.

Directions: 130 km and two hours away from Beirut by car. To get there, keep going north on the coastal main road, until you get to Chekka, one city before Tripoli. In Tripoli, take a right upwards through Amioun and keep going past places like Kousba, Turza, Hadet, Hasrun, Bazaoun, and finally Bcharreh a few minutes away from your destination.

Amioun + 961 70 103222

Faqra Club

Opened in 1974, the Faqra ski resort is located in the village of Kfardebian and filled with charming chalets and ski slopes of varying difficulty. It's smaller than some of Lebanon's other resorts with only four slopes, but they are high quality, and combined with Faqra's picturesque location and diverse facilities, it's well worth the trip.

Directions: 45 km away from Beirut. Take the coastal highway to the north, then turn right after the Dog River tunnel and keep going straight up the mountains on the main road past Jeita, Ballouneh, Faytroun, Faraya, and then finally Faqra Club.

Kfardebian Village +961 9 300601

Laklouk

With its retro '60s vibe and wondrous natural setting amidst jagged mountain ridges and tree laden terraces the Laqlouk resort is a joy to visit. At an altitude that ranges between 1,750 and 2,000 meters it offers excellent alpine and cross-country skiing terrains. The first ski lifts were installed in 1958. Now it has eight runs to choose from.

Directions: Laklouk's resort can be easily reached by taking the main coastal highway north to the city of Jbeil, after which you take your right up towards Annaya Mar Charbel's monastery. On your way up, take your right before the checkpoint to Ihmij Village to reach Laklouk resort, which is 62 km from the capital. It takes an hour and fifteen minutes to get there.

Laklouk +961 3 441112

درب الجبل اللبناني




Lebanon Trail Mountain Trail

The Lebanon Mountain Trail is a premier long-distance trail stretching 440km through scenic landscapes and mountain villages. Every year, the LMT Association organizes a thru-walk of the entire LMT during the month of April. The theme this year is Water Conservation!

Immerse yourself on the LMT and get in shape while enjoying the great outdoors, discovering history, making friends, and supporting local communities.

Be part of this national public-interest effort by supporting one of several programs, including:

- 1 **Trail Corridor Plan** to protect landscapes and natural resources
- 2 **Trail To Every Classroom** to promote environmental education in and outside the classroom
- 3 **Guesthouse Renovation** to enhance visitor experience and support rural families
- 4 **Adopt A Trail** to protect and maintain the LMT for future generations.

For more information about the trail or LMTA programs, please contact us on 05 955 302 or 3, send your email to lmata@lebanontrail.org, or join us on Facebook. 

For your donations: visit www.lebanontrail.org



Photos courtesy of Christian Akhrass, LMT Association

Mzaar Lebanon

Mzaar boasts 80 km of ski tracks, spread out over 42 different trails. This is an easy getaway for weekend skiers, snowboarders, and snowmobile fanatics (it's an hours drive from Beirut). The highest point (2,465 meters) offers a spectacular view over the Bekaa Valley, Laqlouq, the Cedars and the coast. Challenges can be found off-piste or at the peaks of Mzaar; Jabal Dib and Warde.

Directions: From Beirut your destination can be reached within an hour and a couple of minutes. 46 km away from the capital, you go north down the coastal highway until you reach the Dog River (Nahr El Kalb), after which you take a road up right to Zouk Mosbeh. You keep travelling upwards reaching towns like Jeita, Ballouneh, Faytroun, and then Faraya village, which is 6 km under Mzaar Kfardebian's slopes.

Kfardebian +961 70 103222

The following two resorts are currently not open for skiing but are great places for fun in the snow.

Qanat Bakish

Located 1,900 meters above sea level with five ski slopes, Qanat Bakish opened as a ski resort in 1967. Less crowded than most of Lebanon's other ski resorts, it is perfect for a quiet and peaceful snow-filled escape. There's also a road that now connects the Faqra resort to Qanat Bakish so you can easily combine two ski resorts in one trip.

Directions: Qanat Bakish is 47 km away from Beirut, and takes an hour and a half to get there. The best route is to take the road to Faqra and keep going upwards.

Kfardebian +961 3 340300

Zaarour

The closest ski resort to Beirut the capital, Zaarour ski resort and country club is one of the smallest in Lebanon, yet it offers many outdoor winter activities in addition to skiing. Zaarour's ski slopes are North-facing offering an excellent quality of snow with a panoramic view spanning the famous Valley of the Skulls. Since it has been rebuilt as a private club, meticulous attention has been given to the slopes clearing them of boulders to create a fun and safe skiing experience. For the cross-country skier Zaarour offers a four kilometer track on the Sannine mountain with beautiful views and fresh clean mountain air.

Directions: Zaarour's resort is 54 km away from Beirut, which should take you about an hour and a half. One option is taking the road from Beirut's Sin El Fil and going up past Mansourieh, Beit Mery, Broumana, Baabda, Bikfaya, Dhour Choueir and Mrouj. Another option would be heading north on the coastal main road, and then turning right in Antelias going straight up on the Bikfaya road, followed by all the villages mentioned above.

Zaarour +961 9 231611 ■



Photos courtesy of Myriam Shuman



It's all in the stones

Curator and museum specialist, Juliana Khalaf, takes Byblos and its surrounding region in her stride as she hunts for fossils.

Byblos is believed to have been founded around 5000 BC and was built as the first city in Phoenicia. Today, it is thought by many to be the oldest continuously inhabited city in the world. But, one must admit that the fish got there first. Founded in 1991, the Byblos Fossil Museum houses a unique collection of fossils of sharks, eels, shrimps, rays, flying fish, squids and star fish offering great insight into the ancient marine life of the region dating back to 100 million years ago. Most of the fossils have been collected from the mountain villages of Hakel, Hjoula and En-Namoura.

The original source of these fossils was, of course, the Mediterranean Sea, which in that period covered those regions. The presence is due to the fact that the fossilization conditions of

that period were excellent and the limestone rocks preserved a wide variety of Mid-Cretaceous fossils. At the museum one can learn about the marine explorers and the species that thrived in the sea around the region. Early members of many of today's most common ocean fish groups, as well as many extinct groups, can be looked at, touched and even purchased. Located in the old souk of Byblos, the museum is open all year round, from 10 am to 6 pm daily in the winter and until late in the summer. Entrance is free of charge.

What not to miss in Byblos

- Ancient Phoenician Temples
- Byblos Crusaders Castle
- Medieval City Wall
- Byblos Wax Museum
- St. John the Baptist Church
- Historic Quarter and Souks



- Byblos International Festival (summer period)
- Egyptian Temples
- Roman amphitheater

What to wear

- Comfortable walking shoes
- Hat and sunscreen on sunny days

Take a drive to Hakel and discover its quarry and museum

Take the road going through the villages of Amchit, Hbelin, and Obaidat until you come to Haqel, which lies 650 meters above sea level. With a population of 400 people, the village has a quarry where the fossils, mainly fish are preserved. In the early 20th Century, 55 genera and 69 species of fish were recorded in Hakel deposits, compared to 47 genera and 58 species in nearby Hjoula, and 25 genera and 30 species in Nammoura. Fish are the most common fossils, but crustaceans are also frequent. Plants and echinoderms are also present as rare finds.

The Museum

Rizkallah Nohra founded Expo Hakel, a museum of fossilized fish. The whole adventure began in 1970, when as a seven year-old boy



he started to gather stones with peculiar designs and engravings from a piece of land owned by his family in Hakel and his hobby became a passion as years went by.

Expo Hakel is open seven days a week from 9am to 5pm in winter and 7pm in summer.

+961 9 770012
expohakel.com

Sidon through the ages

Since the 14th century BC, the Lebanese coastal town of Sidon has been a commercial center with strong trade links with Egypt. The city rose in prominence from the 12th to 10th centuries BC, its wealth generated from trading murex that produced an expensive, highly prized purple dye, which was eventually exploited to the point of extinction.

Sidon was famed for its glass-making, which was considered the best in the world. The town also became known for shipbuilding and provided experienced sailors for the Persian fleet. The king of Sidon was admiral of the fleet and successful in campaigns against the Egyptians in the 6th century BC, and later against the Greeks, giving Sidon a degree of independence from its Persian overlords. This

lasted until the middle of the 4th century BC, when a Phoenician rebellion, centered in Sidon, incurred the wrath of the Persians.

During the Byzantine period, the aftermath of the devastating earthquake of AD 551 saw Sidon fare better than most other Phoenician cities. In 667 the Arabs invaded and the city took on the Arabic name Saida, still widely in use today.

Sidon's fortunes rose in the 15th century when it became a trading port of Damascus. In 1791, the Ottoman pasha of Acre, Ahmad al-Jazzar, drove the French from the town and Beirut took over as the center of commerce. An earthquake in the 1830s, followed by bombardment during the Ottoman–European campaign to remove Bashir Shihab II, helped ensure the city's fall into relative obscurity.





A stroll through historical Sidon

Sidon offers a multitude of Ottoman buildings, military and religious. The Hammoud palace (Madrassat Aisha) once housed Ottoman soldiers until the French military during its mandate and finally the modern day Internal Security Forces, before being completely abandoned.

The St. Nicolas Cathedral, which stands on the site of an ancient basilica of the eighth century, was built in 1690 and was the seat of the Orthodox Archbishop of Sidon. It has some interesting features such as a small room where St. Paul and St. Peter are believed to have met and a trapdoor, which according to legend provides access to a tunnel linking the sea castle to the land castle.

Sidon also has a synagogue, which according to some historians dates back to 833 while others believe it goes back to the destruction of the Second Temple during the time of Christ. A photo taken 15 years ago by Sami Karkabi shows Hebrew characters on the medallions. Today, unfortunately, the synagogue is squatted and the characters are daubed with red paint.

Other places of interest include the Al-Omari mosque, the Kikhia mosque, the Chapel of the Franciscans (Terra Santa) built in 1856 by Antoine Catafago, the Audi Foundation's Soap Museum, the Debbané Palace and the Sacy residence that stands on the cross foundations. Also, the Serail Square as well as the nearby St. Louis Castle and the Fakhreddine Baths sold by an Ottoman dignitary in 1856 to the Jesuits monks who turned it into a college.

Little known facts about Sidon

Saint-Joseph University's professor Andre Sacy is so enamored with the history of his hometown of Sidon that he has literally scrutinized every corner of its sites and their history. He has come up with the following findings:

- According to ancient texts, Jesus Christ preached not only in Tyre and Sarepta but also in Sidon. The rock on which he stood to address the crowd had been cited in several texts up to the period of the Crusades.
- Sidon hosted the famous School of Law after the earthquake of 551 struck Beirut.
- The sea castle was built in four stages. It had two towers, two large halls, including that of the Knights Templar, and a monumental chapel built in 1260. A wall protected it from the sea. It had two entrances, one connected to a dock leading to land, the other giving access to the sea.
- Fakhreddine did not build Khan el-Franj (the caravanserai of the French). It was built 60 years before his time. In 1540 the Grand Vizier Mehmed Pasha rented it out to French consuls and merchants for the equivalent of 792 dollars. The caravanserai was composed of three different properties: the Grand Khan, the Little Khan and the French consul's residence. The first two belonged to the Mecca Wakf and the last to the Damascus Wakf.



Where to eat

Shawarmas are a fixture in Middle Eastern souks and this is true for Sidon as well. There are numerous shawarma stands scattered around the souk, making them convenient options should those hunger pangs appear. **Abou Bahij +961 7 729857**

Sidon is famous for its sweets, particularly the sanioura, a crumbly biscuit that is often described as a cross between a shortbread and pavlova. Wandering around the souk there are numerous **sweet shops** with a variety of mouthwatering delicacies.

Al Baba +961 7 720678

In need of refreshment after hours of wandering in the maze of alleys of the old city, you'll stumble upon **Sidaoui Cafe**. This family owned café makes a great stop for a thirst-quenching cup of tea. **+961 7 750333**

Local **cafés** across the street from the Sea Castle are another good stop have a bite to eat, play backgammon and experience a shisha. As is **Al Qalaa**, Sidon's only boutique hotel **+961 7 734777**

For those wanting to taste a falafel, **Abou Rami** is a must. This small store is always full and the sandwiches are more than filling.

Getting there from Beirut

Getting to Sidon by public transportation - mainly by mini-buses and service taxis - is easy. The main terminal is Cola bus station in southern Beirut.



Off the beaten path

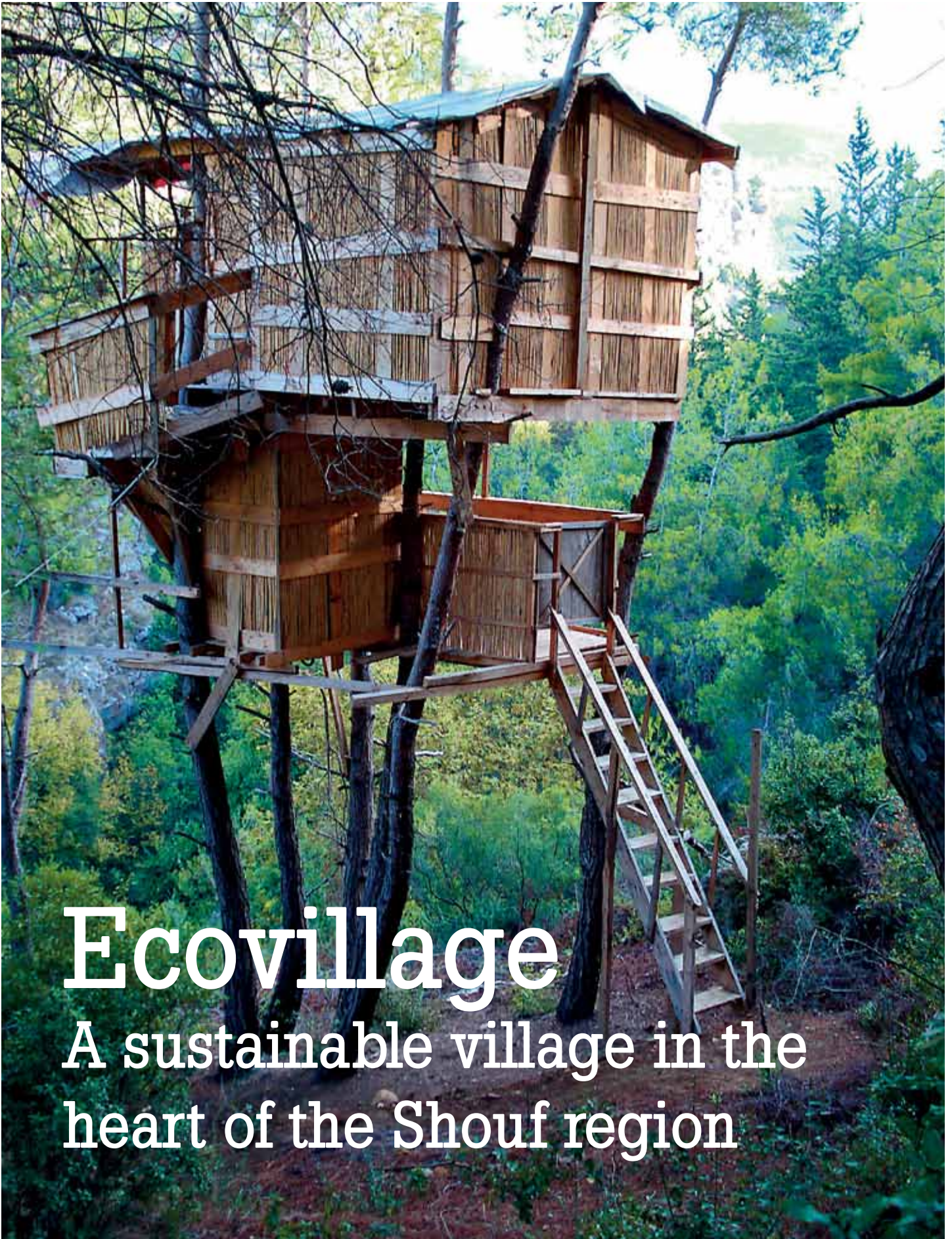
Temple of Echmoun

About 3km north of Sidon, on the banks of a river called Nahr el-Awali, lie the ruins of the Temple of Echmoun. It was dedicated to the Phoenician god of medicine and healing, the most revered in Sidon at the time and one that was later equated with the Greco-Roman god Asclepius.

Magdouche: Sanctuaire Notre Dame de Mantara

If you're going on a day trip then take the time and go a bit further. Visit this sanctuary that holds a special place in the heart of the locals. It is believed that this sanctuary is where the Virgin Mary waited for Jesus while he went to preach in Tyre and Sidon. ■





Ecovillage

A sustainable village in the heart of the Shouf region

"It all started in 2005. We were three friends, Greenpeace activists looking for a safe haven in nature, one that is sustainable. At the same time, my mother had an organic restaurant, Olive, and I wanted to have a farm to supply the restaurant. Several environmentalists' ideas came together and the end result was Ecovillage, a sustainable farm," explains Karim Al Khatib, founder and owner of Ecovillage.

Located in the Shouf, the Ecovillage was first a camping place, mainly for Greenpeace activists. Little by little the number of campers grew and the need for some bathrooms became evident. After the bathrooms, the need for electricity revealed itself. "As a sustainable place, we have to create our own electricity, so we made a micro turbine that works on the river water flow," says Al Khatib. The project continued to gain in popularity and a need for more facilities was becoming more pressing. So, Al Khatib took a loan from Kafalat to continue to develop the project.

Spread over 100,000 m², Ecovillage is a sustainable village. To be sustainable, a village needs first and foremost to have its own agriculture to feed its inhabitants and visitors. The houses should be built in a sustainable way using natural material such as wood. Using your own water is another condition for sustainability and Ecovillage has its own source of water and facilities to save rainwater. Finally the village should produce its own electricity, which is the case for Ecovillage. "We are probably the only place in Lebanon to have electricity 24/7," jokes Al Khatib.

Visiting Ecovillage is not only a communion with nature; educational programs for all ages about ecology and sustainability are a major part of the visit. The young can learn about the food chain, and adults can learn about the medical herbs that grow all over the region. "We teach visitors of all ages about the ecosystem and the importance of sustainability. Who knows, maybe that young camper will grow up to become an architect and we might have opened their eyes on a new way of thinking."

Aside from the educational aspect, the village is a place where you can enjoy swimming in the river, walks in nature, rock climbing and participate in zip wire activities. For the less adventurous planting and pottery painting activities are also available. The restaurant uses local produce to offer visitors traditional vegetarian dishes.

Ecovillage is a wonderful venue to spend some quality time with family, unwind with friends, get rid of stress and learn about the environment and the local traditions. It is also an ideal venue for companies with a conscience to hold conferences, workshops and team building activities.

The next big thing for Ecovillage is to be a zero waste venue. "Although we sort the waste, we do not re-use it and that's the next step. We will be re-using all of the glass, metal and wood we collect in many ways in an effort to become more industrial," reveals Al Khatib.

"And now that we have a new born, [Karim is now a father] we are working on making the village baby friendly and are creating some stroller accessible paths around the village." ■

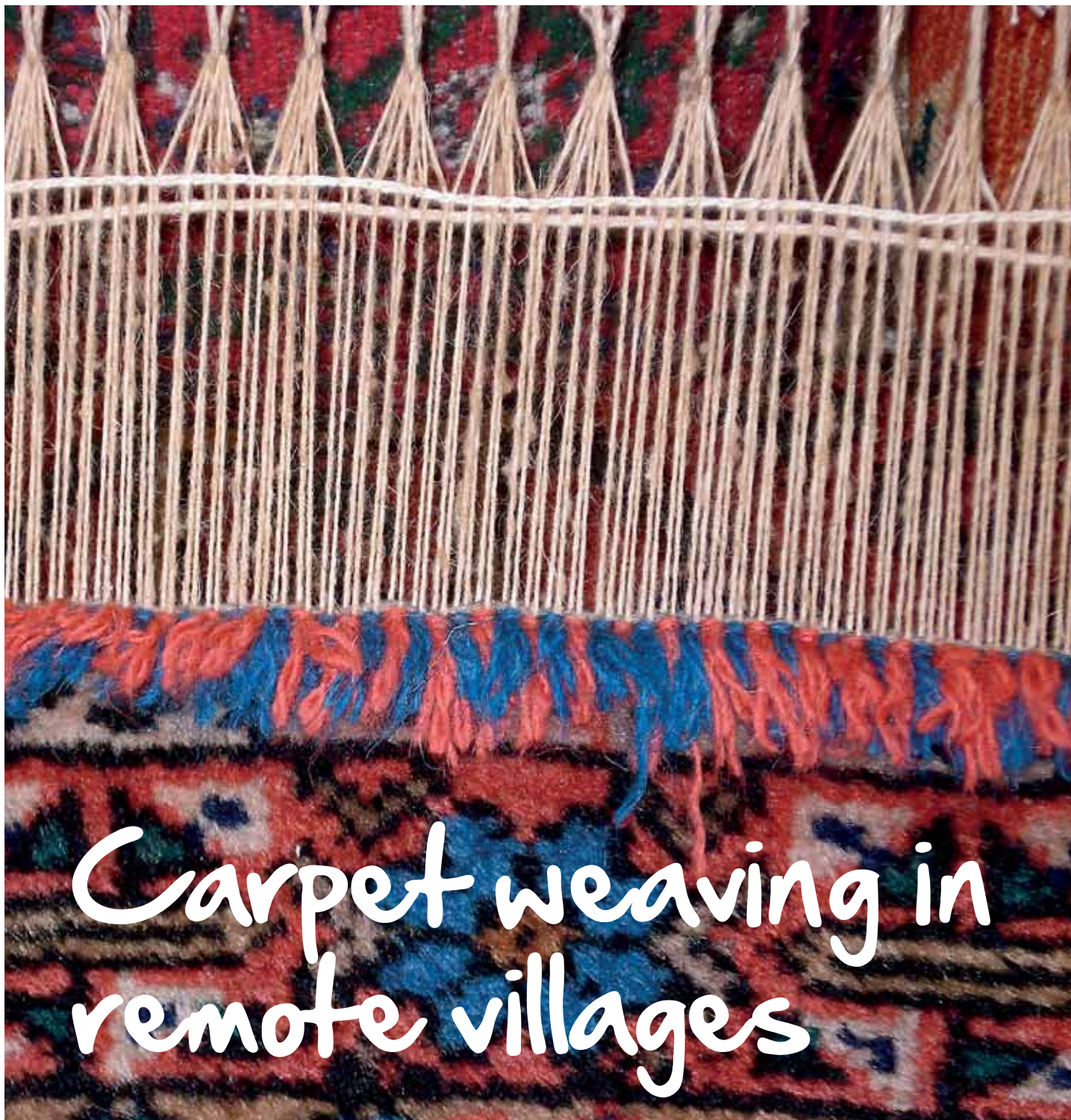


Sustainable weddings

Weddings are a major event for the Lebanese society, but, also a great source of waste. In the line of sustainable philosophy, Ecovillage has introduced the sustainable wedding concept and created the "La Maison des Merveilles" venue. Here you can have a wedding that is up to Lebanese standards without being wasteful. In the beautiful natural surroundings of the Ecovillage, the wedding will be catered using produce grown on the premises, as well as meat from the animals bred within the village. Electricity, music and lighting are available and decorations are mostly wild flowers. The wedding is sure to compete with any traditional Lebanese wedding with a plus: it will surely cost far less!

Ecovillage is an ecotourism educational project situated in the Dnit valley of the Shouf mountains 22km (40 minutes) away from downtown Beirut. The land extends on 130,000 m² surrounded by pine forests and bordered by the Safa River. Its aim is to provide its 10,000 yearly visitors education about its environment and sustainable living. Ecovillage can host 60 people in cottages and tree houses and has a restaurant that serves vegetarian food.

Karim El Khatib
 +961 3 381733, +961 3 211463
ecovillagelebanon.com



In the remote villages of Jdeydet el Fekha and Aarsal, in Lebanon's Bekaa valley, the carpet weaving tradition is kept alive by the women of the village. In their homes, with their kids running around, the women are hard at work to create a beautiful and unique piece for all to appreciate. And, it's not an easy job.

Previously just used to cover bad flooring and to give cover on cold winter nights, carpets have now gained a more luxurious and artistic aspect. Whether laid on a floor or hung on walls, hand

woven carpets are now considered an exclusive item that owners are proud to put on display.

The first step is to prepare the wool. It has been cut from sheep, washed, dried in the sun, combed, spun to transform it into threads, and then dyed with natural colors. Later comes the weaving process, which begins by preparing a loom, making knots, compacting them, cutting the edge to make them even and then working on the design.

Most of the carpets have been made following the Bergama Style. Bergama is a town northwest of Turkey and Bergama carpets are pure wool and have a knotting density of around 12 knots per cm². They are typically three to four m² in size. Bergama rugs traditionally have dyed wefts, usually red, and long silky pile.

Wefts are horizontal plain colored thread, which run across the width of the rug, over and under the warp strings and between each row of knots, to help hold rows of knots in place and strengthen the structure. Different colors are used in knotting in accordance with the pattern. The Turkish knot is looped around two different wraps, both ends are pulled down and cut. As for the designs, they are passed down from generation to generation.

If you are visiting the town of Baalbek, make a stop at the villages of Jdeydet el Fekha and Aarsal to learn about rug making. Purchasing a unique hand woven rug from the village women will support the traditions of the local community, well worth the 42 km detour.

Nahla Succari c/o Baraa +961 70 831269 ■





Furn el Man'oushé

Food writer Barbara Abdeni Masaad takes a closer look at the tradition of the man'oushé, the so-called Lebanese pizza. Be sure to look out for this local delicacy as you travel through the country.

"*Bedeh man'oushé a3 zaouk*" translates from Arabic "I want a man'oushé made to your liking". This is what you may hear customers shouting out when entering a bakery to ask the *ma3lem* (baker) for a *man'oushé*. This portrays the Lebanese lifestyle and the adventurous characters of our people. Don't get me wrong. The extreme opposite exists among us too. I've often met Lebanese ladies who bring their own toppings to the bakery because they feel that theirs is the original one, "*el assliyeh*". They boast that they personally gathered and picked the *zaatar* (oregano) during its season and that the *kalta* (mixture) is a family secret.

I am a traveler and have often reflected upon different societies and how each one lives in their given community. The street corner Lebanese bakery, "*the furn*" is a meeting place where one can relish for a minimal price the iconic Lebanese breakfast par

excellence. Don't be fooled though, the "*the furn*" is not only about eating. It is much more than that. It is a meeting place where women gather to gossip, thus the saying "*neswen el furn*". It is a place where one goes to talk politics or discuss a neighbor's spat, and even to find true love. How would I know, I have sat and observed for many years the happenings of this special place. I have made my own humble conclusion: the *man'oushé* is the common denominator amongst us as Lebanese. It is available to the rich, to the poor; to all our diversified communities all around the country, and yet regional differences arise in recipes ...

Traveling down south, one can visit local bakeries and eat the region's typical bread called *jreesh*. This bread, sometimes called Ramadan bread, is served wrapped in newspaper. As the fresh loaf comes out of the hot baker's oven a faint odor of *misk* and



*Man'oushé: Inside the Street
Corner Lebanese Bakery.*
+961 3 688258
barbaramassaad.com

aniseed hangs in the air. The taste is out of this world. One bite and you are hooked for life.

In Beirut, man'oushé and all its varieties can be found at every corner. Local restaurants marketing the man'oushé as a meal make customers pay more for the same pie that is available at a nearby bakery. However, some favor sitting in chic surroundings to eat their man'oushé, it's a question of taste. Menus with a huge variety of toppings like *zaatar*, cheese, red pepper paste mixed with onions, *sujuk* (Armenian sausages), eggs, *kishk* (dried yogurt) and many others including sweet varieties hinting at western pancake flavors, attract customers.

In the Shouf, man'oushé is made with wild herbs and plants, which grow in the region. When folded into a triangle they are called

fatayer. Another regional favorite is made with *kishk* mixed with walnuts and a mild red pepper paste with chopped onions.

In Byblos bakeries make man'oushé with eggs, often mixed with awarma (preserved lamb meat made in the mountains) or sujuk. In the north, due to proper animal breeding, laham bi ajin is favored. Sometimes you can find bakeries that solely make meat pies and offer no other varieties, not even *zaatar*. The meat is full fat, but the taste is exquisite, almost refined.

I am a traveler. I have wandered all around the world. When I smell the taste of *zaatar* cooking in a hot oven on fluffy, almost cakey dough, walking through the streets of Beirut, it hits me like a ton of bricks. I am back in Lebanon, in the village of my ancestors. I am Lebanese. I am home. ■



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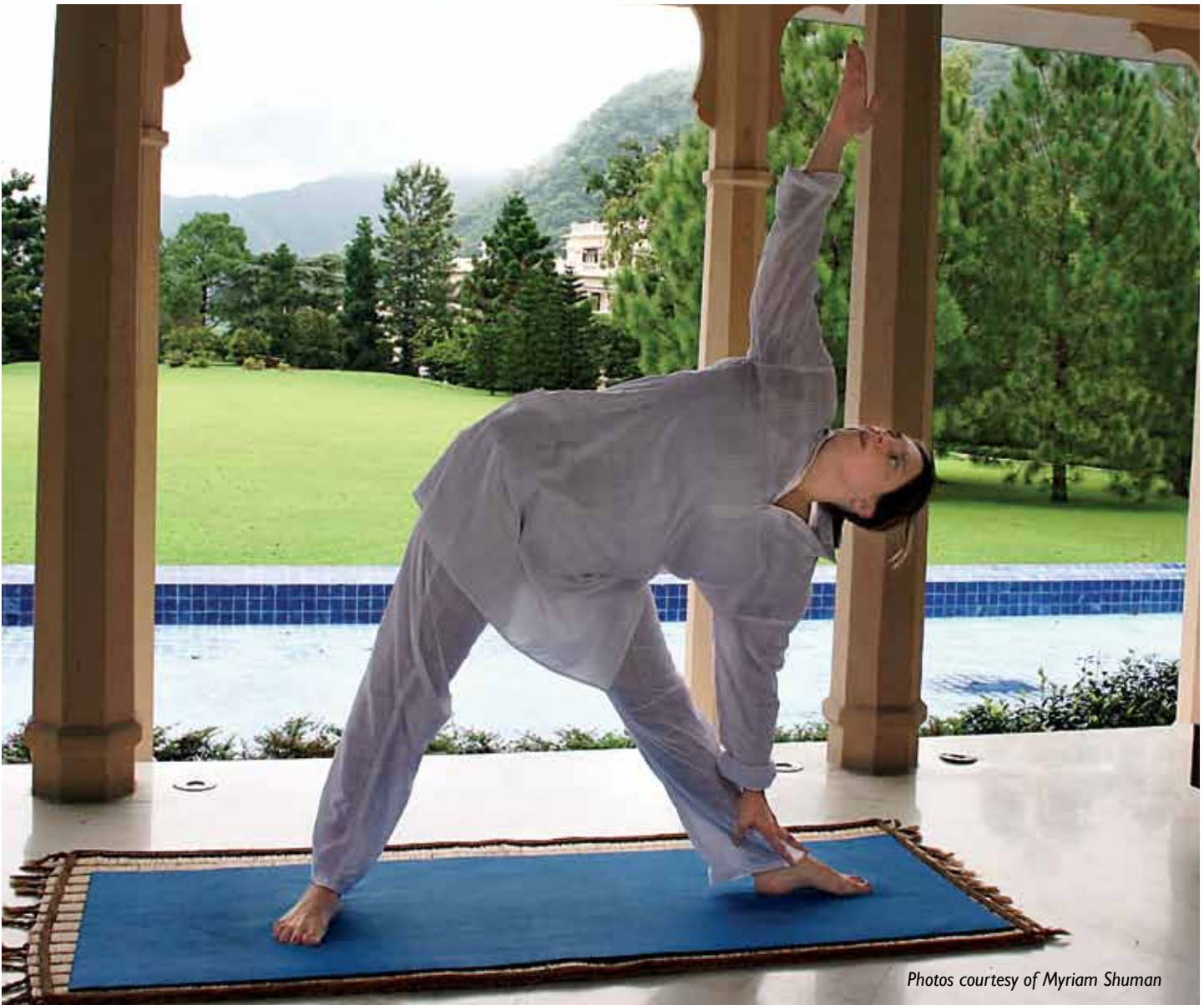
LONG YIN

Giverny

Pergolas

HEMINGWAY

EARTHQUAKE



Photos courtesy of Myriam Shuman

Beauty through yoga

Yoga brings out the best in you as it helps you relax and reconnect with yourself. Throughout Lebanon you will find yoga retreats where you can do just this, as well as classes for every taste.

What is yoga?

Yoga is an ancient Indian body of knowledge. The Sanskrit word yoga means to join or yoke together. Ancient yogis had a belief that in order for a person to be in harmony with oneself and one's environment, the person has to integrate the body, the mind and the soul. For these three to be integrated, emotion, action and intelligence must be in balance.

Yoga, as its name indicates, aims to unite body and mind in

a unique harmonious experience. Exercise, breathing and meditation are the three main axes of yoga. Designed to put pressure on the glandular systems of the body, the exercises can lead to health improvement. Breathing techniques are based on the concept that breath is the source of life in the body. Students gently increase breath control to improve the health and function of both body and mind. By focusing on these two, students are prepared for the next step: meditation. By designing physical poses and breathing techniques that develop awareness of the body, Yoga allows students to focus and be relieved from the daily stresses.

What are the benefits of yoga?

The practice of yoga can be beneficial on many levels, both physically, spiritually and emotionally

Stress reduction

The modern daily lifestyle is not one free of stress. Yoga, with its quiet, precise movements will drive your focus away from the chaos of your day towards a calm place as you move your body through poses that require balance and concentration.

Increased fitness

As you learn the many yoga positions and master balance techniques, you will enjoy an improved range of motion and strength as well as enhanced flexibility. This increased fitness means a decreased risk of injuring yourself in other physical activities of your daily routine.

Better posture

With increased flexibility and strength comes better posture as most standing and sitting poses of yoga develop core strength as you are counting on your abdominals to support and maintain each pose. Exercise will heighten your body awareness which means you are more likely to realize when you are slouching or slumping and adjust yourself into the right posture.

Healthier circulation

Yoga improves blood circulation. By transporting nutrients and oxygen throughout your body, yoga provides healthier organs, skin and brains.

Better pain tolerance

Yoga students have a higher pain tolerance than people who do not practice yoga on regular basis. Studies have revealed that meditation increases the thickness of the grey matter in brain therefore reducing your sensitivity to pain.

Management of chronic health conditions

Yoga might help with a variety of health conditions such as cancer, depression, pain, anxiety and insomnia by helping with sleep problems, fatigue and mood. It can also help reduce heart rate and blood pressure, which will lead to lesser risks of heart attacks, high blood pressure and strokes.

Weight loss

For overweight and binge eaters, yoga might facilitate to make the healthy lifestyle changes that will help gain control of your eating habit, hence loose the unwanted kilos.

Yoga for travelers

Travel can be physically and mentally taxing. Incorporating yoga into your travels can help you enjoy the journey instead of stressing out. Below are a few poses that will allow you relieve your fatigue so you can fully enjoy our beautiful country! Be sure not to push yourself too hard in the poses. Take it easy, remember to breathe and have fun.

Pose 1

Restorative Inversion: Legs up against the wall

This position stretches the back of the legs, calms the mind, and relieves fatigue and cramping in the legs and feet.

- Set a bolster or pillow on the floor against the wall.
- Sit sideways against the wall with your lower back against the bolster.
- Gently bring your legs up onto the wall. Use your hands for balance as you shift your weight as you lie down.
- Rest your shoulders and head on the floor. Your lower back should now be fully supported by the bolster.
- Hold for 5-10 minutes, breathing with awareness.
- To release, slowly push yourself away from the wall and slide your legs to the side.

Pose 2

Spine Opener: Bridge Pose

The bridge pose calms the mind and is known to be therapeutic for individuals with high blood pressure. Do not perform this pose if you have neck injuries.

- Lie on your back with your knees bent and feet on the floor.
- Press your feet and arms into the floor as you lift your hips toward the ceiling.
- Keep your thighs and feet parallel — do not roll to the outer edges of your feet or let your knees drop together. Roll your shoulders back and underneath your body. Clasp your hands and extend your arms along the floor beneath your pelvis.
- Hold for up to one minute, then exhale and release by slowly rolling the spine along the floor, vertebra by vertebra.



Photos courtesy of Carlos Bou Nafeh

Pose 3**Spinal Stretch: Easy pose with twist**

This position stretches the back, knees, and ankles. Sitting upright so your spine is properly aligned reduces stress and anxiety. Twisting stimulates and detoxifies your abdominal organs, while boosting energy.

- Sit on the edge of a folded blanket, crossing your legs in front of you at the shins. If your hips are very tight, you can sit on a bolster or block.
 - Balance your weight evenly across your sit bones. Align your head, neck, and spine. Lengthen your spine, but soften your neck. Relax your feet and thighs.
- Place your right hand on the floor behind you. Bring your left hand to the outside of your right knee, gently twisting to the right. Inhale to lengthen your spine, and exhale to twist deeper. Gaze over your right shoulder.
- Hold for ten breaths.
 - Come back to center. Change the cross of your legs and twist to the opposite side.
 - To release, come back to center.

Pose 4**Restorative Stretch: Easy Pose with Forward Fold**

This position stretches the back, shoulders, hips, knees and ankles. Folding forward calms the mind, and reduces anxiety and fatigue.

- Sit on the edge of a firm blanket, crossing your legs in front of you at the shins. If your hips are very tight, you can sit on a bolster or block.
- Balance your weight evenly across your sit bones. Align your head, neck, and spine. Lengthen your spine, but soften your neck. Relax your feet and thighs.
- Reach your arms up overhead, lengthening your spine.
- On an exhalation, slowly bow forward with your arms still



extended. Rest your arms, hands, and forehead on the mat. If your forehead does not touch the mat, bend your elbows, stack your hands, and rest your forehead on your hands. You can also rest your forehead on a pillow or bolster.

- Hold for up to five minutes.
- To release, use your hands to walk yourself back to an upright, seated position. Change the cross of your legs, and repeat the pose.

Pose 5**Full-body Stretch: Seated Forward Fold**

This calming forward bend helps to relieve stress and reduce fatigue. It stretches the spine, shoulders, and hamstrings, and is reputed to be therapeutic for high blood pressure and infertility.

- Do not perform this pose if you have a back injury.
- Sit on the edge of a firm blanket with your legs extended in front of you. Beginners should bend the knees throughout the pose, eventually straightening the legs as flexibility increases.
- Inhale as you reach your arms out to the side, and then up overhead, lengthening your spine.
- Exhaling, bend forward from the hip joints. Do not bend at the waist. Lengthen the front of your torso. Imagine your torso coming to rest on your thighs, instead of tipping your nose toward your knees.
- Hold onto your shins, ankles, or feet — wherever your flexibility permits. You can also wrap a yoga strap or towel around the soles of your feet, holding it firmly with both hands. Keep the front of your torso long; do not round your back. Let your belly touch your legs first, and then your chest. Your head and nose should be the last to touch your legs.
- With each inhalation, lengthen the front torso. With each exhalation, fold a bit deeper.
- Hold for up to one minute. To release the pose, draw your tailbone towards the floor as you inhale and lift the torso.

Poses from yoga.isport.com



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A publication of Hospitality News Middle East Magazine

Yoga classes around Lebanon

Yoga on the beach

Nothing makes you feel better like walking on a sandy beach enjoying the sun. The Edde Sands resort offers yoga classes on the beach for double enjoyment. Relax under the sun, let yourself be taken by the sound of the waves, go deep into your meditative state and unwind.

Classes are offered Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays. Students can choose between morning and afternoon classes. Each class costs 22,500 LL or 157,500 LL for a whole month of lessons.

+961 9 546666 ext 126

Laughter yoga

Laughter yoga is a revolutionary idea. It combines unconditional laughter with yogic breathing. Laughter is stimulated as a body exercise in a group and with eye contact and childlike playfulness it soon turns into real and contagious laughter. Based on the scientific fact that the body cannot differentiate between fake and real laughter, laughter yoga give the body the same physiological and psychological benefits of a good laugh. Sabine Jizi will guide you through this unique type of yoga every Sunday at Nino's in Gemayze. Sessions begin at 7pm and cost 20,000 LL per person.

+961 3 160434 or +961 3 912123

Yoga retreats

Olga Pavlova, yoga teacher and holistic massage therapist, organizes yoga retreats that take place outdoors and away from the hustle bustle of the city. The retreats are based on yoga and include different levels of students. They are also meant as a yoga cleansing. During a whole weekend you will exercise, eat healthy and cleanse yourself from all toxins. They usually take place from Friday to Sunday early evening in green spaces such as the Ecovillage in the Shouf, or in the cedar forest nursery in Ramlieh or in Maaser al Shouf, The cost is around 300,000 LL per person.

+961 3 096147

Shiva Lila Yoga Space Beirut

Located in Clemenceau, the Shiva Lila Yoga Space offers different approaches to yoga ranging from fluid power and vinyasa flow to tantra yoga and hatha yoga. Classes are held every day and a single session costs 20,000 LL and a 10 passes booklet 150,000 LL.

+961 3 335054 or +961 76 624386



Photos courtesy of Carlos Bou Nafeh

Qi Gong with Barbara

A Chinese variation of yoga, Qi Gong is the practice of aligning breath, movement, and awareness for exercise, healing, and meditation. With roots in Chinese medicine, martial arts, and philosophy, qigong is traditionally viewed as a practice to balance qi (chi) or what has been translated as "intrinsic life energy." Typically a qigong practice involves rhythmic breathing, coordinated with slow stylized repetition of fluid movement, and a calm mindful state. Barbara Driesken will coach you and help you find your balance. Classes are held every Wednesday evening in Mar Mikhael and cost 15,000 LL.

+961 3 096147

Yoga and tourism

Find your balance and tour Lebanon with Lola Travel's one week yoga retreat. Learn the fundamental principles of yogic balance during morning and evening yoga session in the peaceful seaside of Byblos-Sur-Mer Hotel. Between sessions follow a guide to major landmarks of the Lebanese touristic map. This 7 day yoga retreat is also an occasion to learn some healthy Lebanese recipes and enjoy Ayurvedic massages. Planned for 9 -16 March and 20 - 27 April, the retreats cost 3,900,000 LL on full board basis, inclusive of tours and massages.

+961 70427821 ■





The Hakawati Tradition

Once upon a time, in bygone days, people entertained themselves. But, not by watching TV, going to the movies, reading a book or surfing the Internet. The most common form of entertainment in the Middle East used to be that of the hakawati.

The word hakawati is derived from the Lebanese word hekaya and literary means the one who tells stories. A hakawati is a teller of tales, myths and fables, a storyteller, an entertainer, someone who earns his keep by beguiling an audience with yarn. In the old days, villages had their own hakawatis, but the great ones left their homes and traveled around the country to earn their living.

A hakawati never reads his stories. He always tells them from memory and his style is one filled with metaphors, rhymes and lots of exaggeration. He tells traditional tales from 1001 Nights, chronicles of legendary Arab heroes such as Anta, or stories from the holy Quran. Experimenting with pitch, tone and accent, the storyteller impersonates the many characters he is talking about. A hakawati could go on spinning the same tale daily over several months, always ending on a cliffhanger to keep his audience

wanting more, the equivalent of today's soap opera. According to legend, in the eighteenth century, Ahmad al Saidawi, one of the best hakawati of his time, told the story of King Baybars for three hundred and seventy-two evenings in a café in Aleppo, Syria. This may have been a record. It is also said that al Saidawi cut the story short because the Ottoman governor begged him to finish it.

Telling a riveting story to pass time and learn a few morality lessons along the way was a powerful means to make people step out of their everyday concerns and willingly lose themselves in another world. "It was said that after the ruler of the country, it was the storyteller who occupied the second most important position, as telling a story involved communicating with the masses. Kings, too, depended on storytellers to spread their message," says Ahmad Yusuf, a hakawati from the UAE.

Today, the hakawati is long gone, replaced by various forms of modern entertainment. The tradition is revived mainly during Ramadan, in some cafés in Sidon, South Lebanon, and during a special festival of storytelling. For the 13th consecutive year, the

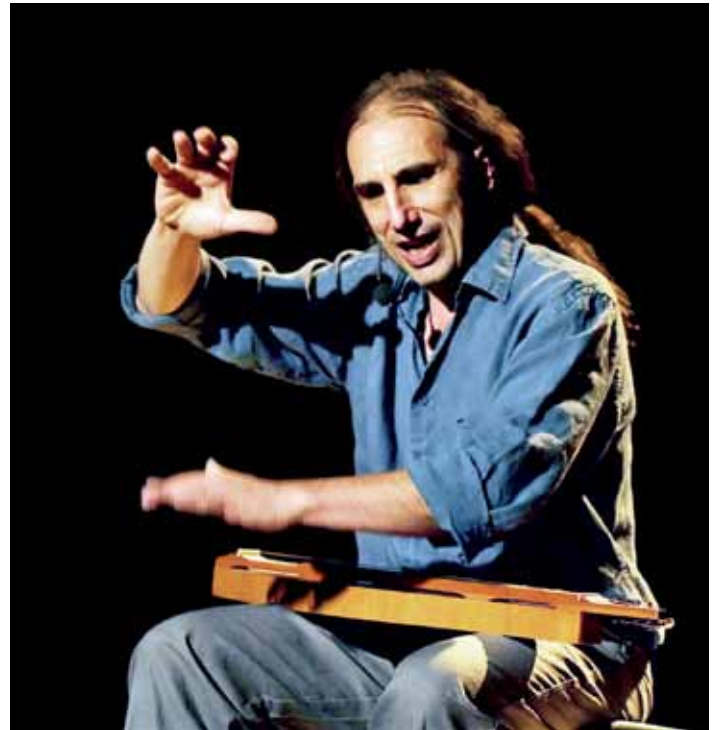
Monot Theater, Beirut, organized the International Festival of Stories and Monodrame. From the 8th to the 13th of March, storytellers from all over the world got up on stage and captivated the audience with traditional tales from their country. Two storytellers competed every night for the audience's attention. The festival ended with the highly popular "Liars Contest" where all the storytellers went on stage and improvised stories as cued by the public. For those familiar to the festival, the last day was the culmination of a weeklong journey into popular imagination, word spin, and talent.

Like every year, the lineup for 2012 was quite impressive. Nassim Alouane, Khaled al Naanaa, Sara Kasir and Ahmad Tay from Lebanon, along with Armelle Audigane and Peppo from France, Victor Cova Correa from Venezuela, Kintega Pingwinde Gerard from Burkina Faso and Stelios Pelasgos from Greece did, in a perfect hakawati tradition, take you away from your daily reality into the world of popular creative fiction.

Another particularity of the festival is its venue; it all unfolded in the old crypt of the Saint Joseph Church, home to the Monot Theater. Though not exactly a traditional café, the setting adds a touch of fantasy to the whole event. The well-preserved crypt offers an interesting surrounding for the tales to unravel and people to listen religiously.

The festival was also an occasion to sample young talents. As an opening for each evening, school students from all over Lebanon would get on stage to practice their story telling skills and charm the public with their growing talent.

For further information on the hakawati tradition or to learn its trade (Madrassa du Conte) contact Paul Mattar Monot Theater +961 | 202422 ■



What makes a good storyteller?

The narrative: The story should have a strong plot that captures the interest of listeners

The characters: A minimum of 3 to 4 characters should be interacting in a story that will move it towards its climax

The action: The story must feature elements of sound and fury: a clash of kings, an adventure on high seas or a quest for something that is undertaken in tough surroundings

The spectacle: Music and props work as symbols: a blue drape could represent the sea while a stool may stand for a sword

The message: The stories act as an important community service and the storyteller must communicate the importance of living a principled life to the audience

Airport

Rafic Hariri International Airport
+961 | 628000

The only international airport in the country, its website is extremely well organized and is updated every 10 minutes with the latest arrival and departure times, delays and cancellations. Certified airport taxis (with the airport logo on the side) are available for a fixed rate. However, you can bargain with other taxi drivers for a lower rate. You should be at the airport 2 hours prior to your flight.

beirutairport.gov.lb

Banks

Banks cashiers are normally open between 8am and 2pm from Monday to Friday, and until noon on Saturday. Most banks open longer hours for transactions that are not cash.

Bus Routes

Inside Beirut

Bus 1

Hamra to Khalde

Begins on Sadat Str and passes by Emile Edde Str (better known as Lion), the Bristol Hotel, Verdun, Cola, the airport and Kafaat before reaching it's final destination in Khalde.

Bus 2

Hamra to Antelias

Begins by the gas station next to Barbar on Emile Edde Str and passes by Radio Lebanon, Sassine Square, Mar Mikhael, Borj Hammoud and Dora before finally arriving in Antelias.

Bus 5

Ain El Mreisseh to Hay As-Saloum

Begins in Manara on General De Gaulle Ave, and continues south, passing through

Verdun, Tariq Al Jdideh, Bourj al Barajneh and the Airport before finally ending in Hay As-Saloum.

Bus 6

Cola to Byblos

Begins in Wata at Cola and continues northeast passing through Dora, Antelias, Zalka, Kaslik, Jounieh and finally ending in Jbeil (Byblos).

Bus 7

Badaro to Bharssaf

Beginning near the National Museum (Matahaf) in Badaro, this bus travels east through Beit Mery, Broumana, and Baabdat before finally arriving in Bharssaf.

Bus 8

Hamra to Ain Saadeh

Begins at AUH and then passes through Mar Elias, Becharra el Khoury, Sassine Square, Karam el Zeitoun, Bourj Hammoud, and Jdeideh before finally ending in Ain Saadeh.

Bus 9

Barbir to Nahr el Mot

Begins in Barbir and continues through Fum el Chebbak, Sin el Fil, Habtoor, Salloume, Dekwaneh, Sabtieh and Mar Taklah before finally ending at Nahr el Mot.

Bus 12

Burj Al Barajneh to Hamra

Begins in Burj Al Barajneh and continues through Haret Harek, Ghobeiri, Chiah, Sabra & Chatila, Cola, Salim Salam Str and by the Bristol Hotel before finally ending in Hamra at AUH.

Bus 15

Cola to Aley

Begins at Cola and continues through Bir Hassan, Mar Mikhael Church and Hazmieh, before finally ending in Aley.

Currency

The national currency is the Lebanese Lira. One US dollar is equivalent to approximately LL 1,500. The US dollar is accepted almost everywhere. International bankcards are accepted in most places; look out for signs. Foreign currency is easily exchanged. Banks, ATMs and exchange bureaus can be found in main cities and towns.

Driving

It is easy to rent a car if you have a valid Lebanese or international driving license

Parking

Public parking lots are available around the city and either charge a set fee or by the hour, at rates that typically range from LL2,000 to LL5,000. Another option, is to take advantage of valet services available at almost every bar and restaurant in the city, which usually cost around LL5,000 or LL7,000 if you're parking at a hotel.

Regulations

You should have a fire extinguisher in the car; wear your seatbelt at all times and always carry your mandatory government insurance, car insurance, car registration and driver's license with you at all times when driving.

Electricity

The two-pin rectangular plug system is used and adapters are easy to find. Most areas have, at least, a three hour power cut per day; more in areas outside the capital. Almost all establishments have generators automatically set to operate when the power cuts.

Tipping

Gratuities are usually in the region of 10 - 15%. As a rule, taxi drivers do not expect a tip. Tip porters USD 1.00 per piece of luggage and restaurants 10% of the bill.

Transport

Outside Beirut

Charles Helou
Buses leaving from here will take you to destinations north of Beirut. You can also catch a taxi or service to Damascus from here. Be prepared to wait for the bus or service to fill up before they depart.

Cola

Packed with buses, taxis and services that will take you to destinations south of Beirut.

Dora

An intersection for services to the north, buses stop here too. You can get to Dora by service or van from the beginning of the highway by the port.

Services (taxis that go along certain routes and take up to 5 people, LL2,000 each), street taxis (LL10,000 - 12,000), vans (LL1,000) and private buses (LL1,000).

Prices are correct at time of going to press.

Useful numbers

+961 | 449557 Beyond Beirut
beyondbeirut.com
+961 | 340940 Ministry of Tourism
lebanon-tourism.gov.lb
+961 International Code
112/999 Internal Security
125 Civil Defense
140 Red Cross
175 Fire Department
120 Directory
1155 OGERO Directory
1718 Weather



beyondbeirut

Beyond Beirut is a Lebanese non-governmental organization with a mission to encourage the development of experiential tourism beyond the city limits of Beirut as a means for sustainable economic development in rural Lebanon.



For the past year, Beyond Beirut has been actively working at developing its marketing channels. They are:

- **The Annual National Forum for Sustainable Tourism Development**

This Lebanese Sustainable Tourism Forum is the first of its kind to promote dialogue and linkages among local tourism stakeholders, and between local and national tourism stakeholders, trying to expand sustainable tourism across the value chain to all regions of Lebanon. The first Forum for Sustainable Tourism Development took place on October 5th 2011. It consisted of conference sessions and an exhibition. It was implemented in collaboration with the Ministry of Tourism and in partnership with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

- **The Beyond Beirut website: www.beyondbeirut.com**

An online portal promoting Beyond Beirut values and supporting Beyond Beirut goals while bridging rural communities with the world wide web.

- **The magazine: Lebanon Traveler**

The publication of the magazine is a joint venture between “Beyond Beirut” and “Hospitality News” Middle East. Lebanon Traveler reveals latest international tourism trends, presents updated statistics, carries in-depth interviews and relays rarely known information on Lebanese hot spots, alternative tourism destinations and rural communities. It is a quarterly publication with 2000 copies distributed to hotels, restaurants, embassies, cultural centers, municipalities, rural communities and the ministry of Tourism information office. It is sold in major bookshops.

Initiation of destination development

Beyond Beirut is currently working with rural communities to upgrade the services they offer to the tourism industry. The proposals Beyond Beirut offer are based on partnerships with the communities; they are integrated plans of action that target service quality improvement, product development and that link communities to Beyond Beirut channels.

Beyond Beirut’s first year activities, website, and magazine were made possible with funds from the American people through USAID.



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