

WORLD TRAVEL MARKET 5-8 NOV 2012 ROUND-UP Stand ME140 in the Middle East Section

Facts About Lebanon

CAPITAL: Beirut

POPULATION: Approximately 3.8 million

LANGUAGES: Arabic (official), French, English, Armenian

AREA: 10,452 square kilometres

CLIMATE: Mediterranean climate with cool, wet winters and hot, dry summers.

ELEVATIONS: Highest point – Qornet Es-Saouda (3,090m); lowest point – Mediterranean Sea (0m).

FLAG: The Lebanese flag is divided into three wide horizontal stripes, with red on the top and bottom and a wider white stripe in the middle. In the centre of the white stripe is a green cedar tree, the emblem of the country.



ECONOMY: Lebanon capitalizes on the initiative of its people and its geographical location to make up for a lack of natural resources. Traditionally, a substantial percentage of the country's income derives from remittances sent by millions of Lebanese residing overseas. A service-based economy, the trading, banking and financial facilities, as well as its free currency market, made Lebanon the region's commercial and tourist centre before the war. With peace established and reconstruction underway, Lebanon is once again serving as the commercial and tourism capital in the area.

About 38% of the country is under cultivation, with wheat, vegetables, fruit, tobacco and olives as the main crop categories. There is considerable livestock farming as well. Industry ranges from cement to textiles, clothing, furniture, canned goods, and light metals. Tourism, one of the mainstays of the pre-war economy, is being revived.

To help strengthen the economy, the government has initiated a low income tax schedule to provide investment incentives, increase disposable income and expand tax base.

CURRENCY AND BANKING: Movement of currency into and out of the country and all exchange transactions are completely free of any kind of control. Gold and silver coins may be freely exchanged, imported, and exported. The official monetary unit is the Lebanese pound issued in LL50, LL100, LL250, LL500, LL1,000, LL5,000, LL10,000, LL20,000, LL50,000, and LL100,000 denominations.

Banking is a major industry in Lebanon with strict banking secrecy (one of its important features). More than 80 banks operate in the country and transactions are performed efficiently and at low cost.

GOVERNMENT: Lebanon is a democratic republic with a parliamentary system of government and a cabinet headed by a Prime Minister. Its constitution is based on the separation of executive, legislative and judicial powers, with a president elected for a six-year term. The 128 members of parliament are elected by universal adult suffrage for a four-year term.

Useful Information

Entry Requirements

Visas: All foreigners must have a valid passport and visa to enter Lebanon. Passports must be valid for at least six months. Visas can be obtained in advance at Lebanese embassies and consulates around the world. Nationals of many countries can also obtain business or tourist visas upon arrival at the Beirut Airport and at other ports of entry on the Lebanese borders. At Beirut Airport, visa stamps can be purchased at a window directly across from passport control.

Important Note: Travellers holding passports that contain visas or entry/exit stamps for Israel are likely to be refused entry into Lebanon.

Customs: All ordinary personal effects are exempt from customs duty.

Currency

The official Lebanese currency is the Lebanese pound or lira (LL). Notes are available in denominations of: LL1,000; LL5,000; LL10,000; LL20,000; LL50,000; and LL100,000. There are also LL250 and LL500 coins. U.S. dollars are used widely throughout the country. Restaurants, hotels, and stores often quote their prices in U.S. dollars, and many establishments will convert and provide U.S. dollar prices for you upon request.

Language

While Arabic is Lebanon's official language, English and French are widely spoken. Most Lebanese speak at least two or three languages, and visitors will find no problems communicating. Many establishments provide signs, menus and information in both Arabic and English.

Time

Lebanese time is G.M.T. +2 hours in winter (October to March) and +3 hours in summer (April to September), when daylight savings time is observed.

Business Hours

Government Offices: 8:00 to 14:00 (Mon to Thur) - 8:00 to 11:00 (Fri) – 8:00 to 13:00 (Sat)

Banks: 8:00 to 14:00 (Mon to Sat)

Shops & Malls: 9:00 to 22:00

Private Sector: 8:00 to 17:00.

Communications

Telephones: While the telephone system in Lebanon is well-developed, there are few public pay phones and international phone calls are expensive. Most Lebanese use mobile phones and coverage extends throughout the country.

The country code for Lebanon is (961). This is followed by the local area code and the telephone number. The area code for mobile phones is (03) and the area code for Beirut is (01). If you are dialling Lebanon from outside the country, omit the (0) in the area code.

Internet: There are Internet cafés available throughout Lebanon and many larger hotels now offer high-speed and wireless Internet access for free or for a small fee.

Electricity

Electric current is 110/220 volts, 50 cycles. A two-pin plug, with round pins is commonly used (Type C, similar to many European countries), but other types of plugs are also in use so it is best to check before you go.

Health

Lebanon is a developed country with relatively good health facilities. Similar to travel to other foreign countries, hepatitis A and B vaccines are recommended; also make sure tetanus-diphtheria and measles vaccinations are up-to-date. A typhoid vaccine is also recommended for travel to Lebanon.

FOODS OF THE LEBANESE

The Lebanese diet focuses on herbs, spices and fresh ingredients, relying less on heavy sauces. Mint, parsley, oregano, garlic, allspice, nutmeg, and cinnamon are the most common seasonings.

Bread, a staple food in Lebanon, is served with almost every meal, most often as a flat bread, or pita. It is so crucial to the Lebanese diet that some Arabic dialects refer to it as "Eesh", meaning "life."

Fruit, vegetables, rice, and bread out-weigh the amount of meat eaten in the average Lebanese meal. However, the most commonly eaten meats, poultry and lamb, make up some of the country's most popular dishes. The national dish, Kibbeh (or Kibbe), consists of a ground lamb and cracked wheat paste, similar to paté. "Kibbeh" was originally made by harshly pounding the lamb and kneading in the spices and wheat.

Mezze, a variety of flavourful hot and cold dishes, is another important part of the Lebanese diet. As many as forty small dishes are presented at once as either appetizers or as a meal itself. Hummus (chickpea, sesame seed and garlic paste), rice and meat wrapped in grape leaves, mashed beans, hot and cold salads, grilled seafood and meats (including kebabs, cooked cubes of lamb, peppers and onions), and pickled vegetables are most popular. Lebanese meals are rarely served in courses, but presented all at once. Tabbouleh (a salad made with cracked wheat) and Mujaddara (a lentil and rice dish) are also widely consumed.

Lebanon's variety of fresh fruits makes them popular after-dinner desserts. Melon, apples, oranges, tangerines, persimmons, grapes, and figs are great treats. Baklava, a sweet, flaky pastry, is usually associated with Greek cuisine. However, the Lebanese have embraced the dessert and normally prepare it with pistachio nuts, drizzled with rose-water syrup (the Greeks use walnuts and honey). "Ahweh" (strong, thick Arabic-style coffee) and the country's national drink, arak (a colourless alcoholic beverage made with anise, also called "Lion's Milk" because it becomes white when mixed with water), are most commonly served with dessert.

About Lebanon: A Heaven on Earth!

Landscapes that change with the seasons, but are always bathed in the warm sun. The daylight rising over Lebanon brings endless opportunities of fun, beach, nature and outdoor activities. You'll never know what to choose. Whatever it will be, an unforgettable time awaits you under the shiny Lebanese sun.