

10 best bars in Beirut

The cosmopolitan city knows how to throw 'em back. After this tour of top watering holes, you'll know why

As partners go, "bar-hopping" and "Middle East" might sounds like dogs and cats, but a night out in Beirut is an exception.

The city has long been the party capital of the region, from its swinging '60s heyday as the playground of the international jet set to its more recent resilience after years of conflict.

Beirut's bar scene centers around the neighborhoods of Gemmayzeh and Hamra, and the recently hip district of Mar Mikhael.

Here are 10 places where Beirut warms up, gets hot and winds down.

1. Dragonfly



From the dapper barmen to the art deco-style and old cinema seats, Dragonfly is all retro charm. Lebanon may have gained independence from France in 1943, but there's still a Parisian feel to this small cocktail bar on Gemmayze's main drag.

Behind the bar, Nino and Danny mix inventive cocktails to old school jazz.

The daily happy hour from 6 to 8 p.m. makes Dragonfly a perfect place to start a Beirut night.

Gouraud Street, Gemmayzeh; +961 (0)1 561 112; daily 6 p.m.–late.

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2. Torino Express



COURTESY GLEN PEARSON Whatever time you visit Torino Express, you're bound to find someone interesting propping up the bar. Undoubtedly the city's most atmospheric drinking den, this tiny bar next door to Dragonfly is a Beirut institution.

What it lacks in size, this former picture-framing shop makes up for in character, with barrel-vaulted ceilings, no-frills décor and unpretentious crowd.

By day, it's a café serving tasty panini and excellent espresso; by night, a standing-room-only bar serving beer, wine, cocktails and eclectic tunes.

Gouraud Street, Gemmayzeh; +961 (0)3 611 456; daily, 10 a.m.–late.

3. Kayan



COURTESY GLEN PEARSON

In the mood for dessert? Tiramisu

shot! Down a quiet side street off Gouraud Street, Kayan is the kind of place you'd like as your local if you lived in Beirut.

It's busiest midweek, when a casual, jean-clad crowd of 20- and 30-somethings pops by for expertly mixed cocktails (\$5.50 during happy hour from 5–8 p.m.).

Like many Gemmayzeh bars, there's no drink menu. Unlike its competitors, the owners are behind the long wooden bar.

Brothers Kayan and Jean Moukhtar are renowned for their tiramisu shot (they also make a mean Bloody Mary).

Lebanon Street, Gemmayzeh; +961 (0)1 563 611; daily, 5 p.m.–1 a.m. (2 a.m. on Friday and Saturday)

4. February 30



Stools at February 30. So wacky they're wonderful. A newcomer to Hamra's lively alleyway of bars, February 30's kooky décor evokes a wonderland worthy of Alice.

There's furniture stuck to the ceiling, a DJ booth above the bathroom door and Beirut's best bar stools.

The generous happy hour -- all drinks half-price between 5-8 p.m. daily - provides a good excuse to visit.

On Sundays there's a barbecue followed by a Lebanese film (\$27).

78th Street, The Alleyway, Makdessi Street, Hamra; +961 (0)76 994 405; daily, 10 a.m.–3.30 a.m. for brunch, lunch and dinner

5. Bar ThreeSixty



Bar ThreeSixty at Le Gray Hotel. Set around a dramatic glass atrium, this lounge offers some of the best views of the city, sea and surrounding mountains.

Visitors can pull up a pew overlooking the blue-domed Mohammad al-Amin mosque and join a sophisticated crowd sipping the signature ThreeSixty Martini.

A huge wine list features excellent local and international bottles, while the delicious charcuterie and cheese platters are good for sharing.

The resident DJ plays soft jazz, funky soul and happy house; there's live music on Wednesday and Friday.

Le Gray Hotel, Martyrs' Square, Downtown; + 961 (0)1 962 888; daily, 7.30 p.m.–2 a.m.; www.legray.com

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6. Internazionale



Not an Inter Milan fan? Best keep that to yourself at Internazionale. Named after Italy's Inter Milan football club, this happening hangout is the latest offering from Andreas Boulos, the Lebanese-German owner of Torino Express.

A large black and white photo adorns one wall, showing a smoky plane full of sharp-suited jet setters, resplendent in dark glasses (including Boulos' granddad).

An equally hip crowd sips cocktails from an impressive list, although they've got to smoke outside these days thanks to a recently introduced smoking ban.

Inside, an open kitchen serves gourmet burgers and daily specials, while DJs play deep house, acid jazz, and hip hop.

Armenia Street, Mar Mikhael; +961 1 565 463; daily, 7 p.m.–late.

7. Ferdinand



COURTESY GLEN PEARSON

Ferdinand's famous Ferdi

burger. Despite its proximity to the prestigious American University of Beirut, this cozy, low-key gem attracts a 30-something crowd.

The music reflects this, with a playlist featuring funky old school, indie rock and '70s and '80s tunes — but strictly no electro.

It's primarily a cocktail bar, but there's also local beer like Almaza, imports and Heineken on tap, plus good quality Lebanese wines.

The main draw is the Ferdi burger, which is topped with blueberry jam and homemade mayonnaise (\$15). Trust us, it's worth it.

Mahatma Gandhi Street, Hamra; +961 (0)1 355 955; Monday-Saturday, noon-late, Sunday 4 p.m.-late.

8. Dictateur



Beirut's Dictateur has a chilled out, artsy/industrial vibe. With an underground vibe, industrial look and arty crowd, this watering hole on the outskirts of Mar Mikhael is worth seeking out.

Split over four areas, there's a busy bar serving local beers and cocktails, with a happy hour every day from 6 to 8 p.m.

DJs play alternative and indie rock. If you want quiet conversation with your cocktail, there's a lounge area and outdoor terrace.

Badawi Street (behind Manadaloun nightclub), Mar Mikhael; +961 (0)3 251 512; Tuesday–Sunday, 6 p.m.–late, weekend brunch noon–4 p.m.

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9. Behind the Green Door



COURTESY BEHIND THE GREEN DOOR *Bow chicka wow wow.* Named after the cult 1970s porn flick, the velvet decor and impromptu pole dancing adds to this lounge bar's louche feel.

Behind the Green Door attracts Beirut's alternative party crowd (and a few hen nights, too) who come for the wide mix of music, including R&B night on Thursdays.

It gets packed on weekends, so visitors are advised to call head to reserve a table.

Consider plumping for a Piscine (champagne over ice) or brave a dou-dou shot (vodka, lemon juice and Tabasco with an olive).

Nahr Street (opposite EDL, the Lebanese electricity company), Mar Mikhael; +961 (0)70 856 866; Monday–Saturday, 8 p.m.–late.

10. SKYBAR



If it's Beirut bragging rights you seek, SKYBAR doesn't disappoint. No round up of Beirut bars is complete without the one that put the city on the international party map.

Opened in 2003, SKYBAR still reigns as the city's biggest and best summer rooftop bar/super-club.

With 10 resident DJs yet no dance floor, dancing on the 60-meter long bar isn't just encouraged, it's expected.

Dress to impress and reserve a table to get past the notoriously tough doormen -- there's no minimum spend, but you'll need at least eight people.

Other clubs may be snapping at its heels, but SKYBAR is still the one you want to brag about to your mates back home.

BIEL Pavillion, Minet El Hosn, +961 3 939 191; open mid-June through end of October, Thursday-Sunday, 10 p.m.–4 a.m.; www.sky-bar.com