

# Lebanon Traveler



Lebanon 8,000 LBP

A publication of Hospitality Services in a joint venture with Beyond Beirut | Issue 13 | December 2014 - March 2015

**150+**  
**WINTER**  
**DESTINATIONS**

**Maxime Chaya**  
*Touring the country  
by bike*

**MEET**  
The women stitching  
a heritage revival

**British  
Ambassador**  
Tom Fletcher's  
Lebanese life

**Molasses**  
*The seasonal ritual*

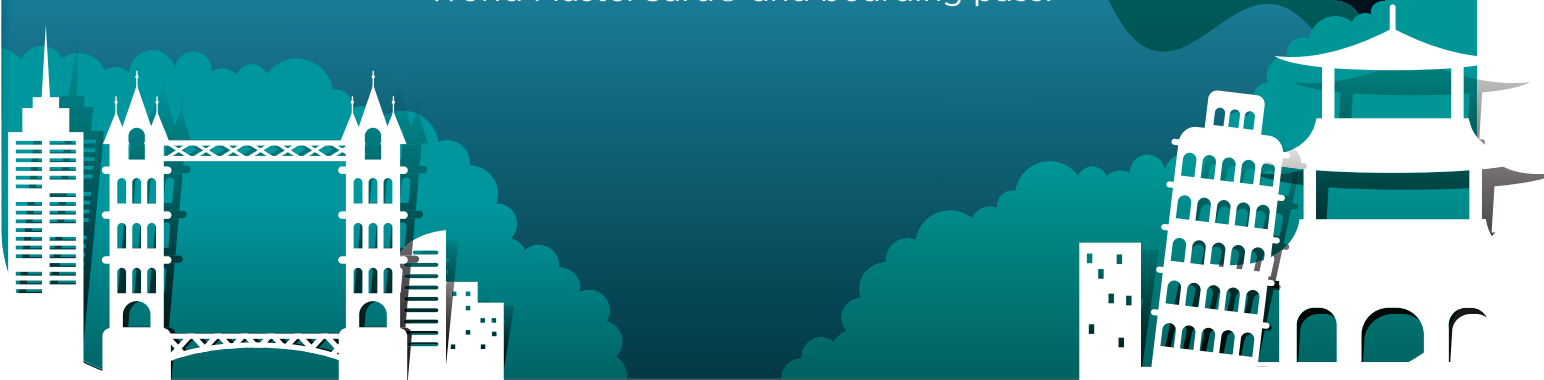




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# Winter wanderings

With snow already topping Lebanon's mountains and new winter activities and resorts ready to go, 2014/15 looks set to be an active season. It's that time of year when weekends become a holiday escape from Beirut; when the snow-covered mountains, guesthouse retreats and indulgent meals by the log fire seem like a world away. But as we prove in this issue of Lebanon Traveler, winter in the country isn't only snow; there's a wealth of experiences across the country from architectural tours around Tripoli to experiencing rural landscapes by night or exploring the country's rich forest reserves followed by an overnight stay in a local B&B.

Lebanon Traveler, as always, highlights the sustainable tourism approach, where the rural experience rules. Martine Btaich shares the potential for rural communities in an upcoming rural tourism strategy, Lebanon's cycling enthusiasts share their passion for seeing the countryside by bike and reflect on an evolving cycling community and the Food Heritage Foundation travels

the country to meet the small-scale producers continuing the seasonal ritual of making molasses.

We also highlight Lebanon's diverse heritage and meet those fighting for its preservation, speaking to artisans who are reviving the tradition of Lebanese embroidery and backgammon players who, in the streets, keep the oldest board game in the world alive in the streets. And we tour the old stairs of Mar Mikhael and Jeitawi, with those fighting for their preservation.

Culture has a prominent presence too, from painter Issa Halloum's deep connection to the lands of the Bekaa's Al Ain to jewelry designer Randa Tabbah's pieces, directly inspired by the city, along with a rich program from the Al Bustan Festival who've created a winter tradition of music and the arts.

Whatever your passion during the winter season, all you'll find in this country is warmth.

## CONTRIBUTORS



### Elsa Sattout

Elsa Sattout, PhD, is a Miriam Rothschild Scholar following a conservation leadership program at the University of Cambridge, UK. She is an interdisciplinary professional and researcher with more than 15 years experience working on eastern Mediterranean ecosystems, socio-cultural aspects of biodiversity conservation and sustainable development. She has served global communities through international organizations to support government agencies in the Northern Arabian Peninsula in the implementation of the convention on biological diversity.



### Gilbert Moukheiber

Gilbert Moukheiber is managing director of 33 North. With a focus on rural, pastoral and eco-tourism the alternative tourism operator encourage tourists to discover the entire country. He's also a development and tourism trainer and consultant and a winter search and rescue leader and trainer.



### Karim Sokhn

25-year-old Karim Sokhn is a social worker and bike activist who established CyclingCircle, the largest active cycling network in Lebanon, and founded the first bike messenger service in Lebanon and the Arab world - Deghri Messengers. He specializes in bike touring and all cycling related activities, as well as being a messenger in his bicycle delivery service. Sokhn is also active in the social field, working with Syrian refugees and in child protection related projects.



### Martine Btaich

Martine Btaich is an MBA graduate and a professional in community and sustainable development. After a few years in advertising, she moved to work with international NGOs on multidisciplinary development programs. For the past ten years she's focused on sustainable tourism, rural and economic development, in addition to education and social development programs.



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### Zeinab Jeambey

Food heritage management specialist, Zeinab Jeambey first trained as a dietician. After working on a cultural mapping project of Homs, Syria, she became hooked on the subject of heritage. Searching for a link to bring together her experience and interests Jeambey went on to study food heritage management at the University of Barcelona where she graduated in September 2013. Since returning to Lebanon, she has worked at the Food Heritage Foundation in Beirut.



Log on to our online platform, [lebanontraveler.com](http://lebanontraveler.com), and find tips to explore the country.



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# Lebanon Traveler

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# NEWS

## Meditour 2014

On 27 November, Barcelona hosted the sixth edition of the Mediterranean Tourism Forum (Meditour 2014) which was organized by the Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture of Beirut and Mount-Lebanon and The Association of the Mediterranean Chambers of Commerce and Industry (ASCAME). It had a special focus on Lebanon, reaffirming Beirut's reputation as a major intellectual, cultural and tourist center in the Eastern Mediterranean. The forum discussed the creation of the Mediterranean Tourism Agency and the investment of over USD 1 trillion to develop Mediterranean tourism. Inaugurated by Minister of Tourism, Michel Pharaon and President of ASCAME and the Chamber of Commerce,

Industry and Agriculture of Beirut and Mount-Lebanon, Mohamed Choucair, many other major players in Barcelona tourism were also present. The forum focused on recovering from the tourism crisis affecting countries in the Mediterranean. The session focusing on Lebanon was moderated by the General Director of the Ministry of Tourism in Lebanon Nada Sardouk and discussed the challenges of tourism in Lebanon with guests that included the President of Syndicate of Lebanon Hotel owners, Pierre Achkar; Representative of Ecotourism, Rafic Bazerji; President of Syndicate of Owners of Restaurants, Cafes, Night-clubs and Pastries in Lebanon; Paul Ariss; President of Beiteddine Festival, Nora Joumblat; President of the Association of Travel and Tourism Agents in Lebanon, Jean Abboud; President of Byblos Municipality Council in Lebanon, Ziad el Hawat; Managing Director of Hospitality Services, Joumana Damous and the Office Manager of Solidere, Micheline Abi Samra.

[medaeconomicweek.org/meditour](http://medaeconomicweek.org/meditour)

## Lebanon Traveler Roundtable

On 30 October, Hospitality Services and Lebanon Traveler magazine held a roundtable discussion with leaders in the tourism field including representatives from municipalities, tourism and eco-tourism companies and sites, NGOs and nature reserves. The discussion which focused on Travel Lebanon 2015 – which will take place for the second time at the Garden Show & Spring Festival – and feedback on Lebanon Traveler magazine and website highlighted the importance of the industry in shaping the above platforms and provided an important networking opportunity to bring together all those working on a shared goal to promote tourism in Lebanon.

[the-gardenshow.com](http://the-gardenshow.com), [lebanontraveler.com](http://lebanontraveler.com)



## Byblos archeology revived

On 18 November, American Ambassador David Hale took part in the opening of the Main Tower of the Citadel at Byblos' archeological site, renovated thanks to a USD 93,895 grant from the U.S. Department of State's Ambassadors Fund for Cultural Preservation (AFCP). "The [AFCP] embraced this project in Byblos because of our belief in the importance of preserving, remembering, and learning from our shared history," said Hale at the inauguration. "Today we remember the ancient past of Lebanon. We also look to Lebanon's rich and diverse culture and toward a prosperous future for its extraordinary people."

Facebook: [Ambassadors Fund for Cultural Preservation](https://www.facebook.com/AmbassadorsFundforCulturalPreservation)





## At the Rose House

Most of Beirut knows the iconic 19th Century mansion in Manara as The Rose House. Featuring arched balconies, that stretch the length of its façade, visible from the sea front, it is part of old Beirut's architectural heritage. British artist Tom Young knocked on its door in April 2014, hoping he could paint there and create an exhibition, and he met resident Fayza El Khazin who allowed him studio space over the summer. With an interest in using his art to help preserve the future of Beirut's heritage buildings along with their memories, when he discovered she would soon leave he contacted the new owners,

the Jaroudi family, who supported his project to use the building as an exhibition space. Young's exhibition features 40 paintings and a short film, which explore the context of the house within the city, its memories and hopes for its future preservation. The exhibition also offers a rare chance to look inside one of the beacons of old Beirut.

*Rose House  
Manara  
76 811357  
Exhibition runs until 31 Dec  
tomyoung.com*



## Lebanon for Free

Being short of cash doesn't mean not being able to enjoy the country but finding activities that are free can be a struggle. Step in new App "Lebanon for Free," which has tips on what to do and where to go in the country for free. Based on Google Maps, each region in the country is color coded with information about attractions available to easily browse from your phone. Now get out and explore.

*Lebanon for Free App available on iPhone and Google Play*

## Agenda Culturel turns 20

French cultural platform Agenda Culturel is celebrating 20 years of existence, over which time it's become a solid institution for supporting culture in the country. In 2014 the platform launched its "English corner," featuring cultural articles and coverage of exhibitions in English. And Agenda Culturel continues to evolve, in 2015 it will launch an ambitious program of guided visits of the city's major art exhibitions, heritage sites, literature-focused meetings and culinary experiences.

*Info at [visites@agendaculturel.com](mailto:visites@agendaculturel.com)  
01 369242  
[agendaculturel.com](http://agendaculturel.com)*



## Beirut one of New7Wonders city

Most of us have a soft spot in our heart for Beirut and we'd preach to anybody about it being one of the best cities in the world. But now we have another confirmation with Beirut fighting out over 1,000 other competitors to make it on the list as one of seven in the new campaign "New7Wonders Cities." After a series of voting rounds

from around the world through an online platform, a panel of experts including architects and urban scholars picked from the final 77. Beirut, we've made it!

*Facebook: [New7Wonders](https://www.facebook.com/New7Wonders)*



## Jezzine Natural Park

South Lebanon's Jezzine has been focused on its tourism redevelopment in recent years and as a result it's seen a huge increase in visitors. Now the region has a new project in the works to create a regional park, which has been met with enthusiasm by local actors in rural development. The goal of the regional park, which is partnered by the Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur (PACA) region and the Verdon Natural Regional Park in France, is to conserve the region's natural and cultural heritage while maintaining the economic development of the region. The Jezzine region has just completed an essential step in the project by drafting the Charter of the Regional Park, which will soon be approved by the presidents of the municipalities.

For info contact Joe Harfouch 03 353293



Photo courtesy of Joë Harfouch

## Portal 9 Forest

The new issue of Portal 9, a journal of stories and critical writing about urbanism and the city, takes the theme of the forest, creatively exploring the subject through a series of essays, creative writing and photo essays that focus on the region and beyond. They launched their fourth issue of the bi-annual publication, Forest,

at Souk el Tayeb on Saturday 13 December in Beirut Souks as part of a book market along with children's workshops, book binding, reading corners, performances, and panels.

[portal9journal.org](http://portal9journal.org); LL39,000 at [antoineonline.com](http://antoineonline.com)



## Barqa's juniper nursery

On 24 November the Minister of Tourism, Michel Pharaon opened a nursery of juniper trees and planted a tree in Barqa, Bekaa Valley, highlighting the importance of the trees in the region, which are at risk of extinction. The association *Mamlakat al Lezzeb* is developing rural tourism in the region with a project that includes three alternative lodgings and a fourth on the way, homemade food made by the local community and activities such as hiking in Barqa, farm visits and education about the juniper tree. The association aims to plant another 2,500 juniper trees in the next year, hopefully helping to preserve the species' future in Barqa.



## Lebanon Mountain Trail (LMT) Gala Fundraiser

The Lebanon Mountain Trail Association (LMTA) organized its first fundraiser gala dinner at Beirut's Phoenicia Hotel on 5 December, 2014. The Lebanon Mountain Trail (LMT) Gala gathered 290 guests, including the Minister of Environment, Mohammed El Mashnouk, President of the Board, Karim El-Jisr, and board members, friends, donors and supporters who came together to celebrate the LMT and pledge additional support to the trail. Speakers and live performers animated the event. The festive event featured a live auction of art pieces, which were generously donated by Lebanese artists. The LMT is a 470km path and the first long distance trail in Lebanon. It crosses 75 towns and villages from the north to the south at altitudes ranging from 600 to 2000 meters above sea level, as well as one World Heritage Site, two biosphere reserves, and four protected areas. The LMT promotes responsible tourism and invites travelers to experience the beauty of Lebanon's hidden treasures and conserve them. Thanks to the generosity of its supporters, the LMTA is now able to continue its mission to develop and protect the trail, and safeguard the cultural and natural assets along it, while enhancing the income levels of local communities.

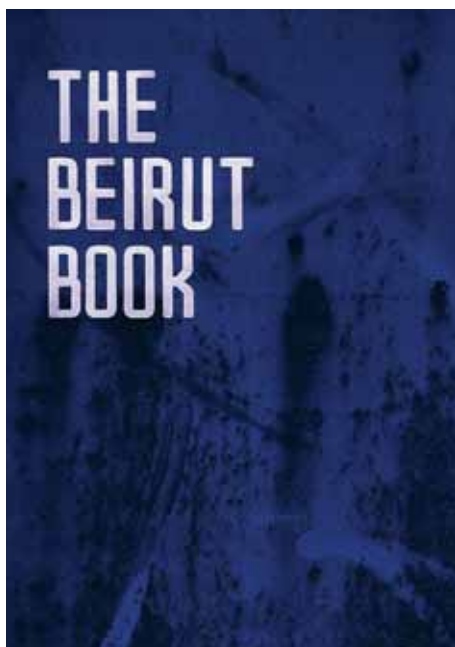
[lebanontrail.org](http://lebanontrail.org)

Facebook: [Lebanon Mountain Trail Association \(LMTA\)](https://www.facebook.com/LebanonMountainTrailAssociation)

Instagram: [lebanontrail](https://www.instagram.com/lebanontrail)







## The Beirut Book

Trilingual in French, Arabic and English, "The Beirut Book" (Tamyras, Oct 2014) features illustrations inspired by the common blue enameled plates on the walls of every corner of Beirut. Taking famous quotes and inserting the word "Beirut," inspiration for the book's content was gathered at the Beirut Francophone Book Fair in 2013 with strangers, local celebrities, authors and passing celebrities suggesting quotes. The book perfectly captures the variety of emotions that Beirut arouses in quotes such as "Beirut smells like teen spirit" and "Beirut. This inhuman place makes human monsters." LL75,000

## Dictionnaire amoureux du Liban

Alexandre Najjar invites readers to discover a country that's always been a symbol of freedom in the Arab world in "Dictionnaire amoureux du Liban" (Dictionary for lovers of Lebanon, Plon, Nov 2014, French language). He explores the ancient civilizations that have passed through Lebanon and left their archaeological remains, through to the present day, taking inspiration from the Lebanese author Khalil Gibran who wrote "If Lebanon was not my country, I would have chosen it as my homeland." LL45,500

All books available at [antoineonline.com](http://antoineonline.com)



## Positive Lebanon

As part of a large-scale initiative to highlight positive actions within Lebanese civil society and spread a movement of positivity, independent publishing house Tamyras release the book Positive Lebanon (Tamyras, Dec 2014, English, French and Arabic language) bringing together interesting encounters, photos and humor-filled caricatures. Positive Lebanon is the first volume in a collection of books dedicated to positive movers from associations, NGOs and initiatives who are always working to revitalize Lebanon. LL45,000

## ON THE NET

### BEST OF THE BLOGS

#### Night Collective

The perfect portal to discover beautiful shots of Lebanon's rural wintery scenes by night, The Night Collective brings together the work of a group of Beirut-based photographers.

Facebook: [TheNightCollective](https://www.facebook.com/TheNightCollective)

#### Green Glass Recycling Initiative

With 71 million green and amber bottles ending up in landfills every year, recycling project Green Glass Recycling Initiative (GGRII) has stepped in to package and revive the glass blowing artisanship in Lebanon.

Facebook: [GGRILebanon](https://www.facebook.com/GGRILebanon)

#### The Knooz Room

A platform for digital storytelling from the Middle East; a "journalist-creative coder team" tap into the region's artistic community to create multi-format stories across audio and visual. [knoozroom.com](http://knoozroom.com)

### WHO TO FOLLOW

[@LebanonWines](https://twitter.com/LebanonWines) Putting Lebanese wines on the map – a UK campaign funded by wineries.

[@ZawaribWorld](https://twitter.com/ZawaribWorld) Local guides for Beirut and Istanbul.

[@BeirutBilArabeh](https://twitter.com/BeirutBilArabeh) A Beirut blogger trying to make change.



## Un an - Journal d'une année comme les autres

Famed visual artist and comics author, Mazen Kerbaj took on a challenge back in 2012 to make one drawing every day for a year. The result is "Un an – Journal d'une année comme les autres" (One year – journal of a year like no other, Tamyras, Oct 2014, French language.) Featuring 382 drawings in ink, watercolor, charcoal and markers, it is an intimate visual journal that covers everything from foreign travel and late nights in Beirut's bars, to the Syrian war. LL52,500



# The Lebanese life

From the coast to the mountains, British Ambassador Tom Fletcher takes us on a tour of his favorite spots in Lebanon



**Where's your favorite place to visit in Lebanon?**

The place I visit most is the fort and harbor at Byblos. I love the sense of history, the fish lunches, and the stunning sunsets.

**Which rural region do you keep returning to in Lebanon and why are you drawn to it?**

I often walk in Barouk. The kids love hiding among the cedars, and the views are wonderful.

**What's your favorite place for Sunday lunch outside of Beirut?**

We have so many. I've recently got to know Batroun, and I love the Corniche in Tyre. More often we'll end up in Beirut itself, either by the sea or in a good brunch restaurant.

**Where would your winter getaway be in Lebanon and why?**

It has to be Faqra and Mzaar in Kfardebian. I've been doing more skiing since arriving in Lebanon. I still have a long way to go, but can now avoid too much embarrassment. Followed by a fondue at Montagnou (09 341441, [montagnou.com](http://montagnou.com)) of course.

**After a hard week in the office, what's your favorite activity to do in Lebanon?**

I like to wind down by running or swimming, or getting up into the mountains.

**What aspects of Lebanese culture do you miss when you return to the UK?**

The variety of the scenery, the quality of the people, the food and the sense of adventure.

*When you are planning to visit Lebanon, please make sure you check out the latest travel advice:*  
[gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/lebanon](http://gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/lebanon)




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# *Taking tourism to rural regions*

A rural tourism strategy for Lebanon – a great potential for the country’s tourism prospects and for rural communities. **Martine Btaich**, an independent consultant in social, economic and sustainable tourism development explains



Rural Tourism in Lebanon now has a strategy. Developed by Beyond Beirut in cooperation with the Ministry of Tourism, Hospitality Services and Lebanon Traveler and funded by USAID, under the Lebanon Industry Value Chain (LIVCD) project implemented by DAI – Cooperation and Common Action in Rural Tourism activity, and in consultation with over 150 tourism actors, the document provides key directions and practical actions to improve rural tourism and market Lebanon’s rural destinations beyond the commonly known sites.

## **WHAT IS RURAL TOURISM?**

Within the local context, rural tourism involves “experiencing the country” through a variety of travel activities that have a positive impact on the local environment, local communities and





Photo courtesy of Fadi Yenitürk



Photo courtesy of Martine Blaich

local culture. It involves traveling within rural areas, beyond Lebanon's big urban centers. Landscapes, nature, agriculture, food, and heritage are at the heart of the rural traveler's activities.

There is a lot to see in rural Lebanon and rural regions can offer added value experiences to travelers away from noisy, often unhealthy and jammed city life: a relaxed and quiet environment, laidback villages and towns, beautiful scenery, adventure and discovery, fresh, and traditional local food, healthy and organic produce, reconnection with history, and hospitality and personalized services at small family-run facilities. Rural tourism offers travelers the chance to interact with locals and experience their rural way of life and their regional specialties.

While staying in rural areas, travelers contribute to increasing income and creating jobs for local people, including those that are often marginalized and have no choice but to leave their villages, their lands and homes to find a better source of income. Travelers also contribute to raising interest of locals in their local assets and motivate them to conserve this heritage.

Rural tourism is not new in Lebanon. Many pioneers and investors have developed great initiatives over the last two decades and the strategy builds on those existing programs.

**“ Lebanon's heritage is a legacy and everybody is responsible ”**

These initiatives are the starting point to suggest more synergy and foster common language and common actions among actors within the sector. The plan suggests taking action progressively and systematically to strengthen and develop these rural attractions.

The strategy includes marketing and communication actions that improve the visibility of rural destinations and attract more visitors. It recommends developing competitive and better quality professional services and products that are more appealing to travelers.

The plan also includes suggestions to further engage the local communities and municipalities to institutionalize tourism at the local level and improve the infrastructure, and decision makers to regulate work and enforce policies to manage tourism activities and preserve the local heritage.



Photo courtesy of Fadi Yenitürk

## “ We need to see more Lebanese taking the rural trails ”

Over the last decade, many of Lebanon’s rural areas have become highly urbanized. Unorganized and disproportionate building constructions and roads, destruction of mountains and forests, illegal quarries, unlicensed hunting along with waste and litter have invaded rural areas. Many historic sites and buildings are in danger and urgently need to be protected. There is still a chance to develop and safeguard them before they are lost, along with the tourism they attract.

The long-term focus of the strategy remains to build “a culture of rural tourism among the Lebanese and the young generation.” Lebanon’s heritage is a legacy and everybody is responsible. Implementing such a strategy requires a serious common action and cooperation between all stakeholders, namely all ministries, policy makers and municipalities. It is also the responsibility of travel businesses, NGOs, the Lebanese and diaspora, universities,

schools, investors, the media and travelers. The strategy suggests a common action mechanism to follow-through the actions suggested progressively, advocate for the conservation of rural areas, advocate for policies, and ensure proper coordination and linkages among all actors. A serious will to follow-through is needed otherwise the strategy would be just “another strategy,” like many that have been developed only to be forgotten in drawers.

It may seem absurd for some, to work on a strategy in light of the country and region’s unstable situation, where travel bans are affecting tourism and the economy in general. Despite this and despite the many infrastructural gaps in the country, stakeholders can come together, prepare the ground, engage local communities to preserve what they have left of their rural areas and invest responsibly. It’s also the perfect moment to encourage travelers and particularly the Lebanese, either living in the country or working abroad, along with the diaspora to discover their country and participate in the conservation of their hidden and beautiful heritage. Rural tourism and internal travel is a great resilience card for tourism and for the local economy; and we need to see more Lebanese taking the rural trails.

## 8 DIRECTIONS PROPOSED BY THE STRATEGY

1. Develop and improve marketing and promotion to increase consumer awareness and the visibility of rural tourism destinations, products and services, domestically and internationally
2. Institutionalize rural tourism at a community level
3. Improve and enforce conservation and protection of the environmental, cultural, historical and agricultural heritage of rural areas
4. Diversify, modernize and improve the quality of rural destinations, products and services
5. Improve policies, legislation, and regulation of the rural tourism sector along with enforcement of laws across the value chain
6. Improve information and data collection and management to support sound planning
7. Develop the culture of rural tourism among the young generation and in the education system
8. Improve domestic and international business linkages and networking (cross cutting objective)

Photos courtesy of Fadi Yenitürk



## WHAT IS RURAL TOURISM?

Rural tourism products and experiences may include: walking; hiking and trekking; nature-based trips; conservation trips and ecotourism; sightseeing and visiting villages; agri-tourism including farming and harvesting activities, wine tourism and visits to wineries; food tourism including knowledge of regional food specialties and cuisine, food trails and food-processing activities; adventure and sports; biking and mountain biking; kayaking and rafting; camping; horseback riding; fishing; bird watching; craft-making; local festivals; music and dance; literary discovery and literary trails; visits to historic, archeological and heritage sites; religious tourism and visits to religious sites and trails; museums; accommodation in rural lodgings, eco-houses and guesthouses.



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# 10 things to do in winter

Oh baby it's cold outside! But don't let that stop you. Lebanon is brimming with life in the winter months from snow-topped mountains and forest walks to music festivals and home-cooked dinners

## 1 Tripoli's architectural gem

Beirut-based Tripolitan Mira Minkara offers monthly **Tripoli tours** around her home city; a rich experience discovering the urban fabric of a diverse city, through the eyes of a local. For architecture lover's one tour offers an exploration around the impressive International Fair of Tripoli, designed by renowned Brazilian architect Oscar Niemeyer. Built in 1964, but never completed because of Lebanon's civil war, the avant-garde space is full of dominating modernist architecture pieces that stand in a vast empty space. Afterwards Minkara guides her visitors around Mina's old neighborhoods by the coast. Another guided walk passes through Tripoli's old souks, rich in ancient architecture from Mamluk and Ottoman mosques to 19th Century Orthodox churches, hammams, khans and madrasses (Quranic Schools).

Facebook: *Mira's guided tours*

70 126764 - [mminkara@gmail.com](mailto:mminkara@gmail.com)



Photos courtesy of Mira Minkara



## 2 Winter forest

The Shouf region has a magical charm during the winter months and makes the perfect destination for a winter walk through the **Shouf Cedar Reserve** followed by an overnight stay in a cozy local guesthouse. “Guesthouses in the Shouf make special meals during winter such as roasted chestnuts and baked potato in the stove,” says Nizar Hani, manager of the Shouf Cedar Reserve. “Now people are enjoying the Shouf Reserve in all seasons; they like the ambiance of walking in winter and then returning to the guesthouses.”  
*shoufcedar.org*



*Photo courtesy of Shouf Cedar Reserve*

## 3 Lebanon by night

Outside of Beirut, beyond the city lights, star-filled skies set an impressive backdrop to Lebanon’s rural landscapes. **The Night Collective** are a group of amateur and professional photographers who make weekly trips to mountainous landscapes to document the beauty of Lebanon’s nightscapes and share via their Facebook page. “In 2009 we formed with a group of foreigners in Lebanon who wanted to explore the country, but most people had day jobs so we had to take photos at night,” says Gaby Nehme, a Lebanese photographer and one of the admins of the Night Collective Facebook group. “Technically it’s harder to capture images at night than day so there is this artistic pressure to try to create something out of very dark situations. We venture far, explore new places at night and shoot rainstorms, celestial events, the moon and stars, and different landscapes. It’s a very nice social environment, we share the same hobbies, discuss technical issues and breathe fresh air.” Take inspiration from the Night Collective and take your camera under the night sky and explore!

*Monthly events are open to Night Collective group members with an interest in photography and their own equipment. Facebook: The Night Collective*



*Photo courtesy of Tarek El Wazzi*

## 4 Urban walks

Beirut has a wealth of interesting neighborhoods and communities and an **urban walk** on an early Sunday morning is the perfect way to rediscover the city. It's become a weekly habit for Tourism Consultant Myriam Shuman. "On Sunday mornings Beirut is very calm. The city is ours," she says. "There are so many different moods. Lots of Beirutis know one neighborhood and stay within it. In only a couple of hours you can explore many new neighborhoods, go down small streets, look up at the varied architecture, discover people and places and have a coffee and conversation with local residents." Ras Beirut is one of her favorite neighborhoods to walk around, to be "close to the sea and the city at the same time." There the feel of old Beirut still exists with heritage houses hidden between high rises and authentic cafes with a long history.



## 5 A warming soundtrack

Since it was established in 1994, the **Al Bustan Festival** ([albustanfestival.com](http://albustanfestival.com), 17 Feb-22 Mar) has built a tradition of music culture in the winter season. Held in the stunning Al Bustan Hotel in Beit Mery, the festival delivers a rich program of predominantly classical music from renowned international artists. This year the festival has a welcome jazz tangent including the brilliant Lebanese/Armenian organist Arthur Satyan and his Acoustic Ensemble (12 March, *Crystal Garden*), a tribute to the legendary swing star, Sinatra (13 March, *Emile Bustani Auditorium, Al Bustan Hotel*) and the Marly Marques Quintet (14 March, *Crystal Garden*.) Oliver Poole, the British musician dubbed a "master of the piano" by the BBC, will make several appearances at the festival (17, 19, 21 February, *Al Bustan Hotel*) and one unique concert will bring music to Beirut's National Museum with cellist Alexander Buzlov and pianist Veronika Ilinskaya playing Schubert, Beethoven and Brahms.





## 6 The return of Zaarour

First established in 1975, but unused since the civil war, **Zaarour Club** is a ski and sports resort with a heritage, that's just had a USD 40 million facelift. At only 35km from Beirut, it's the closest ski resort to the capital city. Spread over an area of 2.5km every detail of the resort has been transformed, from a new sport and ski station, to four new ski lifts, special magic carpets to help kids learn to ski and a vast artificial lake. You'll most likely know Zaarour Club's GM, Serge Zarka, who has spent two decades presenting on MTV Lebanon. An

avid skier, he's passionate about the ski and summer resort. "I remember Zaarour from when I was very little. I used to ski there on the old slopes," he says. "It looks very different now, believe me it's transformed. We've even re-worked the mountains." With a hostel and restaurant due to open next summer and chalets planned for the future, Zaarour looks set to also become a popular summer destination with a whole line of events and activities planned.

*Facebook: Zaarour Club*

## 7 Lebanon's winter tradition

Kfardebian is the biggest village in Lebanon at high altitude, reaching up to 2820m. The area has four months of snow coverage over the winter and the biggest slope in the Middle East region, **Mzaar Ski Resort** ([skimzaar.com](http://skimzaar.com)) along with skiing at **Faqra Club** ([faqraclub.com](http://faqraclub.com)). This year Kfardebian launches a new cross-country ski trail, offering something different for those looking for an experience beyond the usual ski session. "Kfardebian ski trail is the first secure private trail for cross country skiing in Lebanon," says president of nearby **Auberge Beity**, Josphine Zgheib. She's noticed an evolution in the tastes of Lebanese skiers, hunting for new different experiences; "The youth in Lebanon are adventures and nature-lovers. Alternative activities in winter such as snowshoeing and cross-country skiing allow them to discover the beauty of Kfardebian nature." Only 10 minutes from the slopes is the homely Auberge Beity ([03 214871](tel:03214871), [beity.org](http://beity.org)), which makes the perfect cozy overnight retreat after a day of skiing.



## 8 Exploring Marjayoun

The Lebanese town of **Marjayoun** is one of the hidden beauties of the south, perfect to explore during the cooler winter months. Its location at the top of a hill means it has the perfect vantage point on never-ending landscapes, including Mount Hermon and the 1,000-year-old Crusader Castle, Beaufort in the East, and Mount Amel in the West, Mount Rihan and Niha in the North. Its fertile lands continue southwards towards the Golan Heights. The town, characterized by Lebanese heritage homes with the traditional red-roof and arched windows and a diversity of trees, has various religious sites of interest such as the Cathedral of Saint Peter. Famed Lebanese-American journalist Anthony Shahid, wrote the brilliant memoir "House of Stone: A Memoir of Home, Family, and a Lost Middle East," published shortly after his death in 2012. Covering the year he spent restoring his family's home in Marjayoun, it makes the perfect accompaniment for a trip to the region. For the insight of a local explore with guide Wael Shmeis ([78 884176](tel:78884176), [03 909596](tel:03909596)).





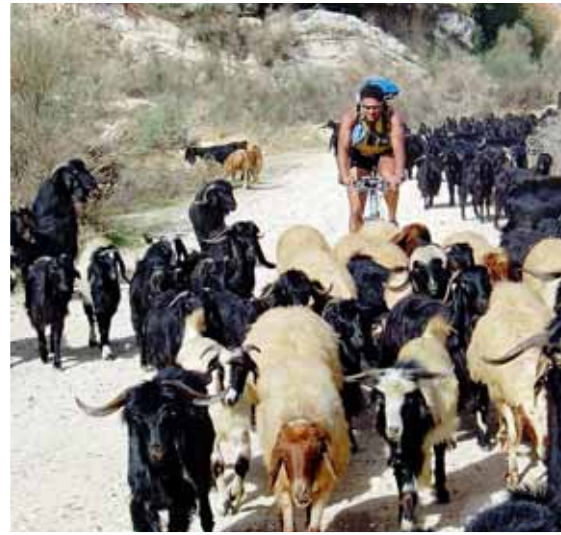
## 9 Dine outside Beirut

One of the pleasures of winter is enjoying warming food in a cozy setting, while the temperature drops outside. There are numerous restaurants to discover. Roalla El Hoss has been hosting visitors to her home in Tannourine for the last two years offering the intimate dining experience, **Roalla's Table** (03 637276, *Facebook page: Roalla's Table*.) She provides an adaptable menu according to visitors' tastes, from warming Lebanese-style soups to lamp chops, Lebanese mezze and Mediterranean cuisine, all made from local produce. Make a weekend of it and stay overnight in **El Hoss' guesthouse** (LL225,000 single person; LL300,000 couple accommodation, full board; lunch/dinner LL60,000 per person). Dining at Broumana's **Le Gargotier** (04 960562) is like stepping into the past, with the legendary French restaurant remaining virtually unchanged since the '60s. In Naas, close to Bikfaya, **Fadel** (04 980979) has a well-deserved reputation for its excellent Lebanese mezze menu and **Lola** (04 983440) serves authentic food, surrounded by the Metn pines. After a day skiing the mountains of Kfardebian, the cheese and wine of French restaurant **Chez Michel** (09 300060, *terrebrunehotel.com, Faqra, Kfardebian*) around a center-placed chimney is a welcome indulgence. Also **Rikky'z** (09 341422, *rikkyz.com, Faqra, Kfardebian*) is a popular spot for hungry skiers.

## 10 Wine by the fireside

Located in Bhamdoun, the renowned restaurant and winery **Le Télégraphe de Belle-Vue** (05 260073, 70 628383, *letelegraphedebelle-vue.com, Bhamdoun, Mount Lebanon*) and **Chateau Belle-Vue Winery**, have opened a new boutique hotel located in the atmospheric setting of the historic former residence of the French ambassador to Iraq and Jordan. "From the very first, our goal has been to preserve Bhamdoun's heritage, support the community and craft extraordinary wines," says co-owner Jill Boutros. "Our goal is to deliver an intimate, warm and relaxed atmosphere where our guests feel at home from the moment they cross the threshold." Start the day with a vineyard tour and wine tasting, explore the nearby village, enjoy a dinner of homemade specialties using locally-produced seasonal products, accompanied of course by a bottle of one of the award-winning Chateau Belle-Vue wines. Then recline by the fireside with a mulled wine (available over the holiday period) before retiring to the comfort of one of their seven suites.





# Exploring home

Global adventurer **Maxime Chaya** keeps things local with a six-day cycling journey along the Lebanon Mountain Trail

Lebanese sportsman Maxime Chaya's achievements are many and despite already having ticked off most of the world's toughest physical challenges and expeditions he's still incredibly active. Having just completed the TSC New York City Marathon on 2 November for St Jude's Children's Hospital, Chaya ran the Beirut Marathon on 9 November for NGO Roads for Life, leading a group of ambassadors to the finish line. But for a man who's climbed the highest peaks in the world, trekked to the poles and rowed an ocean, two marathons in one week don't even faze him.

Sat in his Downtown office filled with endless rows of trophies and medals in the impressive Audi Plaza, the headquarters of Bank Audi for which he's a corporate ambassador, Chaya, in full suit and tie, slowly works through autographing a pile of his book "Steep Dreams," to send out to fellow adventurers. Published in 2009, the coffee table book is an account of his three years climbing the highest peaks on every continent as part of the Seven Summits Challenge. "My friends and family never thought I could make a career out of adventure and sports until I appeared on national stamps," he jokes.

A huge poster covers the back of his office door, showing him planting the Lebanese flag on top of Mount Everest. You'd think after completing one of the world's toughest physical challenges he wouldn't be keen on returning, but for Chaya it's a life's passion. "When I came back from Everest to Lebanon the Prime Minister asked me if I'd do it again. I said that I'd love to, only this time from the other southern, Nepali side. He spent the next 15 minutes trying to convince me why I didn't need to do it again," he laughs.

Chaya was the first from the Middle East to walk from the Antarctic Coast to the



South Pole in 2007, becoming the 16th person in history to complete the Three Poles Challenge and in August 2013 he beat the world record for rowing across the Indian Ocean (rowingtheindianocean.com) as part of a three-man team, traveling 6500 nautical miles in 57 days. With his adventures taking him all over the world, his many stories spill out of him. This is a man who loves life and whose expeditions are not only about extreme physical challenge, but seeing the world and meeting its people. At 53, despite having achieved most of the biggest accolades in the sporting world, he's not planning on slowing down any time soon and has another challenge in the works. "I have something in mind. I can't sit still anymore," he says. "I'm still fit and I have lots of experience; I'm no longer young and no-one's forcing me to do it but I love it."

**“You’re coming on a bicycle, you’re at their level; people open up to you”**

Chaya pauses between stories, jumping to his computer screen to show the early drafts of his upcoming book covering his journey across the Indian Ocean. "I usually keep diaries along the way. This one was more of a challenge, I couldn't write as I went along because there was so much

rowing and problem solving to do every day," he says. Despite his adventures around the world, among some of the world's most stunning landscapes, one experience that sticks in his mind is much closer to home. In 2008 Chaya cycled 470km from the far north of Lebanon, Qbaiyat, to Marjayoun in the south, along with British geologist and cycling enthusiast Steve Holyoak following the Lebanon Mountain Trail (LMT) over six days, staying overnight in small local guesthouses and powered by seasonal food from each region. "Lebanon is a fabulous place, we have amazing weather, four distinct seasons, sea, mountains, add to that the tabbouleh factor and the warmth of the people," he says.

His cycle along the LMT was not without adventure. "We got punctures galore along the way," Chaya says, going on to say that at times the mountainous terrain proved too difficult to cycle along and the pair had to put their bikes on their backs and climb. "You have to be able to take hardship; to be able to get out of your comfort zone," he adds. There were a few wrong turnings along the way too, from heading off road and reaching a warning sign for land mines, to choosing the LMT trail "up an overhanging cliff face with only thorny bushes as handholds," instead of the smooth tarmac trail up to Bcharreh. Adventurer Holyoak persuaded them to take the challenging route and "...30 minutes later saw us gripping our bikes between our teeth, hanging upside down from our toenails still 100 vertical meters from the top. After I clumsily sent a house-sized boulder crashing down to the base of the cliff we made the wise decision to retrace our path and take the more sensible route," Holyoak reports in the blog of their journey (thethreepoles.com/blog/2008/07/12/lmtb-1-lebanese-mountain-trail-by-bike-part-1.)

"We met strange people along the way but I'm sure we looked equally strange to them too," Chaya laughs. He points to a photo on his computer screen taken on the journey, with him towering over a tiny woman in traditional clothes, every bit a part of the landscape, staring up at him quizzically. From meeting a young boy that Holyoak called the "kid with

Mars Bars for toothpaste" to nuns in an overnight stay in a Kobayate convent; for Chaya the journey was not only about the beautiful landscapes but "meeting so many people from different backgrounds and religions, all who were very hospitable." Traveling the country by bike is certainly more of an all-encompassing experience and Chaya found the humility of traveling by bike opened up the doors to connect with local communities. "You're coming on a bicycle, you're at their level; people open up to you, tell you their problems. You realize that everyone has their problems. We just have to find how to coexist in this Promised Land."

The journey along the LMT for Chaya was also a way to "convey the true face of Lebanon; not what we see on the news all the time," and an opportunity for him to discover rural areas and go deep to the root of the country's diverse regions, its culture and its people. "It's a wonderful way to really discover Lebanon. Like many of us Lebanese, I had never been to these places. Cycling is not like touring on a bus or by car; you get to experience the whole thing first hand, to talk eat and sleep with the people," he says. "It's a real taste of Lebanon through a sport you enjoy and you can indulge in vast quantities of food every day," he says.

And with so many experiences and stories of food, people and landscapes creating vivid memories, Chaya is keen to repeat the adventure, this time from South to North.

*maximechaya.com*

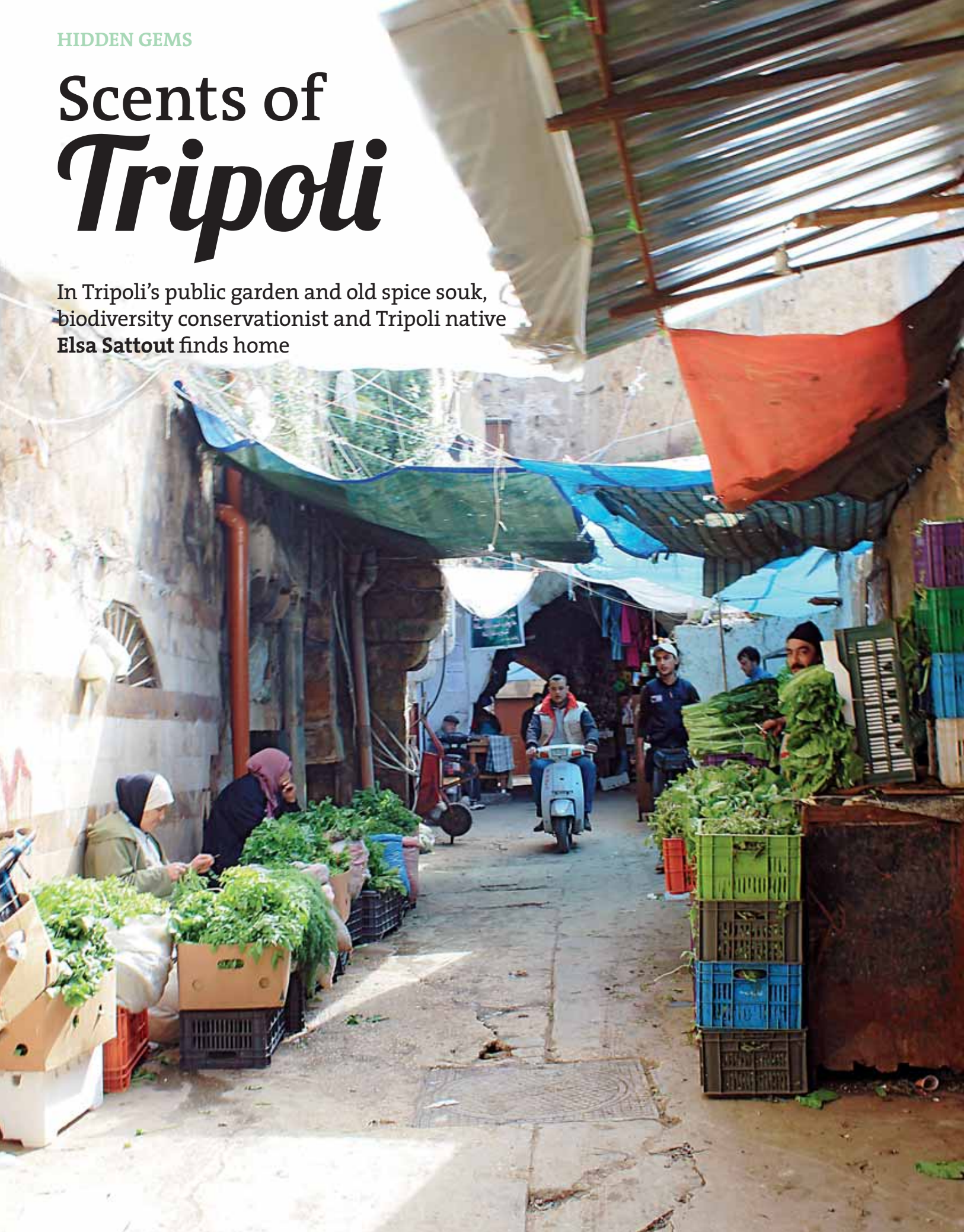
## EXPERIENCE THE LMT

The LMT is the longest hiking trail in Lebanon, crossing through 75 towns and villages. It showcases the beauty of the Lebanese countryside. The Lebanon Mountain Trail Association (LMTA) was founded to protect the LMT and organizes regular walks along the trail, also supporting sustainable tourism, organizing stays in local guesthouses and seasonal meals made by villagers using local produce. [lebanontrail.org](http://lebanontrail.org)

HIDDEN GEMS

# Scents of *Tripoli*

In Tripoli's public garden and old spice souk, biodiversity conservationist and Tripoli native **Elsa Sattout** finds home





Discovering places that have preserved identity in Lebanon offers a sense of belonging. On an early Sunday morning while coming across the quote “the faithful heart does not like to ramble about without a homestead. It needs a fixed spot to return to, it wants its square house,” (“*The concept of dwelling: On the way to figurative architecture*,” Norberg-Shultz, 1985, pg. 12) in my personal notes, I wondered where this “square-house” might be located in the transformed mega-cities we live in today. It could be a living space beyond the home, it might be at a crossroads along the daily walk to work, or it could be at the corner of a road where you briefly sip on coffee from a disposable cup while waiting for the red light to turn green. It could be a space where you have a few minutes to rest in the early morning to read a newspaper, a ‘one-stop coffee shop,’ before catching a taxi or continuing the day of commitments.

For many Tripolitans their “square house” is the public garden located in the heart of the city. Tripoli, Lebanon’s northern city, encompasses stories of many civilizations, conquests and religions and its diverse history has made this large coastal town an enriching place to reflect on cultural diversity, human connections and roots to the past and present.

A scented path from Tripoli’s public garden that crosses the old souk to reach the market of aromatic herbs and the courtyard selling traditional soaps can have a strong impact on a Sunday morning. The garden, known as *Minshiet* or *Jnainet el Tanabel*. extends over a large surface area of around 8,850m<sup>2</sup>, which when the city’s population was only 50,000 was a huge expanse. In the early 1920s, the land was presented to the municipality as a gift from a Tripolitan (*Attadamon newspaper*, 19 February, 2014). The garden features five axes leading to a central water pond. At that time, the garden hosted tree species that thrived in the city such as fig, pittosporum, stone pine, date palms and fan palms. It was a platform where a large number of city dwellers and foreigners once assembled to celebrate and honor the kings, princes and historical and political figures (*Dabliz*, n.d.) while listening to their speeches.



During the French colonization, it was here that celebrations were organized for the commemoration of *Dawlet Loubnan el Kabir* (State of Greater Lebanon) on 1 September and Bastille Day on 14 July during the French mandate period (*Attadamon newspaper*, 19 February, 2014).

A few old trees still stand in the garden, having survived the civil war. A fig tree broken during a stormy winter night in the ‘90s was a resting spot for reflection for citizens from all generations. The meaning of the common name, *Shajaret el Tanabel*, given to this tree relates to the laziness of some dwellers who would spend their days under its canopy, surrounded by natural elements such as

**“A fig tree broken during a stormy winter night in the ‘90s was a resting spot for reflection for citizens from all generations”**

## WHERE TO EAT

The northern city is known for its sweets, so don't leave the city without sampling them. **Abdul Rahman Hallab** (06 444445, [Riad El Solh Street, hallab.com.lb](http://riadelsoh.com.lb)) has been around since 1881 and you can eat inside their atmospheric setting; two others popular among locals include the bustling **Al Elmawi**, located in the middle of the Old Souk and **Al Thoum (Zahrieh.)** If you're hungry, head for **Dannoun Restaurant** (06 433987, [Azmi Street](http://AzmiStreet.com)) for falafel, fowl and hommos.

## WHERE TO SLEEP

The family-owned **Pension Al Koura** (70 211503, [pensionalkoura.com](http://pensionalkoura.com), Tall Street, LL97,500 single or twin) is simple but comfortable and right around the corner from St. Gilles Crusader Castle. Another budget option is **Snooze Residence** (03 334819, 06 933145, [Alhat.](http://Alhat.com)) There is also the beautiful **Beit al Nessim** guesthouse (03 308156, [beitalnessim.com](http://beitalnessim.com), [Labban Street, El Mina](http://LabbanStreet.com)), a historic landmark restored between 2007-12.

## WHAT TO SEE

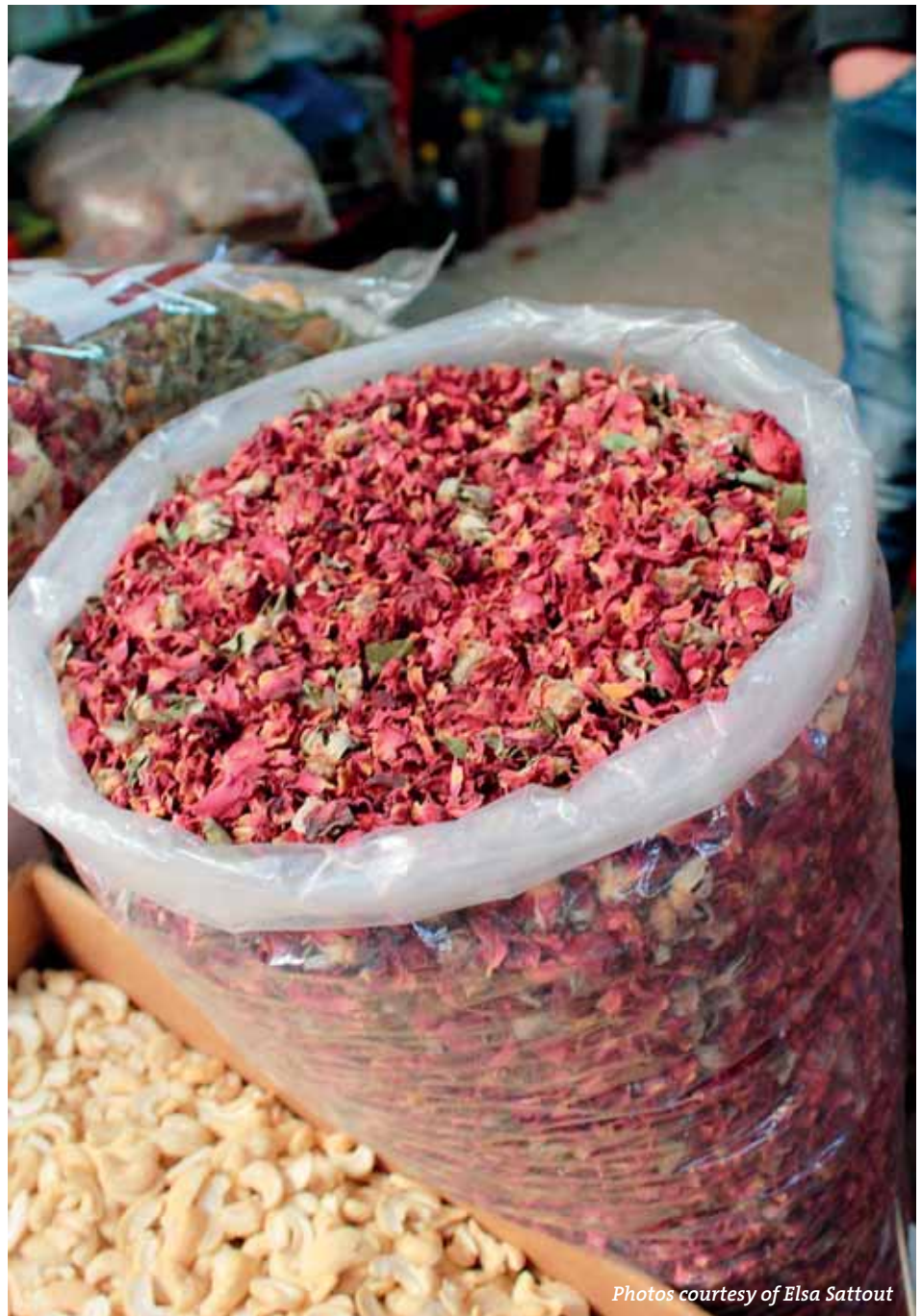
For a city steeped in history there's plenty to see including the ancient St. Gilles Crusader Castle in Nahr Abou Ali, the Turkish bath and the atmospheric old souk. Afterwards take a tour of the city's historic mosques and churches including **Al Mansouri Great Mosque** (Souk el Sagha, Nouri District), **Abou Bakr Al-Siddik** (Between Bahssas and Al Nour Square), **Tinal Mosque** (Bab El Ramel), **Muallak Mosque** (Souk Al Samak), Latin church, St Paul and Peter; Orthodox churches, St Georges and St Nicholas (Orthodox) in Haret Al Nassara; Maronite church, St Michael (Maronite.)

plants and trees including palms, cypress, acacia, silk tree (Albizia), araucaria, oranges and lemons, cranesbill and other aromatic and creeping plants. The spirit of the garden has given a sense of attachment to many of its visitors, embraced by the sun and the historic realm that left its imprint on the walls of the old buildings that surround it.

After leaving the garden and crossing Tall Square, a small entrance leads to Souk el Atarine where the scent of a mixture of wild roses, rosemary, oregano, thyme, cranesbill, fennel, sumac, dill and mint

spreads through the air. A stronger scent of essential oils of sage, cedar, lemon, almond, and other aromatic herbs will capture all your senses and lead you to "Khan el Saboune," the Courtyard of Soap.

These scents took away the breath of many citizens, pilgrims, orientalist, and travelers and drew some of them back again. They atomized the paths and remained nebulized in the city throughout history, drawing in diaspora from all over the world, looking for the traces of their ancestors.



Photos courtesy of Elsa Sattout



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# Winter snow trails

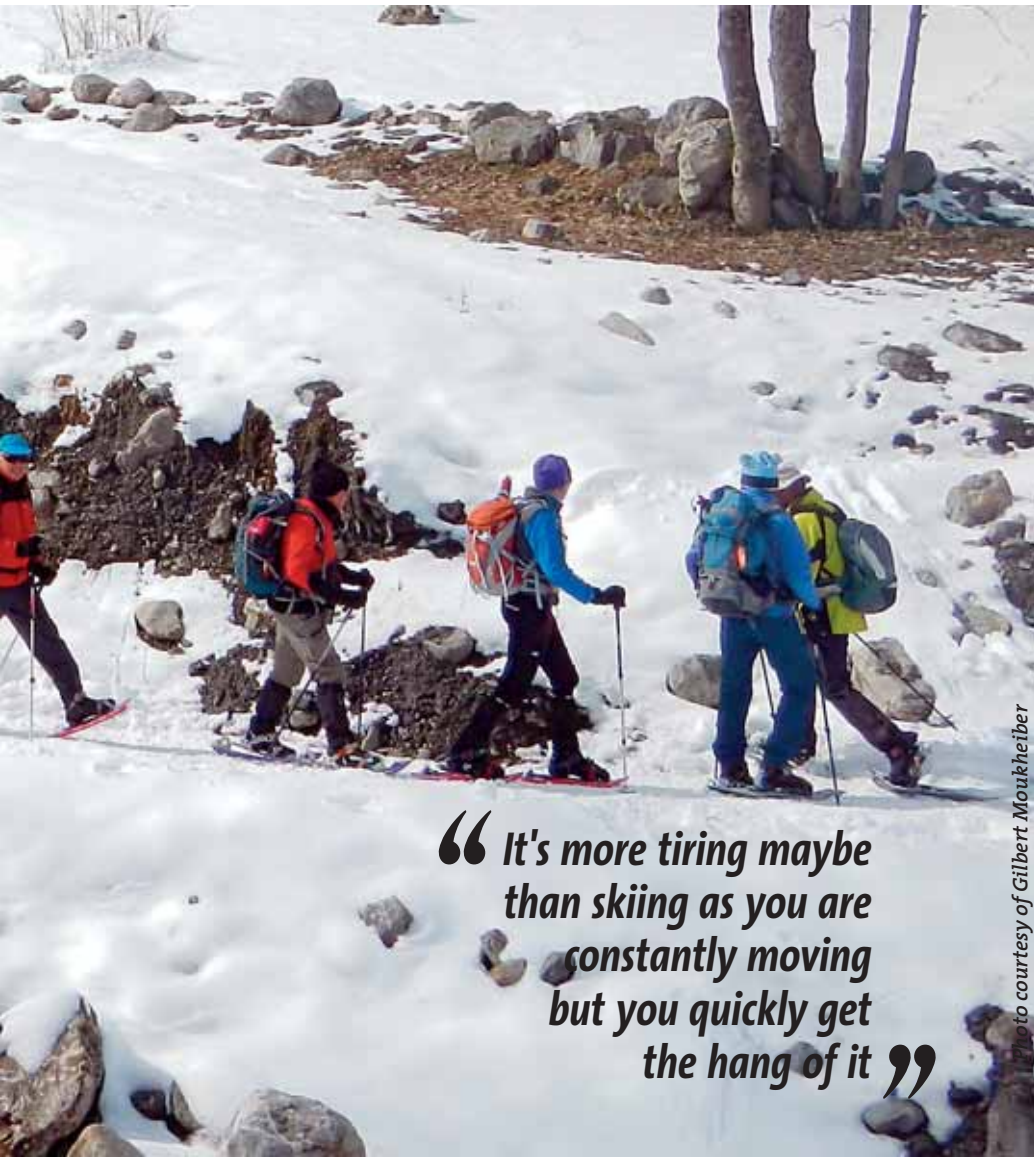
## Lebanon's remote hillsides offer a multitude of white trails perfect for snowshoeing escapades

From December until mid March, some years even until April, Lebanon's remote hillsides are ideal destinations for snowshoe enthusiasts in search of pristine snow. The best places for snowshoeing are the country's nature reserves, such as Horsch Ehden and the Chouf Biosphere Reserve, both just stunning when blanketed with a layer of white. The forest's high towering cedar trees covered in snow are a sight to be seen and the trails that pass through range from easy to hard. The trees offer welcome shelter

during a snowstorm and the forests are home to a variety of animal species such as wolf, fox, hyena, and wild boar. Though rare to spot in broad daylight, in winter their tracks are a wonderful sight, visible on the snowy trails.

At Horsch Ehden and the Chouf Biosphere Reserve it is possible to rent snowshoes and book the services of a forest ranger for a guided snowshoe tour; a good idea if you are a novice. Apart from the reserves there are many

other nature spots to head out to. Snowshoeing gives you the ability to reach remote hills and avoid the crowded ski resorts and packed roads leading up to them on the weekends. Unlike skiing, snowshoeing is not a risky activity and doesn't call for much gear, just the snowshoes themselves, plus waterproof footwear and clothing. It's just you and nature, no need to rely on ski lifts or perfect snow and weather conditions – often the best snowshoeing trips are when it's snowing and the elements



**“ It's more tiring maybe than skiing as you are constantly moving but you quickly get the hang of it ”**

are out in force. The weather can be unpredictable and fog can appear suddenly, so always go with a partner and carry a mobile phone with you in case of an emergency.

"I went snowshoeing for the first time last winter as the ski slopes did not open due to the lack of snow," says Christine Codsí, co-founder of Tawlet, an open kitchen, where different cooks prepare traditional food from their region. "I just went with a group and we hired snowshoes in Lalouq and walked on the hills. It's more tiring maybe than skiing as you are constantly moving but you quickly get the hang of it. Keeping up a good pace is a great work out." The stillness of the hills, breathing fresh winter air and taking in the stunning views over the plains of Lalouq

is an incredible boost for the mind after a long week in the city.

To extend the winter wonderland experience, an overnight stay in the mountains after a snowshoeing trip is highly recommended. In Horsch Ehdén there are little wooden lodges, located right at the Nabeh Jouit entrance, which can be booked for the night. While there, make sure to ask the manager Ramonda to serve up her special *hrisse*, a creamy wheat and chicken stew oozing with cinnamon and nutmeg. At the end of the day, energised by the hearty broth, you may just feel like putting your snowshoes back on again and heading out for a walk in the snow lit up by the moon and the starry night sky. It's just magical.

*Sabina Llewellyn-Davies*

## SNOWSHOEING IN LEBANON

Tourism consultant and managing director of tour operator, 33 North, Gilbert Moukheiber, shares his tips for snowshoeing in Lebanon

### GEAR UP

Essentials for a day of snowshoeing include a backpack, solid waterproof hiking boots, warm clothes (breathable and waterproof), a first aid kit equipped with a survival blanket, shovel, snow probe, headlight, water, hot drink (avoid alcohol), and energy bars.

### SNOWSHOEING DESTINATIONS

There are no trails adapted to snowshoeing in Lebanon, but any dirt, agricultural road or footpath above 1500m of altitude can be used as a snowshoeing trail during wintertime. Alpine ski stations are good destinations for novice snowshoers who want to experience the activity safely

1. Nature reserves: Ehdén, Tanourine, Chouf Cedar reserve
2. Upper highlands: Laqlouq, Aqoura, Tannourine, Hasroune, Hadath El Jebbeh, Becharre
3. Ehmej has a two snowshoeing trails
4. The highest summit in the Middle East: Kornet es Sawda 3083 m
5. The upper mountains of Akkar, Hermel and Donniyeh offer a wide range of free terrain with picturesque scenery

### WHO TO GO WITH

- 33 North (71 331138, [33-north.com](http://33-north.com))
- Dale Corazon (70 986118, [dalecorazon.com](http://dalecorazon.com))
- Decouvre LB (03 373711, [decouvrelb.com](http://decouvrelb.com))
- Beyond Byblos (09 540857, [byblosandbeyond.com](http://byblosandbeyond.com))

# Pedal power

Passionate cyclist and the founder of CyclingCircle, Karim Sokhn shares his reflections on the evolution of a thriving cycling community in Lebanon and his tips for the country's best cycling spots





Photo courtesy of Jad Abou Arrage

Over the past five years cycling has really picked up in Lebanon, alongside several well-known cycling groups. The community is growing rapidly, and cycling has become a popular trend. The largest cycling communities today are CyclingCircle, Bike Generation, Polyliban and The Bike Shop, Tripoli – each work on a different objective but with one mission: to promote cycling and empower the cycling community.

In addition to the bike tours that CyclingCircle organizes, the first bicycle delivery service in Lebanon and the Arab world, Deghri Messengers (70 048673, [degfri.com](http://degfri.com), Facebook: *Deghri Messengers*), was initiated in September 2013. In addition, the country's first bicycle festival, Baskil (Facebook: *BaskilBeirut*) was organized in April 2014, along with the first lobbying movement, Beirut Cyclehack (Facebook: *BeirutCyclehack*) in June 2014.

All the above projects and services aim at promoting the bicycle as a clean and healthy means of transportation, for recreation, commerce, sports and to prove that it is possible to bike in Lebanon.

As for biking tours, there are several regions that are really nice to discover by bicycle. For mountain bikers, Jezzine is the number one destination where easy and hard offroad trails can be found. The most strenuous trails are in the Bkassine Forest and at La Maison de La Foret, there's a bicycle station that provides bicycles in the forest. Mount Kneisse with its breathtaking sceneries is also an awesome destination for a difficult level trail.

For road bikers and recreational cyclists, Beirut is the perfect starting place on a Sunday morning or a mid week night ride around Achrafieh, Gemayzeh, Downtown and Hamra. Beirut is charming at night and beautiful on a Sunday when there is less traffic. Another enjoyable route is the coastal road from Byblos to Batroun. The hard long uphill climb after Batroun village towards Saydet el Nourie is a must. A bicycle station in Byblos provides bicycles.

The Chouf district is my number one destination with amazing scenery and surroundings. One trail takes cyclists from Barouk to Maasser el Chouf, then passing through Khraibe and Mokhtara all the way to Jezzine. Another hard level, but amazing, trail starts at Faqra and ends at the Cedars in the North. Those able to do it will find nothing but pure adventure and satisfaction.

# Riding for life

For many, cycling is much more than a leisurely pursuit or a gentler mode of transport; it's a way of life. With a growing cycling community in the country, Lebanon Traveler speaks to two Lebanese cyclists passionate about the power of the bike

**JAD ABOUT ARRAGE,**  
assistant professor at Lebanese University and member of PolyLiban



## What got you into cycling in Lebanon?

I started as an amateur and used to rent a bike for easy rides along the northern coast between Byblos and Batroun and in the Chouf. In 2010, I volunteered for a non-competitive multi-sports events organized by the Association du PolyLiban, a Lebanese non-profit association working for the promotion of sports and culture through cycling as well as other activities in nature. PolyLiban's objectives and spirit motivated me to buy my own bike and start doing longer rides with the aim of discovery, challenge, and the enjoyment of the Lebanese landscape.

## What are some of the best regions in Lebanon to see by bike?

The Lebanese landscape offers different sceneries where we can enjoy cycling, from the coastline to the highest mountains and the Bekaa Valley; you can cycle on paved roads, dirt roads or technical pathways. Personally, I prefer to cycle in remote rural areas to benefit from the calm, where I can explore natural and cultural heritage while pedaling.

## How can cycling help create positive societal change in Lebanon?

I became an active member of Polyliban in 2012. Cycling could be part of the solution for the transportation system in urban and sub-urban areas; it is contributing to rural and nature-orientated tourism activities and giving the opportunity to many Lebanese and foreigners to discover the country in a different way, appreciate its beauty and work for its conservation.

[polyliban.org](http://polyliban.org)

**SAMIR NAHAS,**  
economist and cycling enthusiast



## How long have you been cycling?

I've always cycled. I used to study in Paris and had a bike; every weekend I used to go outside Paris by bike and sometimes I would cycle around the Loire Valley and camp.

## How often do you cycle?

I usually do a weekly cycle in Lebanon at the weekends. I like to climb so I usually cycle in the mountains where there is no traffic. I'll cycle maybe 50km per ride in the Metn district, which is where I live.

## Has the cycling community grown in Lebanon?

It's definitely growing in Lebanon. I used to have a couple of friends to cycle with me, now I know at least 60 people. It's really expanded over the past four years.

## Is it a challenge cycling in Beirut?

I don't cycle in Beirut much as it's dangerous for everyone.

## What do you enjoy about cycling?

I like the open air and it's faster than walking. It's exercise plus you have a bit of speed. It's a way to enjoy the landscape or nature. Though I usually cycle the same main routes and know the landscapes well; once a year I try to travel and discover a new region by bike.

## Would you commute to work by bike?

It's not just a question of danger, it's very hard. In summer, it's out of the question because it's too hot and within 15 minutes you're completely soaked. In winter it's the opposite – when it rains it really pours here. So there are only a few months where it's comfortable to commute by bike, it's not easy to do on a regular basis. I do commute by bike when I have the chance to.

## WHERE TO BUY

The Bike Shop (06 202 393, Facebook: [thebikeshoplb](https://www.facebook.com/thebikeshoplb), Tripoli) is the place to buy, rent or repair if you're based in North Lebanon. They also organize activities including city tours and races.

Bike Generation (01 398442, [bikegeneration-me.com](http://bikegeneration-me.com), Furn el Chebbak) sell bikes, products and offer rentals and repairs. On Sundays they organize rides around Lebanon.

Cycloport (01 446792, Gemmayzeh, [cycloportlb.com](http://cycloportlb.com)) was founded back in 1932 and sells bikes and accessories. They also organize bike rides.

Beirut By Bike (01 365524, [beirutbybike.com](http://beirutbybike.com), Downtown), with its central location, is the ideal spot to rent a bike and explore the city by day or night.

## WHO TO CYCLE WITH

CyclingCircle (Facebook: [CyclingCircleLB](https://www.facebook.com/CyclingCircleLB)) is a dynamic community for recreational cyclists, established to encourage and promote safe bicycle riding. They also fix, sell and rent bicycles and organize rides in Lebanon.

PolyLiban ([polyliban.org](http://polyliban.org)) was founded in 2008 when a group of cyclists in Lebanon organized a Polyathlon to the Cedars. Now the group organizes a yearly Polyathlon and a PolyLiban, along with numerous cycling tours and events.

Critical Mass Beirut (Facebook: [CMB Beirut](https://www.facebook.com/CMB Beirut)) is a monthly event on the last Saturday of every month at 1pm at Martyr's Square joining the global movement meet-ups happening at the same time all over the world.



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# *Molasses: the nectar of the Mediterranean*

Since the dawn of time, the Mediterranean has been abundant with the sweetest fruits and its people are skilled at preserving them. The Food Heritage Foundation's Zeinab Jeambey researches the tradition of making molasses and meets Lebanese producers continuing this seasonal ritual

Internationally, the word molasses often refers to sugarcane molasses, a by-product of sugar extraction by heating sugarcane juice, which became famous in the early 20th century in the sugarcane plantations of southern USA and the Caribbean. Around the Mediterranean, molasses – an ancient

Roman tradition, were made from grape juice and used as the main sweetener, along with honey, and were prepared as part of the year's food provisions. Though the memory of molasses has almost faded in Europe, it lives on in the Middle East. Traditional variations include date, grape, carob, fig and mulberry molasses.

Known as *debs* in Arabic, this dense liquid is high in natural sugars and rich in minerals. In Lebanon, grape and carob molasses are widely consumed. Happily, we discovered that apple, cactus fruit and sweet orange molasses are also being made, at times out of necessity, sometimes out of creativity.

# Faces and sweet memories

## SHIBLI ABI ASSI'S grape molasses

Shibli Abi Assi, an agricultural engineer from Maasser el Chouf, decided to invest in his family's lands by practicing organic agriculture, mainly producing grapes. Making molasses has always been a family event that lasts for three full days.

On day one, grapes are collected, juiced and soaked with a type of white soil named *houwara* in Arabic. Shibli explains that *houwara*, is high in calcium and neutralizes the grape juice acidity. The mixture is then boiled and left to rest for 12 hours. The following day, the clarified juice called *moustar* is collected for a second phase of boiling. *Moustar* nights are festive occasions where friends and family drink the liquid mixed with walnuts. The *moustar* is then boiled until it reaches a third of its original volume. At this stage the molasses are beaten to solidify, which usually requires another day to reach the right consistency. Abi Assi produces around 100kg of grape molasses every season.

### Abi Assi's sweet memory

As kids, Abi Assi and his brother were responsible for feeding the fire under the molasses pot while family members took turns in stirring. One day the kids saw many birds flying over. They stacked a pile of wood under the pot and left for their favorite hobby, hunting. The heat suddenly increased under the mixture, causing it to burn slightly. Alarmed by the smell, the family rushed to salvage what was left. Abi Assi laughs as he remembers; "Our joy over the one-bird catch quickly faded when seeing dad's anger. I will leave the rest to your imagination!"

To purchase grape molasses, contact Abi Assi on 03 915313



## IMAN SABBAGH'S cactus fruit (prickly pear) and sweet orange molasses

Sabbagh started working with food 13 years ago, after taking courses in macrobiotic diet. She believes that a diet should revolve around locally grown, wholesome foods with no preservatives or added sugar. This creative lady has never stopped innovating: after developing her line of hazelnut, peanut and almond butters she



started experimenting with making new types of molasses. Her purpose? To have natural sweeteners for her jams, desserts and chocolate. She makes cactus fruit molasses and sweet orange molasses.

### Sabbagh's sweet memory

Sabbagh recalls when she first made molasses. A Saudi customer asked for sweet pomegranate molasses and so she made her first three bottles. Hesitant at first she then realized it was a sensation. She personally loves to dilute it with water and serve it as a refreshing late summer drink.

To purchase cactus fruit and sweet orange molasses, contact Sabbagh on 03 891483. Sabbagh sells at Souk el Tayeb (Downtown, every Sat) and Earth Market (Hamra, every Tue)



Photo courtesy of Food Heritage Foundation

## TOUFIQ ABOU ALWAN AND TALAAT BOUSTANI'S apple and quince molasses

Molasses has always been a way to conserve fruit in excess. In Barouk, apple cultivation



started in 1927. Over the last decade, apple farmers have been struggling to sell their produce, with 30 to 40 percent going to waste. Inspired by an apple molasses product from France, Toufiq and Talaat, both responsible for the agriculture cooperative of Barouk and Fraidiss villages, convinced farmers to make molasses out of the apples they can't sell. The cooperative currently produce around 1700kg of apple molasses a year.

### Abou Alwan and Boustani's sweet memory

About a year ago, a businessman passing by Fraidiss came across the village agriculture cooperative. Thrilled with the idea of apple molasses, he asked if it was possible to make a limited quantity of apple and quince molasses to export to London. The product, sold under the Marigold brand, found huge success in the UK and for this season, the company has tripled its order of molasses.

To purchase apple and quince molasses, contact Abou Alwan on 03 288581

## RIF AL KOURA COOPERATIVE AND CAROB MOLASSES

Although carob molasses is known to be a product from the south of Lebanon, our search for someone producing it in the north led us to the Koura Cooperative. Though specializing in olives and olive oil, we found their carob molasses to be exceptional with a smoky flavor acquired from having been reduced over a wood fire.

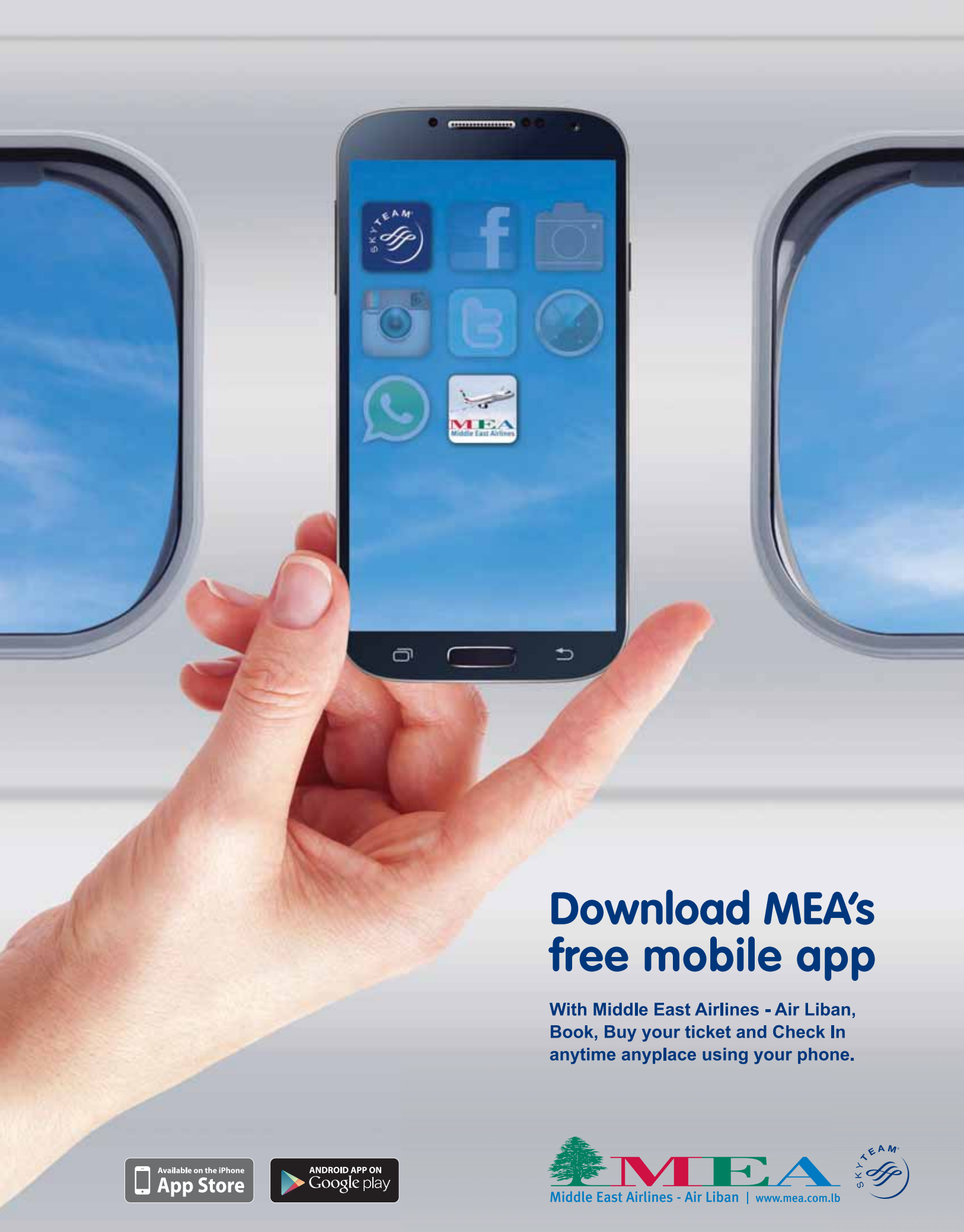
### Tamer's sweet memory

For Hajj Ali Tamer, president of the Koura Cooperative, the smell of carob molasses brings memories of Ramadan during which *debs* is diluted with water as a sherbet and passed around to sooth the thirst of those fasting.

To purchase carob molasses, contact Tamer on 03 131856



Photo courtesy of Food Heritage Foundation



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# Jabal El Kneisseh

*Photo courtesy of Pieme Sakr*

# *Backgammon: a daily ritual*

In Lebanon, the ancient board game backgammon is much more than just a game to pass the time of day; it's tied into Lebanese identity



Despite being one of the oldest two-person board games in history, with traces back to an epigram of Byzantine Emperor Zeno from around 476-481AD, backgammon (*tawle*) still remains popular in Lebanon today. Wander down any street and the game still has a strong presence, from open-air cafes where the game is accompanied by *narguileh* (waterpipe) and Arabic coffee, to a decorative board on makeshift tables and chairs made out of upturned buckets. The game is rooted in Lebanese identity, a long held tradition passed from one generation to the next and a remnant of an old culture, where life spilled out onto the streets of Beirut .

In the Beirut district of Achrafieh, one street lined with peach and pink colored crumbling buildings appears unchanged since the 1950s. It's a self-sufficient bubble where everyone knows everyone else and the mainly elderly residents pass between the barber, bakery, minimarket and butcher, each humble beacons of the community where conversations are drawn out over coffee, *narguileh* and games of backgammon. For the residents playing the game is a daily routine, a way to pass the time and relax in between work.

Here, at three in the afternoon, butcher Wissam Saad and minimarket owner Tony Haddad sit on plastic chairs outside battling it out over a game of backgammon; they've gathered a small crowd of onlookers with jokes flying between them all. "My father taught me how to play when I was a kid. I've played it almost every day since," says Saad while rolling the dice. "Sometimes we have back-to-back tournaments where

the whole neighborhood gets involved. It brings people together and on slow days at [work] it's a fun way to pass the time."

In the backstreets of another Beirut suburb, 43-year old mechanic Abed Dia sits opposite his opponent on a pile of tires and makes his winning move with oil-stained hands and a toothy grin. Taught by his grandfather, also a mechanic, backgammon is a daily ritual for him between fixing cars. "After a morning of work I stop for a break of *manoushe* and tea and, of course, a game of backgammon," he says. "It's a good time to relax and forget about the daily grind. My grandfather taught me and I feel like I'm playing for him. Now I started teaching my nine-year-old son. A lot of street heritage is being lost; it's a way of passing on the tradition and keeping it alive."

Though many backgammon players are from Lebanon's older generation, interest in the game has been sparked lately in the younger generation too, with a new wave of players wanting to keep a connection to what many believe is a strong part of their history. There's even been an evolution in its form with backgammon apps and online games making it possible to play the game via a smartphone while on the move. If enthusiasm for the game continues and evolves further, then backgammon may just be one of the few remnants of an old culture that remains and lasts into the future.

Yasmina Salame



Photos courtesy of Yasmina Salame

## TAWLE VARIETIES

A few different versions of the game exist in Lebanon and the Middle East; the most common form and easiest to learn is *Sheish Beish*. There's also *Wahdeh Tletine* where a player is not allowed to put their checkers on the same squares as their opponents, stretching out the length of the game. A third variation is *Mahbooseh* where when a checker is hit the player places their own checker on top of it and so imprisons it.

The Turkish influence of the game can still be heard in the pronunciation of the numbers rolled on the dice by Lebanese players still using the expressions for the game: *yek* (one), *dü* (two), *se* (three), *cehar* (four), *penc* (five) and *ses* (six).

## WHERE TO PLAY

– In the heart of Beirut, the atmosphere at Al Falamanki (01 323456, [alfalamanki.com](http://alfalamanki.com), Monot Street, Beirut) restaurant takes you back to village life. Play a game of backgammon in relaxing surroundings to a soundtrack of Fairouz while enjoying mezze.

– Popular Hamra spot T Marbouta's (01 350274, Hamra Square Center) love of the game is obvious upon entering with a large wall-sized artwork of two players hunched over a game of backgammon above Beirut's urban sprawl. Their outdoor terrace attracts a younger crowd of hip Beirutis and is the perfect spot to get lost in a game between conversations, food and arak.

– Located in Manara, Café Rawda's (01 743348, General de Gaulle Avenue, Manara) vast leafy terrace overlooking the sea makes for a stunning backdrop to a game of backgammon with a mint lemonade and *narguileh*.

# Stitching a heritage revival

The heritage of embroidery is an important part of Lebanon's cultural tapestry but it's a tradition in fast decline. We meet the women of Artisanat du Chouf and Artisanat Mabrouk who are among the associations preserving its place in the future



*Artisanat du Chouf, photos courtesy of Myriam Shuman*

The tradition of embroidery in Lebanon stretches back generations, from the hand embroidery of mountainous villages all over Lebanon to the work of nuns in isolated convents. It's a female inheritance passed from generation to generation that, despite its long history, is at risk of dying out, as a throwaway culture of cheap machine-made imports dominate the market and few of today's younger generation learn the time-consuming art from their family. Luckily a handful of associations are working to keep the tradition alive, with some focusing on handmade embroidery work and others using intricate machine work. With Lebanon becoming the home for displaced communities in the region, the country's rich tapestry of cultures can be seen in its diverse embroidery. INAASH, the Association for the Development of Palestinian Camps has worked on preserving the heritage of Palestinian embroidery and providing work for

refugee families in Lebanon since the 1960s and NGOs such as Basmeh wa Zeitouneh help Syrian refugee women to make an income through embroidery. In the same way that these NGOs are giving women both financial independence and stability, many of Lebanon's oldest embroidery associations started for the same reason.

Set in a beautiful traditional stone heritage house in the village of Baakline is Artisanat du Chouf, which aims to preserve the Lebanese heritage of hand-embroidery and to provide work for local women. Inside is a treasure trove of embroidery pieces from a row of traditional abayas with intricate hand-stitched patterns that must have taken years of work, to a kitsch hand-stitched "Thank you for not smoking" sign along with towels, napkins, scarves and tablecloths all featuring the delicate handiwork in varying stitches.

A group of seven local women, the core workers of the artisan, are gathered inside, with a bigger network of women working on embroidery from their homes. Many of these women, taught by their mothers and grandmothers, have worked on embroidery since they were kids and a few were young girls when they joined the artisan, founded in 1959 by Jamal Alameddine Takieddine, who recently celebrated her hundredth birthday. "Jamal's idea was to create work for women to make an income from their own homes," says her daughter-in-law and now the artisan's director, May Takieddine. "It was the first call for the economic independence of women. At her time it was a very big step." She pulls out and unfolds a large wall hanging in purples, lilacs and greys with exceptional detail. "In [the] 1970s Lebanon, Jamal had ladies working all the way from the mountains to the south. Her work was booming, but now people are reluctant



*Artisanat du Chouf*

to pay in these difficult times. This kind of embroidery is a luxury,” says Takieddine. “Before you would take an embroidered tablecloth for life and care for it. Now the trend is to buy something cheap and only use it once. Machine work from China is replacing it.”

After years of working together the women of Artisanat du Chouf have become like family – their gatherings are like social meetings with women crocheting and stitching while making jokes. Nouha Amer is the artist of the center and sketches or paints out the designs before the other women gather and agree on the best selections and colors. “I’ve worked here for 34 years. I haven’t been to a school to study it but I really love this work,” Amer says. Each woman has her own specialty which includes traditional embroidery techniques from makkuk – made from one thread with an old bone instrument – to needlework and crochet and various types of embroidery from shadow stitch, a pattern worked from behind the material, to richelieu, where holes are cut out between stitches. “Ladies who were pushing this barely exist anymore,” says Siham Khodor, an entrepreneur passionate about Baakline’s rich cultural history and supporter of the artisan. “We are pushing young girls to keep this kind of work. It’s our heritage.”

**“ It was the first call for the economic independence of women ”**

In a large brightly-lit basement in the backstreets of Bourj Hammoud a roomful of women work at separate workstations with the whirl of sewing machines fusing with the laughter of children playing above in a school playground. Artisanat Mabrouk, a not-for-profit initiative of St. Vincent de Paul, was founded by Member of Parliament Gilberte Zoueïn Abou-Hamad in 1986 and is run by a



Artisanat Mabrouk

core team of women including Aline Fattal, Maude Khayyat, Alice Tamer, Marie Claude Bittar and Brigitte Khairallah. “We started during the [civil] war. The idea was to have women working at home all year round, to allow them to stay by their children rather than in a factory,” says Fattal. “We decided embroidery and sewing was something they already knew how to do and it perpetrates the tradition.” The workshop though is not only about keeping a tradition of Lebanese embroidery alive, it’s also a social project to give fairly paid work to families in need.

The artisan started in Fanar with women coming together one morning a week with their work, which started with

knitting. “It was a disaster,” Fattal jokes. “We had no idea how to make things at the beginning.” Since then the artisan has built up a solid reputation for their work, which sells in a Downtown Beirut boutique, along with customized orders.

Inside it’s a hive of activity; two women fold a huge tablecloth in front of a rainbow wall of colored threads, a cloud of steam temporarily hides two women pressing designs onto material. A couple of women work on machine-work embroidery, and another sews the final sequins and beads on a delicate jacket. Behind each woman’s workstation is a board with colorful embroidered designs of flowers, fruits, red-roofed Lebanese houses and animals, pinned

for inspiration. From a rail hang some of the final pieces from delicate jackets rich in embroidery that take a minimum of five days to put together to white lace baptism dresses.

“It’s refined work,” says Tamer while proudly displaying tablecloths with Arabic and Phoenician lettering. “They’re arriving at a degree of perfection. It looks like work by hand but it’s all done by machine. Look at those flowers,” she says pointing to the work on a black silk jacket. “They’re beautiful.”

With these organizations keeping the rich heritage of embroidery alive and reviving it for modern times, they are also continuing a strong female tradition, which offers stability and independence to modern day women.

*Artisanat du Chouf*  
Mon-Thu 9am-1.30pm and appointments  
05 305937, 03 376644  
Baakline

*Artisanat Mabrouk*  
01 989200  
Downtown



*Artisanat Mabrouk*

## EMBROIDERY AROUND THE COUNTRY

There are numerous women and associations keeping the art of embroidery alive around Lebanon from Douma to Zouk Mikhael, from North to South. Here are just a few of them

The workshop of Mona Doumit (03 652483) includes a network of more than 20 women who work from home. Over the last 40 years she’s built a solid reputation for her tablecloths and cushion covers. She customizes special designs to order for individuals and for designers.

The handicraft of May Joublat’s workshop (03 334401) is a fine example of embroidery work from the Chouf region. Once situated in Saifi Village, the delicate work is now available by order.

Leyli Saad (04 712448) has dedicated her life to keeping embroidery alive and to offer work to women. The workshop produces diverse embroidery pieces highlighting each of the woman’s specialties. She is renowned for her embroidered organdy tablecloth. Currently Saad works on demand.

Since it was founded in the 1960s INAASH (01 740609, [inaash.org](http://inaash.org), Bikhazi and Charif Bldg, Sidani Street, Ras Beirut) almost 10,000 Palestinian women have been trained in preserving the heritage of Palestinian embroidery and almost three million pieces of handiwork have been made.

The association Basmeh wa Zeitooneh (*basmehzeitooneh*) helps the embroidery work of Syrian refugee women to reach customers and for them to gain their own financial independence.

# Randa & the city

Jewelry designer  
**Randa Tabbah's** pieces  
are directly inspired  
by the city. She talks  
to Lebanon Traveler  
about her designs





With a career spanning more than twenty years, Randa Tabbah was born into a long line of jewelers and craftsmen, with an inherent love of art and design. Her creations embody a passion for true craftsmanship and are deeply rooted in modern aesthetics. With this passion leading her from Beirut to Paris to New York and around the world, Randa has found beauty in architectural landscapes and the stories behind them.

Earning a degree in fine arts at Beirut University College, she honed her craft at L'École de la Bijouterie et de la Joaillerie in Paris. Then becoming an apprentice as a wax model maker of jewelry and accessories. After returning to Lebanon in 1993, she opened her own studio in Achrafieh, and later a boutique in Saifi Village in 2007.

Her first collection, "New York", was a breakthrough in contemporary design, inspired by the iconic landmarks of the city. Structural in form and with a focus on clean lines and geometric patterns, the collection was exhibited in the Aaron Faber Gallery in Manhattan and awarded the International Tahitian Pearl trophy.

**How does your Lebanese heritage inspire you?**

One of my latest collections "Somewhere in Beirut" started out while talking to my daughter about old Beirut. We would walk together and I would point out the street where I used to play as a child or where my father worked. We thought how wonderful it would be to be able to wear those memories, so we came up with the concept of a map to which gemstones [could be added] at key locations.

**What is your design process?**

Jewelry making is an organic process, unrestricted by preconceived notions of

what the piece ought to look like. With an open mind and free hand, I let the natural shape and color of the stone direct the design. Sometimes I start sketching, inspired by the shapes around me and at other times I begin working directly on wax or metal without a design concept. When the piece takes shape, the atelier work follows.

**How is the design scene evolving in Lebanon?**

When I first started out, people looked at me as if I came from Mars. They weren't used to the geometric designs of my pieces. Men actually were more appreciative than women, especially architects and those in the design field. Now, the situation is very different. People are more open and well traveled so they understand the concepts.

**What's the best piece of advice you can give to new designers?**

Design doesn't come easily. Your first idea is not always the one that works. You have to work at it tirelessly. Once you're happy with the design, you have to make sure that it's ergonomically correct. It's a process and one that is not as easy as you might think. You must take into consideration the aesthetics and the fit, as well as the finishing – then it's a true masterpiece.

*Randa Tabbah Jewelry Design*  
01 975030  
signumrt.com  
Moukhalassiyeh street, Saifi Village, Beirut

Annie Keropian-Dilsizian



- 1 Somewhere In Beirut (SIB) pendent, Hamra
- 2 SIB bracelet, Hamra
- 3 Serpentine bracelet
- 4 Paraline bracelet
- 5 Bamboo ring
- 6 Mojito ring
- 7 Crazy earrings



Photo courtesy of Hayat Karanouh

# Turning the pages

## Discover the network of Lebanon’s many public libraries

At the beginning of the year the New York Times by Charles M. Blow (Jan 2014) ran an article with the headline “Reading books is Fundamental.” However in Lebanon, a country with a plethora of homegrown, world-renowned authors, it has been an uphill struggle for many years now to introduce public libraries. Even after 14 years of campaigning, just 3 out of the 12 planned public libraries for Beirut exist.

The first of those planned libraries in Beirut’s turned 14 this year, the Municipal Public Library of Bachoura (01 667701) located in a municipal building overlooking a cemetery. A further two are located in Rmeil (01 562677) and Monot (01 203026), with a fourth library expected to open in Tariq al-Jdeih by the end of the year. Nationwide, however, there are 25 libraries within Assabil’s (the Friends of Public Libraries Association) network. The Lebanese NGO founded

in 1997 to establish and promote public libraries in Lebanon that are free and open to all.

Back in 1997 Antoine Boulad, the president of Assabil, and four of his friends proposed a public library to the Beirut municipality. Assabil’s administrative committee manages the operations of the association in a number of ways: opening and managing some of Beirut’s municipal public libraries; coordinating their network of public libraries located throughout the country; distributing books to public libraries and schools, organizing activities in public libraries; and conducting training sessions for library staff.

### THE CHALLENGES FACING READERS

Making communities aware that public libraries are open in their neighborhoods is often challenging. A recent report in al-akhbar.com by Bassel Habbab (July 2014)

about Beirut’s public libraries stated that in spite of numerous radio, TV and print announcements many locals were still unaware that a library was open in their area. Nevertheless “...in 2013, Assabil received 31,000 visitors and lent out over 16,000 of its 44,000 books. While it represents the only source of books for some of its visitors, the NGO also strives to provide its members with access to culture and a community of readers,” the report stated. To counteract the challenges of creating awareness Assabil also “...hosts regular writing workshops, computer classes, and cultural events.”

The report goes on to cite how “...each library [in Beirut] maintains a general collection, but the three branches also cater to their neighborhood’s interests. The Monot branch has a focus on the arts, while the Jeitawi branch, located in a garden, offers some books focused on horticulture.”



In addition to the neighborhood libraries, Assabil also operates the Kotobus, a mobile library, which currently caters to schools in Beirut's suburbs, as the NGO continues its challenge to ensure the "fundamental right of reading" is available and known to all.

*Derek Anthony-Isaacs*

**Lifetime library membership costs LL10,000; children unable to afford the fee are allowed to enter for free**

**A list of countrywide libraries is available on [lebaneselibraryassociation.org](http://lebaneselibraryassociation.org) and [assabil.com](http://assabil.com)**

## DAWAWINE: A POLYVALENT SPACE

The brainchild of publisher and author Sara Sehnaoui, Dawawine is Beirut's latest cultural center that includes a library and a bookstore. The venue, designed by architect Jihad Kiamé, consists of an open space with various sections: a bistro (open every day from 10.30am to 11pm with a European menu), a bookstore devoted to theater, cinema, music and performing arts, a library, a 32-seat screening room, and a conference room. The airy space is punctuated by low-slung sofas, and includes a terrace.

01 567705, Gemmayzeh, Tue-Sun  
11am-11pm

## PUBLIC READING IN LEBANON



Dr. Imad Hashem, responsible for books and reading in the Ministry of Culture, shares his thoughts on the importance of libraries in Lebanon

Integrated in local public life and playing a role as cultural, educational and social spaces, the public libraries of Lebanon have become true meeting spaces. Indeed, the creation and development of neighbourhood and village libraries assures a better promotion of books, facilitates the discovery of reading, but above all, offers public spaces for the young and the old.

Being accessible and free of charge, public libraries provide access to knowledge and information for all citizens. By the diversity of services provided, the plurality of sources, the variety of activities organised, they further offer the possibility to divert and educate oneself, to build one's personality and opinion in the respect of public space.

Today, the importance of public libraries has become clear to the Lebanese; they witness a constant development and are today at the center of activities of the Ministry of Culture and Civil Society Organisations.

The idea of public libraries, which incited some municipalities to small initiatives before 1975, has re-emerged after the end of the civil war in 1990. Certainly, initiated by civil society organisations and associations, the wave of library creations has known an expansion and amplification thanks to militant activism of the latter, but also thanks to the involvement of the municipalities and the engagement of the Ministry of Culture in the framework of a policy of democratisation of culture and access to books in particular.

### THE CENTERS FOR READING AND CULTURAL ACTIVITIES

In 2001, the Ministry of Culture launched a large public reading project by creating 14 centers for reading and cultural activities, Centre de lectures et d'Animation Culturelle (CLAC) in partnership with the International Organisation for the Francophone (OIF) and local authorities.

Based on the model of the CLAC and encouraged by their success, which is illustrated by the numbers of visits (1000 per month in 2004) and book rentals (300 per month in 2004), the ministry has continued to pursue this initiative and has created libraries throughout [Lebanon].

To date, 45 centers for reading and cultural activities are distributed in all regions of the country. At the beginning equipped with a stack of 2,500 books in two languages, they now offer to the public diversified collections of some 4,000 to 5,000 books, newspapers and magazines, CDs and music, with particular attention being paid to the space for children.

### THE LIBRARY OF BAAKLINÉ

The library (05 304050, Baakleen, Chouf) was created in 1987 in a heritage building of 700sqm and was attached to the Ministry of Culture in 1997. Offering a trilingual collection of 75,000 books and more than 7,000 magazines, newspapers and journals, it employs 20 people of which some are professional librarians.

### THE NATIONAL READING WEEK

A national reading week, coordinated by the Ministry of Culture, is organised every year during the month of April. In 2008, more than 400 events were organized by libraries, cities, bookshops and publishing houses... all actors in the chain of books.



# *Rural roots*

Lebanese artist **Issa Halloum** celebrates Lebanon's landscapes through his paintings

You don't need to have a conversation with artist Issa Halloum to discover his love of the rural regions of Lebanon's Bekaa. His deep connection to the land and people of his hometown Al Ain, a village 33km north of Baalbeck, and the surrounding area is immediately obvious in his paintings. His pieces, characterized by thick linear brushstrokes and blocks of color in a Mediterranean palette, show daily life in Lebanon's rural parts, from fertile landscapes of agricultural fields in shades of green and their workers, to snow-filled scenes in the Bekaa or daytime gatherings in local cafes. His artistic preoccupation seems to be with representing the beauty of Lebanon's landscapes.

Halloum, an unassuming man, modest and softly spoken, started drawing and painting at an early age, encouraged by

his elder brother. "When all the other kids were outside playing football I was not interested," he says. "I wanted to stay home and paint." Later he studied art at the Fine Arts Institute at the Lebanese University where he graduated in 1995 before being accepted at the renowned arts establishment Brera Academy in Milan. Here Halloum found an incubating community where he connected with other artists.

Though the majority of Lebanese artists choose to base themselves in Beirut, to be in the midst of the country's artistic center, Halloum prefers his home region of Al Ain. "I belong to this land. I have my own workshop, my own life here," he says. "I paint wherever I go, but whenever I'm in the Bekaa I have a stronger feeling for the landscape."





*Afternoon Silence*

**“ I paint  
wherever  
I go, but  
whenever  
I’m in the  
Bekaa I have  
a stronger  
feeling for  
the landscape ”**



*Spring Fields*

Directly inspired by the landscapes surrounding him, Halloum takes his painting materials into nature and settles when he finds a nice composition, first sketching in charcoal and then beginning the layers of paint. He often works on numerous paintings around a theme for a planned collection simultaneously. "I work all the time, but [it might mean] sitting in my studio, listening to music, reading, and looking at my work. I'll take one painting with me to the kitchen and living room, so I can live with it and see what's missing. It moves with me."

Drawn to natural scenes full of color and life, fall is Halloum's favorite season to paint outdoors; "I love the palette of colors," he says. His paintings show a variety of landscapes, from mountains to valleys, but it's the agricultural fields that really move him, and repeatedly appear throughout his work. "I love the colors and separations. It helps for the composition." He also has an attachment to the workers of the land. "They're good people. [Those] working on the soil are the real people," he says. "We are the people who make

problems. They plant the wheat, we eat it but then we sit on the computer. They're providing us with life."

Though Halloum wishes art could be decentralized from the capital city, he doesn't expect the Bekaa to develop its own arts scene. "I've tried before but there's no acceptance. People are not interested." When friends ask how he can leave his studio unlocked with his paintings in his home village, he laughs. "I would love it if someone stole one, it would mean someone in the area has an interest in art."

Halloum is passing his experience onto the next generation, teaching at the Islamic University of Lebanon, in Khaldeh. He travels to Beirut regularly for solo and collective exhibitions, many of which have taken place at Alwane Gallery. But the rich lands of the Bekaa soon draw him back again.

*issahalloum.com*

*Halloum's next exhibition will take place in spring 2015 at Alwane Gallery (01 975250, Saifi Village, Saifi)*



*The Balcony*



*The Red Chair*



*The Poppy Field*

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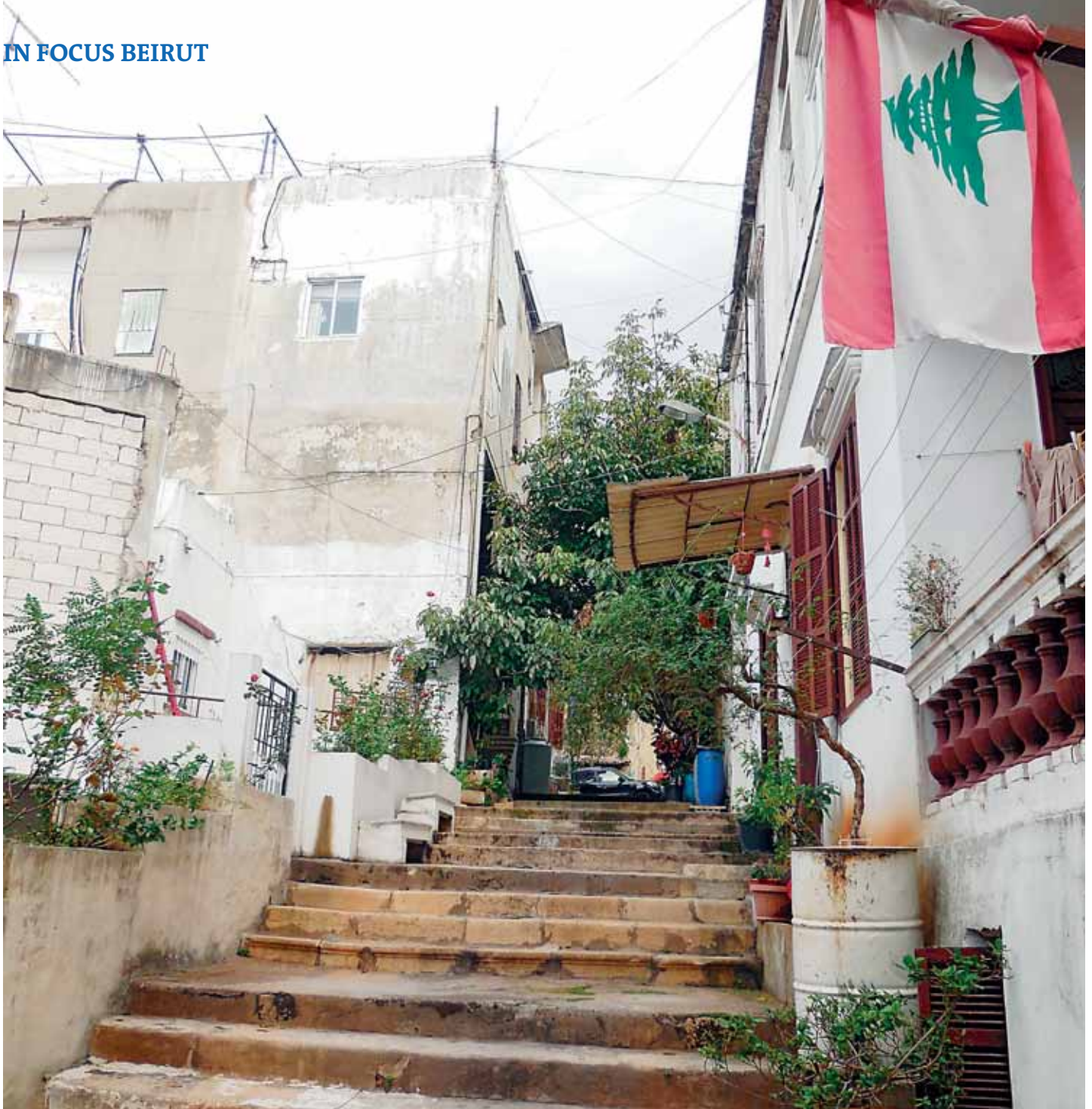
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# Stepping through the eras

The old stairs of Mar Mikhael and Jeitawi have seen the city transform around them. They hold memories of the city's past, but as Beirut becomes more urbanized, like the old communities that surround them, they face an uncertain future



Eight major stairs connect the two neighborhoods of Mar Mikhael and Jeitawi, and a few smaller ones are hidden between. Once, these semi-secret alleyways built haphazardly by locals, were the only connection between their houses and the train station below. Now they are the link to old Beirut, passing through communities that seem unchanged from the '50s; communal living in outdoor spaces, shared gardens and daily coffee and conversations.

The wide stairs named Geara are still full of life. Also known locally as the Vendome Stairs, even their name harks back to another era, a remnant to the cinema that once stood at its side, replacing the Olympic Cinema before it in 1979. Houses line the sides of the stairs, which are the only access to resident's front doors; the public space has become their shared garden. Elderly residents still gather in a circle of chairs to drink coffee every morning; at the top of the stairs mural and graffiti-covered walls are lined with plants and trees, punctuated with religious icons, an urban garden enjoyed by all.

Diala Lteif, Responsible for Section Design at ALBA University, is behind a series of tours around the stairs of Mar Mikhael and Jeitawi and has led a research project on the area for her students. When Lteif discovered a research initiative on the stairs from ALBA urban observatory, Majal, she decided it would make an interesting topic for the course she leads in Section Design. The first public tour was launched in June 2013 as part of Beirut Design Week.

"Initially the stairs were informal alleyways made by residents to get to the train station in Mar Mikhael or to their jobs in the late 1800s," she says. "They were almost secret; only used by local residents. Later the French colonialists formalized them. When the trains stopped and cars came to the city there were less pedestrians and so less use of the stairs. This was the first fall of them."

Many of the local residents have very personal attachments to the stairs and there are hundreds of stories from donkeys going up and down carrying produce to their role during the civil war

when they were used to carry weapons. "One couple got married on the stairs, another set of stairs next to [local bar] Bodo have a hole in the middle and residents have broken their legs on them. Residents have their own daily habits. They use the Vendome to go up since it has resting levels and the other steep stairs to go down," Lteif says.

For local resident Tony Akoury, who has a barbershop opposite the Vendome stairs, they're imprinted on his memories and stories. Once a projectionist at the La Vendome Cinema, he fondly remembers the first ever screening of "Wild Geese" in 1979. "I remember going down the stairs on my motocross bike during The Hundred Days War with Syria, avoiding the dropping bombs," he laughs.

When many of the city's old heritage houses have been pulled down and replaced with high rise flats, it's perhaps a surprise that the stairs have managed to survive until now, but it's actually down to their unusual legal status. Built on private land, many of the stairs cross several houses' plots. "Jeitawi and Mar Mikhael have become expensive areas, real estate agents buy adjacent plots and fuse them together so they can build higher. The future of these stairs is resting on a few residents refusing to sell," says Lteif.

The sound of construction now dominates the sleepy neighborhood around the Vendome Stairs, threatened when a construction firm wanted to make an apartment tower's parking entrance, saved when one resident refused to sell. The view from another set of stairs rests on Bernard Khoury's Skyline Tower. It's perhaps the perfect symbol to the changing urban fabric of the city – a stark contrast to the old neighborhood close by. "We're trying to raise awareness. These stairs are a testimony of what the city was, our shared memory that's at risk of being forgotten," says Lteif.

A number of associations are working to raise awareness of the stairs, one of which is Paint Up!, an NGO that goes by the name the Dihzahyners. They started an initiative to paint and refurbish the stairs between Mar Mikhael and Jeitawi bringing color to grey urban areas. "We

## WHERE TO EAT

For a snack on the go, grab an ice-cream and bag of homemade cookies or other sweet treats from Mar Mikhael's Oslo (01 576464, [osloicecream.com](http://osloicecream.com).)

## WHERE TO SHOP

While in the area, wander along Mar Mikhael's Armenia Street and stop by interesting design-orientated boutiques including art and culture concept store Plan Bey (01 444110, [plan-bey.com](http://plan-bey.com)) and its adjacent exhibition space Zawal. Head in the direction of Gemmayzeh and on the other side of the road you'll come across design boutique Nayef Francis (01 444711, [nayeffrancis.com](http://nayeffrancis.com).)

## WHAT TO SEE

After walking up the Vendome Stairs continue up the hill, then go to the left of the Kataeb Party Headquarters. Grab a coffee and zaatar croissant from one of the surrounding minimarkets and head to Jesuite Public Garden, a green escape in this old urban neighborhood of Rmeil. At one end of the park is a public library, enjoy the free wifi under the shade of a tree on the benches outside, where elderly residents gather daily.



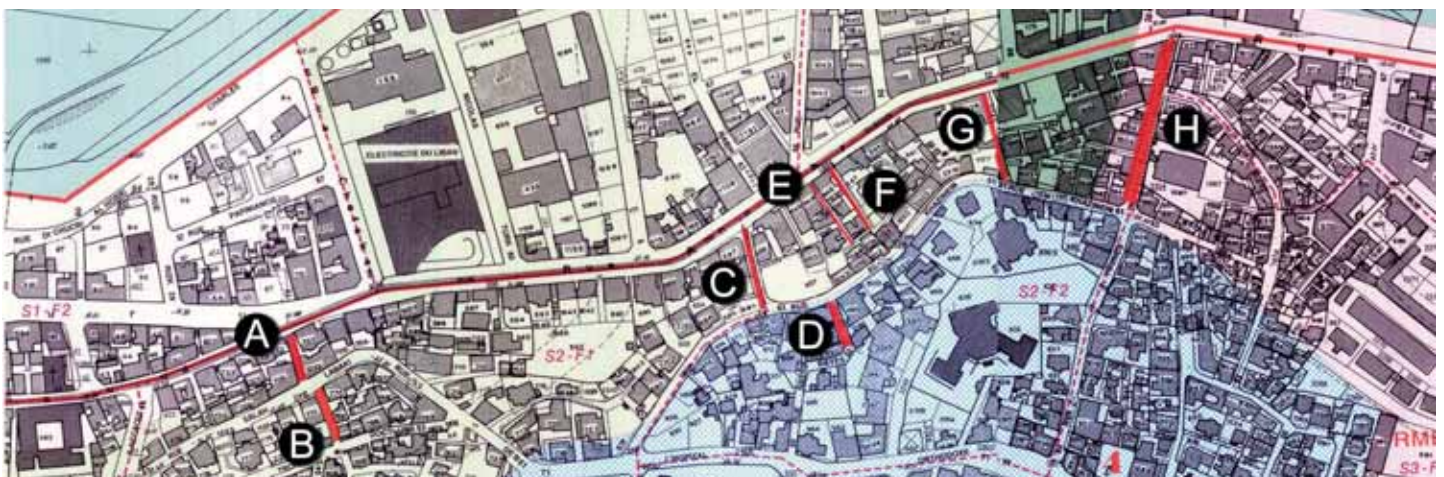
Photo courtesy of Nadim Kamel



aimed at making a real difference in the landscape of Lebanon, and really changing communities that people live in. We thought that we would start with stairs and have it grow into a real movement to reshape the way Beirut looks,” say “the Dihzahyners.”

Founded by Lana Chukri and Jubran Elias, the NGO that started with just 12 members continues to grow and evolve. “We do feel we are making a change to the community. Neighbors in the areas we have painted have thanked us, joined us, and rejoiced in the color we spread in their streets,” say the Dihzahyners. “Beirut’s old stairs are everywhere, they connect neighborhoods together and at the same time it connects people houses together which means it connect people hearts together.”

*Info on the next tour held in collaboration with Gaia Heritage at dlteif@alba.edu.lb  
Facebook: Dihzahyners  
dihzahyners.tumblr.com*



**A:** Gholam stairs connecting Salah Labaki and Armenia street. **B:** Stairs connecting Three Doctors and Salah Labaki street. **C:** Massaad (or Mar Mikhael) stairs connecting Al Khazinian and Armenia street. **D:** The stairs of Nassif Rayes street linking to Armenia street. **E/F:** Two parallel stairs linking to Armenia street. **G:** Stairs connecting Al Khazinian and Armenia street. **H:** Vendome stairs of Younes Gbaily street connecting Al Khazinian and Armenia street.

# GETAWAYS

Founder of NEOS Tourism consultancy and the author of “Eco Lebanon: Nature and rural tourism,” **Nour Farra-Haddad** gives her eco-friendly tourism tips around Lebanon



## Coastal culture: Enfeh

The northern coastal city Enfeh, a narrow promontory shaped like a nose, offers archeological, historical and religious sites. The Enfeh creek consists of an attractive rocky shore shaped in a perfect semi-circle. Those not charmed by the idea of a winter swim can fish with the locals or rent a kayak (*Nizard Dreik 03 330472*).

**SLEEP** Stay overnight in the local house of Marie Josée and Liliane Ajoul's (03 428421) or in a sea-front chalet at Drek's (*Emm & Abou Khalil, 76 550841*).

**EAT** Enjoy fresh seafood and grilled fish at Enfeh creek.

**SEE** Take an in-depth tour of the old city with a local guide (*Georges Sassine, 03 695181, or Hafez Jreich, 03 540215*). Start at the old medieval church of Saydet El Rih where archeological excavations recently took place. Continue through Tahtel Rih fishing port where impressive reservoirs, canalizations, stairways, urns and trenches can be seen, hewn out of the rock. Finally, tour through the ancient churches lining Enfeh city's old street.



## Religious roots: Saydet Kaftoun

The Aramaic and Syriac language roots of the name of the village Kaftoun suggest it was named after the domed Theotokos Monastery, carved in the red rock cliffs by the banks of the Jaouz River. Explore the monastery of Saydet El Nourieh and enjoy the sunset overlooking Chekka bay. Take the small trail toward the 4th Century convent nestled in the middle of the cliff.

**SLEEP** Stay in the peaceful small Hamat-based hotel Theodos (*06 730030*).

**EAT** Enjoy traditional mezze next to the Nahr El Joz River at Moutazah Nahr El Joz (*03 675064*).

**SEE** The three recently restored 6th Century churches of Kaftoun, Saint Phokas Church, the Church of Saint Sergius and Bacchus feature marvelous medieval frescos and the Theotokos Monastery houses an 11th Century Byzantine icon. For a hike discovering old bridges and water mills go with local guide Mitri Sarkis (*03 464076*).



## Family Getaway: Bkerzay & Baakline

In the heart of the Chouf, ecotourism project Bkerzay (*03 512020*) is located on rich lands of olive groves and lush woods of pines and oaks with endangered flora indigenous to Lebanon. Bkerzay hosts a pottery workshop, small store and restaurant. An eco-village with guesthouses for artists and visitors is in the pipeline.

**SLEEP** Camp in the wild at the camping site of Baakline or head to Beiteddine and sleep in luxury at Mir Amin Palace (*05 501315; miraminpalace.com*)

**EAT** Enjoy excellent Lebanese mezze or bring your own picnic and only pay rental of a table and chairs by the river at Shallalat Al Zarka restaurant (*03 560301*).

**SEE** Stroll through the historical village of Baakline taking in the old stairs that link squares and alleyways, mills and olive oil presses, the serail of the Takieddine family and the impressive library which once was a prison. Don't miss the hiking trail developed by the Bkerzay Organization, which winds through olive, pine and oak trees.

# AGENDA

## DECEMBER

Mon  
15



### Festive Market at Le Vendome

A festive market in collaboration with Chocolats Valrhona Foundation and École du Grand Chocolat in France creates a unique tradition of festive chocolate perfection. Le Vendôme Beirut, 01 369280, Rafis Al Hariri St, Beirut. *Daily, 10am-10pm, 15 Dec – 6 Jan*

### Christmas by the lake

The beautiful Bnashii Lake in Zgharta hosts this winter festival for the 6th year. Organised by NGO Al Midan expect everything from parades and games, to theatrical plays and Christmas carols. *Bnashii Lake, 06 664466, almidan.org. 15 Dec – 7 Jan*

### At The Rose House

An Art Exhibition by British artist Tom Young in the iconic Rose House of Manara looking at the house's place in the city. Also featuring pieces by Noor Haydar art and a short film by Charles Kassatly. Rose House, Manara. *Tue-Thu, Sat 11am-7pm, Mon 15 – Tue 30*

### Gingerbread Artist exhibition

Supporting local artists and businesses "Gingerbread Artist" Christmas exhibition brings together local artisans, paintings, photography, artwork, Christmas arrangements, candles, jewelry, pottery and ceramics. Exode, 01 336464, equipeexode.com, Accaoui Street, Achrafieh. *Mon-Fri, 11am-6pm, Sat 3-6pm, 15 Dec – 15 Jan*

FOR DAILY EVENT  
UPDATES VISIT  
[LEBANONTRAVELER.COM](http://LEBANONTRAVELER.COM)

Sat  
20



### Niha to Ferzol hike

Hike around the Bekaa's Niha, known for its ancient citadels, to Ferzol's ruins and caves with a stop by local villagers to eat breakfast and buy their homemade organic produce. Hike level 3 and 6 both available. *Meeting point Sagesse School, Jdeideh, 7:30am. LL80,000 including lunch and transport; LL50,000 without lunch. Vamos Todos*



Sun  
21



### Barouk-Ammiq reserve hike

A hike around the beautiful landscapes of the Barouk-Ammiq reserve. Groups of more than five receive one free hike and one free body composition analysis. *Meeting point Sagesse University, Furn el Chebbak, 8am. LL45,000 including breakfast, lunch and transportation. ProMax*

### Wine tour in Keserwan

"They will blossom as the vine, and their fragrance will be like the wine of Lebanon," said Prophet Hosea (780-725 BC) encouraging his followers to return to Yahweh, and having tried the wines of Lebanon's monasteries, we're sure he was right. Dale Corzan leads a tour of wine tasting at Mar Cha'ya Monastery in Broumana, St. John Monastery in Khenchara and Bzoummar Monastery. *Meeting point Mar Maroun Church Parking, Dora. LL35,000 + lunch. Dale Corazon*

### Falougha to Mtein hike

A hike along section 16 of the Lebanon Mountain Trail from Falougha, the village divided by two rivers to Mtein. *Meeting point National Museum. LL36,000. FootPrints Nature Club*

### Wine tour

Beyond Byblos' full day of wine tasting in the Bekaa valley will certainly leave you feeling jolly. *Meeting point Sodeco Square. LL39,000. Beyond Byblos*

### Wadi El-Salib hike

Exploring the beautiful area of Keserwan with stunning views of the valley. Level 3 hikers (7km, 700-1100m) will discover an old hamlet and an Ottoman bridge, level 6 hikers (12km 700-1200m) will follow the river valley of Nahr As-Salib. *Meeting point Sagesse (Hikmeh School), Achrafieh. LL40,000, LL70,000 married couples, LL35,000 students, LL30,000 under 18s. Hiking trips are every Sun; check libantrek.com for updated schedule. LibanTrek*

### Wadi El Karakir hike

A 12km hike through the north of Lebanon in Mizyara. *Meeting point ALFA, Furn el Chebbak. LL35,000. Born2Hike*

### Deir Moukhalles Baanoub hike

"The best time to plant a tree is years ago.. the second best time is now. This Sunday, we decided to hike, having this idea in mind," says Vamos Todos. Hiking through the area where the beautiful 16th Century Deir el Mokhales monastery is located and Baanoub Village, the group will also contribute to Lebanon's reforestation by planting a tree in the area. Highlights of the trip also include seeing the olive harvest and the production of traditional olive oil soap and carob molasses. *Meeting point Sagesse School, Jdeideh, 7:30am. LL50,000 including transport and tree planting. Vamos Todos*

Mon  
22



### Christmas spirit outing

Get in the holiday mood with a family outing to the forest of Lehfed, Jbeil to make Christmas decorations and cookies. *Meeting point Downtown, facing Virgin. LL48,000 including lunch and transport. Decouvre LB*

Sat  
27



### Hiking Abadyeh

Located in higher Metn, Abadyeh is the highest village in the area with a history that stretches back hundred of years, its old ruins are a remnant of another time. Enjoy panoramic views from a surrounding of thick vegetation. Level 3 hikers (5km)

will reach a beautiful oak wood with views on the Lamartine Valley, level 6 hikers (9km) will also start in Abdyeh but will take a more challenging trail with 350m of climbs and downhill. *Meeting point Sagesse School, Jdeideh, 7.30am. LL45,000 including transport. Vamos Todos*

Sun  
28



### Akhwat Chanay trail

A moderate level hike in the beautiful nature of the Chouf with stunning scenery along the way. Meeting point Sodeco Square. *LL39,000. Beyond Byblos*

### Broumana hike

For level 2 hikers (6km, 600-800m) take the "Turkish path" past pinewoods, for level 5 (10km, 400-900m) follow the valley of the Aimani River. *Meeting point Sagesse (Hikmeh School), Achrafieh.*

*LL40,000, LL70,000 married couples, LL35,000 students, LL30,000 under 18s. Hiking trips are every Sun; check LibanTrek.com for updated schedule. LibanTrek*

### Wadi El-Salib hike

Exploring the beautiful area of Kfardebian and Mount Lebanon. *Meeting point ALFA, Furn el Chebbak. LL35,000. Born2Hike*

### Blawza – Annoubine

Following an 8km trail through the beautiful Annoubine in the region of

Bcharreh and Ehden, the easy level hike starts in the village of Blawza, passing by St Marina monastery, where the tombs of 18 patriarchs from the 15th to 19th Centuries are held. Afterwards there's a visit to one of the oldest monasteries in Lebanon, Deir Saidet Annoubine, passing old houses along the way before reaching Freidis village. *Meeting point Jdeideh Public Garden, facing Sagesse School. LL45,000. Vamos Todos*



Mon  
29



### Snowshoeing in Laqlouq

A walk on the white peaks of Laqlouq breathing the fresh winter air and enjoying a beautiful landscape. The easy-level walk, with only light ascents and descents, is ideal for picture taking. *Meeting point Mar Maroun Church, Dora. LL50,000. Dale Corazon*

Wed  
31



### New Year weekend in Douma

A musical night full of dancing and singing with a hearty feast will celebrate the arrival of 2015. The following day start the New Year with a tour of Douma including its old souk and distinctive landmarks. *Meeting point Mar Maroun Church, Dora. LL195,000 including accommodation and the party with open buffet and drink. Dale Corazon*

### Welcome 2015

Vamos Todos celebrates New Year's Eve in the village of Dhour Choueir. On a mountain overlooking Beirut, the village's 400-year-old houses, narrow alleys and old churches give the atmosphere of a

typical Lebanese village. The New Year's Eve hike at three levels will pass through old caves, mills, ancient bridges, natural water reservoirs and springs and houses with traditional arches. On the night itself Vamos Todos have an exclusive hotel

with DJ and a rich feast. *LL420,000 for full package including hike, New Year's Eve and overnight stay or just New Year's Eve and overnight; LL210,000 for New Year's Eve without overnight stay. Vamos Todos*



# JANUARY

Fri  
02



## Meeting heroes: fire station visit

Introduce your kids to some local heroes, and firefighters with a unique visit to the fire station. *Meeting point facing Pain d'Or between Hayek and Mkalles roundabout. Half day trip. LL30,000 including transportation and snack. NEOS Kids*

Tue  
06



## "Twelfth night cakes" and time-sharing at Beit El Raja

Taste the twelfth night cakes and organize some games with the underprivileged children of Beit El Raja. *Meeting point facing Pain d'Or between Hayek and Mkalles roundabout. Half day trip. LL37,500. NEOS Kids*

Sun  
18



## Snowshoeing in Sad Chabrouh

A day snowshoeing in the Keserwan/ Mount Lebanon region along with a visit to the Monastery of the Resurrection in Chabrouh, overlooking Faraya. *Meeting point Mar Maroun Church, Dora. LL50,000. Dale Corazon*

## Akoura and Yannouh

A moderate level hike in the marvelous nature of Jbeil/ Mount Lebanon. *Meeting point Sodeco Square. LL39,000. Beyond Byblos*

## Azzour hike

Explore the stunning landscapes of Lebanon's own deep south with a hike around Azzour in Jezzine. Level 3 hikers (6km, 300-500m) take in a crusader fort on the Awali river, level 6 hikers (12km, 300-900m) follow the river banks of Awali. *Meeting point Sagesse (Hikmeh School), Achrafieh. LL40,000, LL70,000 married couples, LL35,000 students, LL30,000 under 18s. Hiking trips are every Sun; check libantrek.com for updated schedule. LibanTrek*

Sun  
04



## Abaydate hike

Explore the north region of Lebanon by foot with a hike through Abaydate in Jbeil region. Level 3 hikers (6km, 750-900m) will pass by the cliff hermitages of Wadi al-Bawali, level 6 hikers will also pass by Wadi Ghalboun. *Meeting point Sagesse (Hikmeh School), Achrafieh. LL40,000, LL70,000 married couples, LL35,000 students, LL30,000 under 18s. Hiking trips are every Sun; check libantrek.com for updated schedule. LibanTrek*

## Tannourine forest hike

Explore the luscious Tannourine Cedars

Sun  
11



## Smar Jbeil - Jrabta – Sghar hike

A beautiful hike passing through the rural regions of Batroun taking in 6th Century church Al Sayde (St Mary) and the Phoenician citadel of Smar Jbeil before hiking to Jrabta village, visiting LBC's premises where "El Wadi" was filmed, along with the Monastery and Museum of St. Rafqa and the ancient Al Qattine monastery inside three caves, with an altar, arcades, arches, and ruins. *Meeting point Mar Maroun Church, Dora. LL35,000. Dale Corazon*

## Snowshoeing

Enjoy a day of winter snowshoeing at moderate level difficulty in the heart of nature of Chabrouh, Mount Lebanon. *Meeting point Sodeco Square. LL39,000. Beyond Byblos*

Reserve and get lost in nature with a moderate to easy level hike of 10km. *Meeting point ALFA, Furn el Chebbak. LL35,000. Born2Hike*

## Burning the NY calories out!

We all make New Year's Resolutions that are impossible to keep but a session of hiking or snowshoeing among the cedars in the Chouf Reserve, with stops for igloo building or snow battles, is going to be impossible to resist. *Meeting point Downtown, facing Virgin. LL60,000 including lunch and transport. Decouvre LB*

## Kfarhabrakh hike

A day's hike around the Chouf region of Kfarhabrakh. Level 4 hikers (9km, 800-1100m) pass by a watermill and the emir's canal, level 6 (13km, 500-1100m) follow the river valley of Nabaa as-Safa. *Meeting point Sagesse (Hikmeh School), Achrafieh. LL40,000, LL70,000 married couples, LL35,000 students, LL30,000 under 18s. Hiking trips are every Sun; check libantrek.com for updated schedule. LibanTrek*

## Barouk forest hike

A hike through the magical Chouf Cedar Reserve of Barouk to get close and personal with the trees that are the heart of Lebanon. *Meeting point ALFA, Furn el Chebbak. LL35,000. Born2Hike*



Wed  
21



### Photomed

The second edition of Photomed, the Festival of Mediterranean Photography in Lebanon features the work of international and Lebanese photographers such as Mimmo Jodice, Barbara Luisi, Bernard Plossu, Leila Alaoui, Arslane Bestaoui, Keiichi Tahara, Angel Albarran and Serge Najjar. In parallel, workshops and portfolios presentations will be organized. *Beirut Souks, Saifi Village, Institut Français du Liban, Byblos Bank Headquarters and Hotel Le Gray.* Info 01 497494. 21 Jan – 11 Feb

Sat  
24



### Cars, mini-cars and stories of crazy races with Billy Karam!

Discover the fantastic collection of Billy Karam cars and meet with the racing champion himself. *Meeting point facing Pain d'Or between Hayek and Mkalles roundabout. Half day trip. LL37,500.} NEOS Kids*

### Snow and wine

Enjoy a full day of snowshoeing at the largest of Lebanon's nature reserves; the Al-Shouf Cedar Nature Reserve. Lunch will be followed by wine tasting offered

by Chateau Marsyas. *Meeting point Wild Discovery, Furn el Chebbak. LL129,000 including lunch and transport. Wild Discovery*



Sun  
25



### Bentael Reserve hike

Hike through the area of Kfarmasoun, Bentael, a national treasure filled with cultural, art and natural wealth. *Meeting point Mar Maroun Church, Dora. LL40,000. Dale Corazon*

### Karem Saddeh and Hamatoura hike

A moderate level hike in the beautiful natural surrounding of Karem Saddeh and Hamatoura in Zgorta. *Meeting point Sodeco Square. LL39,000. Beyond Byblos*

### Miziara hike

An atmospheric Sunday hike through the Zgharta area of Miziara, 110km from Beirut. Level 3 hikers (6km, 500-700m)

will pass through the wooded plain of Rechtaamout, level 6 hikers (12km, 300-700m) will walk along the wooded gorge of al-Qraair. *Meeting point Sagesse (Hikmeh School), Achrafieh. LL40,000, LL70,000 married couples, LL35,000 students, LL30,000 under 18s. Hiking trips are every Sun; check libantrek.com for updated schedule. LibanTrek*

### Baadaran hike

A moderate level hike (11km) through the beautiful scenery of Baadaran. *Meeting point ALFA, Furn el Chebbak. LL35,000. Born2Hike*

## FEBRUARY

Sun  
01



### Bisri hike

Hike through the Bisri, Sidon caza in south Lebanon visiting a temple in the historical ruins of Eshmoun and passing through Bisri village before visiting the historical Joun monastery Deir al Mokhales. Walk the valley along the Awwali river bank, cross by water streams, traverse tall tree forests, and admire breathtaking views. *Meeting point Mar Maroun Church, Dora. LL35,000. Dale Corazon*

### World wetland day

To mark World Wetland Day (Feb 2), raising public awareness on the value and

benefits of wetlands, Beyond Byblos hike through Kfarzabad in the Bekaa. *Meeting point Sodeco Square. LL39,000. Beyond Byblos*

### Qteleh

At only 30km from Beirut Qteleh in Baabda is a tranquil countryside escape. Level 2 hikers (5km, 400-600m) will see pinewoods and old bridges in Lamartine valley, level 5 hikers (11km, 400-1000m) will see Delbeh spring and enjoy monastic nostalgia. *Meeting point Sagesse (Hikmeh School), Achrafieh. LL40,000, LL70,000 married couples, LL35,000 students, LL30,000 under 18s.*

*Hiking trips are every Sun; check libantrek.com for updated schedule. LibanTrek*

### Falougha hike

A moderate level 14km hike through the Mount Lebanon area of Falougha. *Meeting point ALFA, Furn el Chebbak. LL35,000. Born2Hike*

### Invading the white

A day snowshoeing amongst the Tannourine Reserve's Cedars with plenty of stops for igloo building and snow battles. *Meeting point Downtown, facing Virgin. LL60,000 including lunch and transport. Decouvre LB*



Sun  
08



### Deir Hamatoura hike

The abbey known as the "Guardian of the City," in Hamatoura, is built in the rocks overlooking great views. The church is the most ancient part, dating back to the 4th Century. Walk along the mountain cliff overlooking the Qadisha Holy Valley and the riverbank. *Meeting point Mar Maroun Church, Dora. LL35,000. Dale Corazon*

### Qadisha Valley hike

A hike through the stunning landscapes of Qadisha Valley, otherwise known as "The Holy Valley." *Meeting point Sodeco Square. LL39,000. Beyond Byblos*

### Daroun hike

Located in Keserwan, Daroun offers important religious sites and beautiful scenery. Level 4 hikers (5-6km, 300-600m) will see monasteries and take the pilgrim's paths of "Heaven" and "Moon," level 6 hikers (8-10km, 0-600m) will pass by monasteries, water mills and two pilgrims paths. *Meeting point Sagesse (Hikmeh School), Achrafieh. LL40,000, LL70,000 married couples, LL35,000 students, LL30,000 under 18s. Hiking trips are every Sun; check libantrek.com for updated schedule. LibanTrek*

### Tannourine hike

An easy-moderate level hike of 10km through Tannourine in northern Lebanon. *Meeting point ALFA, Furn el Chebbak. LL35,000. Born2Hike*

Mon  
09



### Turning water to wine

Tour Batroun's religious sites with wine tasting along the way, visiting the Convent of St. Joseph at Jrebta and Adyar Winery for lunch followed by wine tasting, and then the Monastery of Saint Cyprien and Justinian in Kfifane Village. *Meeting point Wild Discovery, Furn el Chebbak, 8.30am. LL112,500 including lunch and transport. Wild Discovery*



Sun  
15



### Ebre Shouen Jannet Artaba hike

Hike through Wadi Janneh which, as the name reveals, is a piece of heaven on earth. The Nahr Ibrahim Valley offers a varied landscape and is considered one of the most enchanting for hiking in Jbeil Caza, especially during this season. *Meeting point Mar Maroun Church, Dora. LL35,000. Dale Corazon*

### Snowshoeing

Enjoy nature while snowshowing in Wadi al Jored. *Meeting point Sodeco Square. LL39,000. Beyond Byblos*

### Mtein hike

Mtein in the Metn area of Lebanon is a tranquil countryside escape from Beirut, full of history. Level 3 hikers (6km, 1000-2000m) will visit old grape presses and feudal mansions, level 6 hikers (12km, 600-1200m) will pass through

pinewoods and visit a Roman temple. *Meeting point Sagesse (Hikmeh School), Achrafieh. LL40,000, LL70,000 married couples, LL35,000 students, LL30,000 under 18s. Hiking trips are every Sun; check libantrek.com for updated schedule. LibanTrek*

### Ehmij hike

Connect to nature with a 5-10km hike through Mount Lebanon's Ehmij. *Meeting point ALFA, Furn el Chebbak. LL35,000. Born2Hike*

### The hiker in love at ARZ

A valentine-themed day snowshoeing in the poetic Arz el Rabb, hometown of the renowned Lebanese poet Gibran Khalil Gibran. *Meeting point Sagesse University, Furn el Chebbak, 8am; Spinneys parking, Dbayeh, 8.15am. LL52,500 including transport. Baldati*





# FESTIVALS

## Al Bustan Festival

17 Feb – 22 Mar

The international festival of music and the performing arts, Al Bustan continues its tradition of culture in the winter season. *Emile-Bustani auditorium, Al Bustan Hotel, Beit Mery unless otherwise stated. 04 9728980, albustanfestival.com.*

### February

#### Super stars and super music (Tue 17)

An all star line up playing the greats of classical music including Beethoven's concerto for piano, violin and cello, Saint Saens: Introduction and Rondo Capriccioso, Sarasate: Gypsy airs and Bizet/Sarasate Carmen Fantasy. Musicians include Oliver Poole on piano, Ana Tifu on violin, Lizi Ramashvili on cello, Nikita Zimin on saxophone and the Lebanese Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Gianluca Marciano.

#### Super stars and super music (Thu 19)

The same program as Tue 17 but with a surprise.

#### Inspiration and Creativity (Sat 21)

British pianist Oliver Poole plays Schumann, Rachmaninov, Stravinsky and his own live improvisations.

#### Inspiration (Mon 23)

An lecture from ambassador Miguel Angel Estrella.

#### Music At The Museum (Tue 24)

A duo made up of cellist Alexander Buzlov and pianist Veronika Ilinskaya do Schubert Sonata in A minor D821, Beethoven Sonata No.3 in A major, Op.69 and Brahms sonata No.1 in E minor, Op. 38. The National Museum

#### Bellini's Norma (Thu 26, Sat 28)

An opera in concert performance with one of Bellini's greats. Gianluca Marciano

### March

#### An Oriental Night (Sun 1)

The music of Ziad Ahmadiéh.

#### Khatia is back! (Wed 4)

The award-winning Georgian pianist Khatia Buniatishvili and the State Youth Orchestra of Armenia (SYOA) do Tchaikovsky, conducted by Gianluca Marciano.

#### One piano, two girls, four hands (Fri 6)

Two pianists Khatia Buniatishvili and Gvantsa Buniatishvili double up to play Mozart, Schubert, Brahms and more.

#### Passion and genius (Sat 7)

Violinist Arabella Steinbacher is joined by the State Youth Orchestra of Armenia (SYOA) to play Mozart and Beethoven.

#### Music of two cultures (Sun 8)

The Accentus Austria Early Music Ensemble. Assembly Hall

#### The brilliance of the Two Sergeis (Tue 10)

The Two Sergei's, violinist Krilove and conductor Smbatyan join forces between the State Youth Orchestra of Armenia (SYOA)

#### The Arthur Satyan Acoustic Ensemble (Thu 12)

Renowned Armenian jazz organist Arthur Satyan performs featuring Avo Tutunjian on alto saxophone, Khatchadour Savzyan on contrabass and Paolo Orlandi on drums. Crystal Garden

#### Remembering Sinatra the Blue Eyes Singer (Fri 13)

Swing legend Frank Sinatra remembered with a festive choir.

#### A Sensuous Voice (Sat 14)

Late night jazz from the Marly Marques Quintet. Crystal Garden

#### La Mome de Paris, a tribute to Edith Piaf (Sun 15)

A tribute to the French diva Edith Piaf with Richard Galliano on accordion and Sylvain Luc, acoustic guitar. Saint Joseph Jesuit Church

#### Heavenly Inspiration (Tue 17)

Beethoven Mass in C Major with soprano Valentina Farcas and mezzo soprano, Eva Vogel, tenor Mark Milhofer, bass David Shipley and The World Orchestra, conducted by Gianluca Marciano.

#### Mario Frangoulis (Thu 19)

Greek tenor Mario Frangoulis sings Theodorakis.

#### Late night in a Greek Taverna (Fri 20)

Traditional Greek Music. Ain El Khasfe

#### Music inspired by Ancient Greece (Sat 21)

A concert from pianist Paolo Restani and The World Orchestra conducted by Gianluca Marciano.

#### La Divina, a tribute to Maria Callas (Sun 22)

Remembering Maria Callas with 12 of her favourite opera arias.



Photo courtesy of Roland Ragi



Photo Courtesy of Roland Ragi

# ONGOING ACTIVITIES

## Sidon, Tyr & Echmoun

See the ruins of Lebanon's southern cities Sidon and Tyre, both steeped in history; from a crusader castle and caravanserai to a hippodrome. On the return trip back to Beirut stop at the Temple of Eshmoun. *Pick up from any hotel in Beirut on Mondays or Thursdays at 8.30am. Mon LL120,000, Thu LL105,000 including lunch and transport. Wild Discovery*

## Paragliding tandem

See a bird's eye view of Lebanon over the Ghosta, Jounieh area by paragliding. *LL180,000 + LL45,000 DVD and photo package. Mon-Fri 2pm-sunset, Sat 1pm-sunset, holidays all day. Exit to Nature*

## Adventures with Footprints

Footprints organize a variety of activities for adventurous types from snowshoeing and rappel and mountain climbing (*LL45,000 per person*) to rafting (*LL75,000*) the wild rivers of Lebanon or a customized camping weekend (*LL75,000*). *Footprints*

## Tripoli-Rachana-Balaman

Take a tour of Tripoli to visit its historic sites such as the Crusader Castle of St. Gilles, the old city with its narrow alleys, souks, and mosques dating back to Mameluk and Ottoman times. Afterwards stop by Balamand monastery and enjoy lunch in a local restaurant, before continuing to art village Rachana, made famous by Lebanese sculptors the Basbous brothers. *Individual tour LL465,000, 2 people LL292,500, rates cheaper with bigger groups, including lunch and transportation. Kurban Tours*

## Snowshoeing

Alternative tourism operator, 33 North organizes day trips and overnight stays in snow capped mountains during the winter season in areas including Hadath el Jebbeh and Daher el Qadib, Aqoura and Tannourine and the cedars of Becharre and Hermel. *Meeting point Spinneys Parking, Dbayeh. LL40,000, overnight LL150,000 including full board. 33 North*

## Back country ski

Have an out of the ordinary ski experience through the countryside. *LL165,000. Every Sun. Club Thermique*

## Authentic Lebanese nature and culture

Take a tour of the Chouf and Deir El Qamar, the former capital of Mount Lebanon, which still retains several palaces

along with Notre Dame church and Fakhreddine mosque dating from the 17th and 18th centuries. The tour also takes in Chouf Cedar Reserve, a typical Lebanese lunch and a visit to Beiteddine, the magnificent Palace of Emir Bechir. *Meeting Point Virgin Megastore, Downtown, 9am, every Sat. LL157,500 including lunch and transport. Saad Holding*

## Jeitta Grotto and Harissa

A five hour trip to some of Lebanon's biggest touristic pulls including the impressive grottoes of Jeitta and a trip up the iconic teleferique to Harissa for a view from the top of the Virgin Mary of the whole of the bay below. *From LL396,000 for solo tour, price reductions for bigger groups. R. Rida International*

## Spotlight: Igloo building

You don't have to live in the North Pole to try your hand at a spot of igloo building, the Lebanese mountains will do it! Working in small groups it's a tough task that relies on solid teamwork with each person taking a role from the snow pilers, to the snow block cutters or the igloo builders. It's the perfect winter challenge (and workout) to practice teamwork for families and kids or corporate companies. *Adults LL60,000, kids LL48,000 including transport. Minimum 12 people. Beyond Byblos 03 485551, 71 728165 Facebook: Byblos.Beyond*



## ADDRESS BOOK

### 33 North

03 454996 - 33-north.com

### Adventures in Lebanon

71 443323 - adventuresinlebanon.com

### Baldati

04 922999 - baldati.com

### Beyond Byblos

09 540857 - byblosandbeyond.com

### Born2Hike

3 287838 - born2hike.com

### Club Thermique

09 237193 - clubthermique.org

### Decouvre LB

03 373711 - decouvrelb.com

### Dale Corazon

70 986118 - dalecorazon.com

### Exit to Nature

03 559992 - exittonature.com

### Footprints Nature Club

03 876112 - footprintsclub.com

### Kurban Travel

01 760500 - kurbantravel.com

### LibanTrek

01 329975 - libantrek.com

### Nakhal

01 389389 - nakhal.com

### NEOS Kids

03 733818 - neoslb.com

### Promax Adventures

03 955642 - promaxsports.com

### R. Rida International

04 718790 - ridaint.com.lb

### Saad Tours

01 393100

### Safari Lebanon

03 954052 - safarilebanon.com

### Sports4life

03 574874 - sports4life-lb.com

### Vamos Todos

03 561174 - vamos-todos.com

### Walkleb

70 353738 - walkleb.com

### Wild Discovery

01 565646 - wilddiscovery.com.lb

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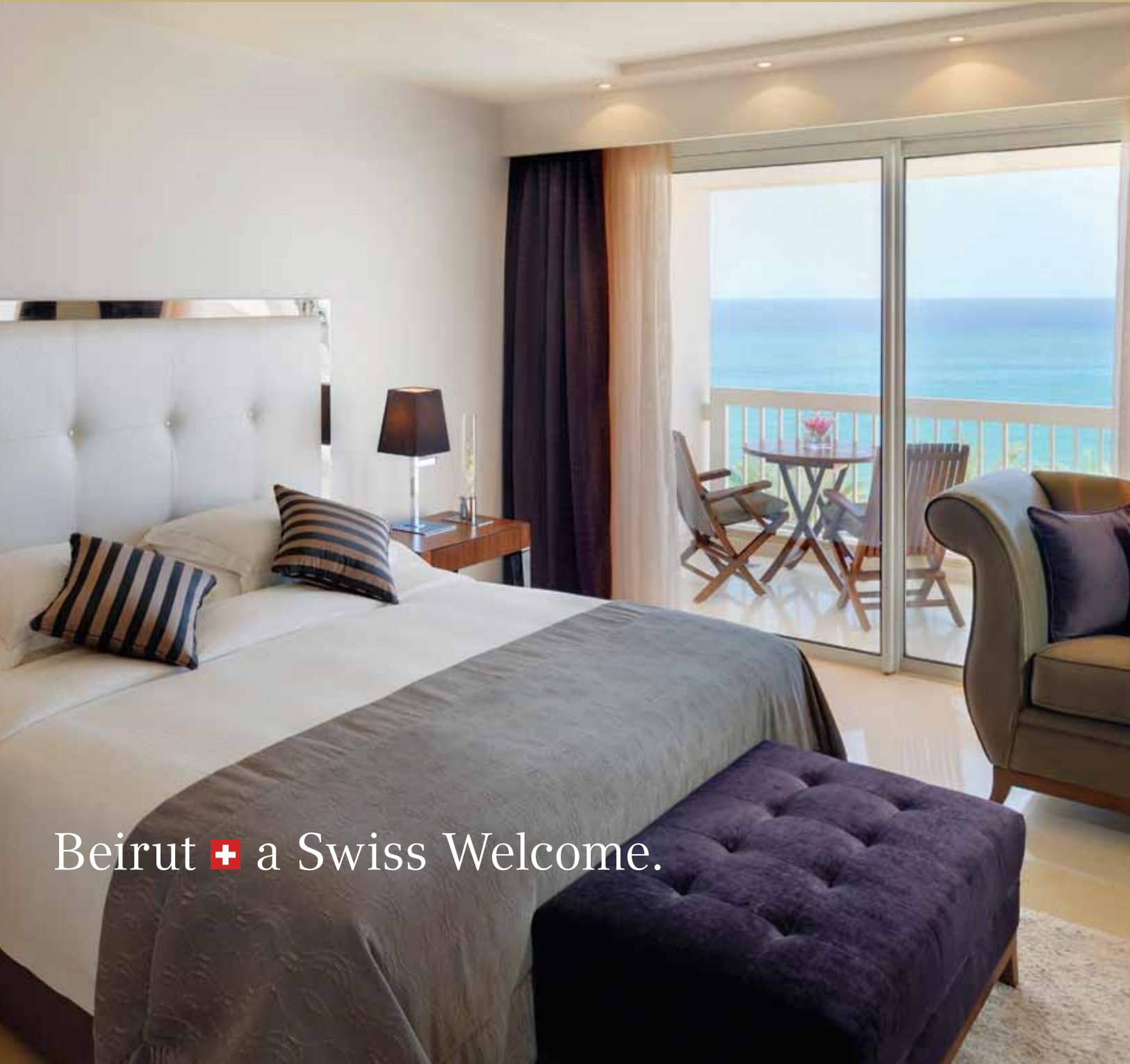


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01 333 550

Saida  
07 729 111

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