

# handicrafts

The Lebanese celebrate their long heritage through traditional handicrafts. Carole French looks at some of the beautiful items fashioned by local artisans

ON A VISIT to Lebanon, you can't help but admire the extent of local artists' imagination. The styles and patterns are as varied as the plethora of colours and materials used for crafts made of the country's natural resources.

Finely sculpted pottery and blown glass pieces, cutlery, colourful textiles and embroidered fashion accessories, carvings made from olive tree wood and grass baskets, plus soap produced from olive oil and beauty treatments using sea salt, are just some of the handicrafts found here.

Souks and small villages are the best places to find practical yet elegant handicrafts being made. See trinket boxes and furniture being carved from wood,

their design following the natural grain and then inlaid with mother-of-pearl. Pottery, too, is simplistically stylish and lightly glazed using olive oil. Some of the best examples can be seen in the souks of Assia and Rachaiya El-Foukhar.

Metal crafts, such as lamps fashioned from copper, brass and bronze, iron and stainless steel, can be seen at souk workshops throughout the country, while blown glass pieces like glasses and decanters come in every shade, from the palest yellow to the most vibrant green and blue. Sarafand, which lies due south of Beirut, is famous for its blown glass pieces created from recycled materials.

Lebanon is also famous for its olive oil soap. Families have grown their own olive trees and extracted the fruit's oil for soap for centuries. The best places to find pieces to take home as gifts is in Tripoli souks and the villages of the Koura district. ■

IMAGE: LONELY PLANET

## TYPICAL HANDICRAFTS

► **GRASS WEAVING:** Rural communities use grass, dried and tightly woven, to produce baskets and floor coverings. The skill has today been adapted to produce elaborate furniture, too. See items being made in the craft workshop near the Eglise St Barbara in Aamchit.

► **HAMMERED TRAYS:** These ornate trays created by hammering patterns on to copper and brass are a staple for entertaining in Lebanon. They are often decorated with

calligraphy or arabesque patterns. Some of the finest examples can be found along the main street through Qalamoun.

► **TEXTILES:** Lebanese textiles are among the world's most beautiful, but the skill was all but forgotten until in the past decades co-operatives were set up to help rural women earn a living from textiles. Today, the colourful textiles characterised by their geometric patterns can be seen everywhere.

Hand-made soaps