

Lebanon 8,000 LBP

# Lebanon Traveler



A publication of Hospitality Services in a joint venture with Beyond Beirut | Issue 17 | Dec 2015-Feb 2016

YOUR HANDS-ON  
GUIDE TO LEBANON

## AL BUSTAN HOTEL AND ITS LEGACY

**ORIENT 499**  
THE ARTISANS  
OF LEBANON

KRIKOR  
JABOTIAN'S  
**FASHION EMPIRE**

## BEIRUT CAFÉS

A TEA TOUR OF THE CITY

## DEBBANE PALACE

SIDON'S OTTOMAN  
HERITAGE

## JAMIL MOLAEB

ART OF THE LANDS

YOUR  
WINTER  
HIT LIST



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**Lufthansa**

# Lebanon Traveler

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Cover photo by  
Pierre Sakr

## As the nights draw in...



Photo: William Khouchaba

Fortunately, Lebanon's mild climate means that the advent of winter doesn't mark the start of hibernation. The seasonal chill is usually characterized by blue skies and fresh air, punctuated with a warming winter sun. As usual we bring you a whole host of activities to experience the winter season at its best – from snowshoeing and skiing when the snow finally falls, to staying at the coziest hotels and B&Bs for a weekend away.

This issue we take you on a tour of the country, heading north to the historical town of Hadath el Jebbeh – an exceptional winter destination with its 1,000-year-old cedar forest and important religious sites. We also visit Sidon's Debbane Palace, which preserves Lebanon's tradition of Ottoman architecture, and Beit Mery's Lebanese Heritage Museum which houses an impressive collection spanning Lebanon's history.

We meet some of the leading figures who enrich the country's cultural fabric, such as Myrna Boustani, who established a winter tradition of classical music more than 20 years ago with the Al Bustan Festival. And we visit artist Jamil Molaeb, whose hometown Baissour has become the site of his museum.

Diving head first into Beirut life we stop by the modern handicraft boutique, Orient 499 and visit renowned Lebanese fashion designer Krikor Jabotian's Achrahfieh atelier. We also take a tea tour around Beirut's finest cafes and go shopping for designer pieces at the city's museum shops.

Our magazine is packed full of tips on where to eat, sleep, and visit in Beirut and around the country, so let Lebanon Traveler be your guide. And take us on the ride too – share your experiences on [Instagram](#) LebanonTraveler and [Facebook](#) LebanonTraveler.

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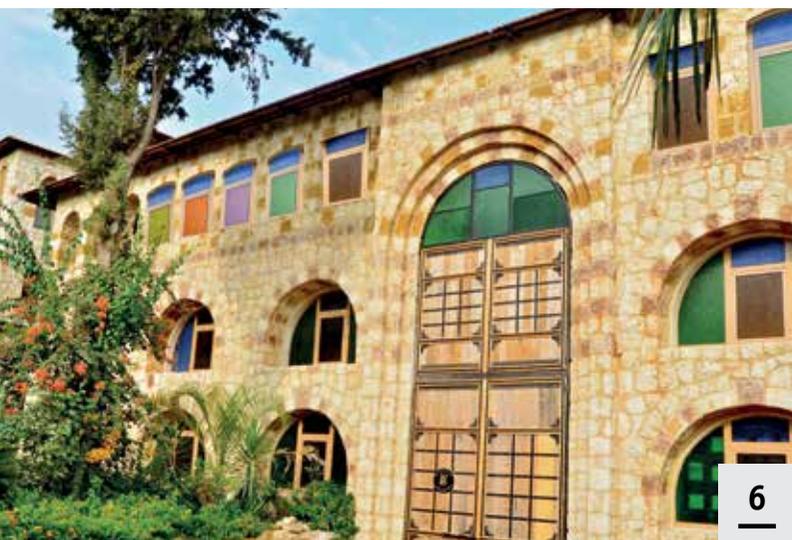
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## Contributors



### William Khouchaba

William Khouchaba is a Lebanese Visual Artist who started to take pictures in 2005. William reflects his passion to Lebanon in pictures, especially at touristic and ecological sites.



### Haig Melikian

10 years ago, Haig Melikian bought a bicycle and started to ride with groups. He soon started taking photos of his rides, documenting the villages and landscapes he saw along the way.



### Charbel Bouez

Charbel Bouez has developed a unique style in communicating the beauty that surrounds us. In 2013 he created Charbel Bouez Visual Communication and has earned global recognition, exhibiting in Lebanon and abroad.



### Martine Btaich

Martine Btaich is an independent professional working in community and rural development. She is also the Vice President of the Lebanon Mountain Trail Association.



### Zeinab Jeambey

With a background in dietetics and food tourism, Zeinab Jeambey is a specialist in food heritage management and has developed the first food tourism trail in Lebanon, Darb el Karam, for the Food Heritage Foundation.



### Nour Farra-Haddad

Nour Farra-Haddad manages her own travel consultant company, NEOS, and is also the author of Eco-Lebanon and Wiz Kids guide books.

# News



## Tech talk

### LEBANON TRAVELER APP

Lebanon Traveler, in collaboration with the USAID-funded Lebanon Industry Value Chain Development (LIVCD) project, launched the first mobile travel application on iPhone and Android at the fifth edition of the Beirut Cooking Festival in November.

The Lebanon Traveler app is a hands-on guide to the country from rural destinations to the bustling capital city of Beirut. It features the latest articles in Lebanon Traveler Magazine, a daily calendar of events and direct access to exclusive Lebanon Traveler deals, along with a gallery of photos showcasing beautiful landscapes.

Connect with us  



## On the web

### FROM EVERY ANGLE

InterContinental Phoenicia Beirut has launched the online campaign, See Lebanon for Yourself, so visitors can explore the country's major sites through 3D photography and Google Cardboard. [Seelebanonforyourself.com](http://Seelebanonforyourself.com)



## New Openings

### NATURE

Nature by Marc Beyrouthy, a shop to open soon in Kaslik, will offer a wide range of eco-friendly, natural and sustainable products. Coming from a family of farmers and landscapers, Marc Beyrouthy has created a one-stop destination for the green lifestyle. At the store you will find a tea and coffee house selling the world's finest selections, plants and flowers, herbal and essential oils, Lebanese terroir and heritage, agriculture, plus eco-friendly and up-cycled products and gifts; all available online. Go green. [marcbeyrouthy.com](http://marcbeyrouthy.com)



## Rural tourism

### GREEN MAPS

The Nature Conservation Center at the American University of Beirut held its fourth "Baldati Bi'ati" award ceremony and map exhibition at AUB in October. Funded by the Coca Cola Foundation, the project has worked with over 70 villages to develop maps, which highlight their natural and cultural heritage. The project has involved the local community, working with 520 local residents to boost local development and rural tourism. The 70 Green Maps produced cover everything from environmental features and natural resources to touristic assets, along with available services, activities and general tourism information.

[AUB Nature Conservation Center](http://AUB Nature Conservation Center)  
01 350000/4505 [aubnatureconservation.org](http://aubnatureconservation.org)

## ♥♥♥ We Love...

### BOXED EXPERIENCES

Beirut-based start-up Wonder.Full has launched a new concept that transforms the act of giving. They've created pre-packaged experiences in a box; so you can give unforgettable experiences to explore Lebanon's scenery, people and food, as a gift. We love the Adventure Box, which offers an outdoor getaway, from a hike for two in nature to a day canyoning or windsurfing lessons. 03 348112, [awonderfullbox.com](http://awonderfullbox.com)



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OUR



### *The wider region*

## LEBANON – HEAD OF WORLD TOURISM ORGANIZATION, M.E.

Lebanon has been honored with the position of the Head of the World Tourism Organization Committee for the Middle East, for the next two years, with minister of tourism Michel Pharaon elected as chairman. The minister said that terrorist threats against historic and cultural sites were a sabotage of the civilizations of the region, such as what took place in the city of Palmyra or elsewhere. He also said that he hoped stability and security would be established in the region, which could ensure greater tourism growth, and would boost the orientation towards ecological tourism among Arab countries.



### *Events*

## SUPPORTING RURAL CO-OPS

USAID has supported the participation of 20 food cooperatives and small businesses at the Beirut Cooking Festival in the 'Atayeb Lebnanieh' exhibition booth through its Lebanon Industry Value Chain Development (LIVCD) project. The event took place from 12-14 November. "The Beirut Cooking Festival is an important opportunity for small-scale cooperatives to showcase their delicious products. This will help them to expand their market reach and increase their incomes," commented Dr. Jane Gleason, chief of party of LIVCD. Through their participation in the festival, these businesses have displayed their products during tasting sessions, increased exposure, and generated additional sales.

[f Lebanon Value Chain](#)

[lebanontraveler.com](http://lebanontraveler.com)

## 5 MINUTES WITH... *Ronald Hochar*



This October, Chateau Musar celebrated its 85th anniversary at Palais Msar; also honoring their winemaker Serge Hochar, who transformed his father's winery in 1959, who passed away last year. LT sat down over a glass with his brother and President Director General, Ronald to find out more about the Lebanese winery's heritage

### **WHAT DOES WINEMAKING MEAN TO YOU?**

When you plant vines to become grapes, it needs seven years to reach full maturity. To become a Chateau Musar it needs seven more, to reach perfection it's another seven. That's 21 years... so you should be seriously optimistic at the minimum. Making wine is a matter of faith. It means we believe in this country.

### **TELL US HOW THE MUSAR JEUNE WINES CAME ABOUT.**

My brother [Serge] was the winemaker, and my role was to find the best way to make our wine worldwide. He was a genius. He took a philosophical approach to winemaking; it was more than just drinking to drink. 20 years ago, I told Serge that I felt the market is changing and the younger generation is coming. The Chateau Musar age group was always 50 plus. Ok, at 21 you don't have the finesse of taste or the spending power, but at the same time you have to adapt to the young generation.

### **WHAT IS THE FUTURE AIMS FOR CHATEAU MUSAR?**

I remember my father telling my brother, and me: "If you want to be a shoe-shiner, be it, but be the best." This message was always in our minds. We want to be in as many countries as possible and continue educating people on the culture of wine. To make wine and keep it seven years is not financially sound, but wine is not our pocket; it's our heart. I hope the next generation will continue this. I said at our event: "This is the wine for the future. I won't be here anymore but my wine will speak for me."

[chateaumusar.com](http://chateaumusar.com)

[For the full interview visit lebanontraveler.com](http://lebanontraveler.com)

## WHAT'S TRENDING

**#GiantManousheh** – To mark Lebanon’s Independence Day, 30 chefs from Socrate Catering gathered in Choueifat to prepare a 32m-long zaatar manousheh. The flatbread of epic proportions, smashed Saudi Arabia’s previous 2014 world record winner, which measured in at 15.17m.

**#IXSIR** alongside Enoteca hosted an open doors event to celebrate the end of the 2015 harvest on 7 November at IXSIR’s winery in Basbina, Batroun. Guests enjoyed the cool weather of the Lebanese mountains, paired with IXSIR’s Micro-cuvee EL Red and White. [ixsir.com.lb](http://ixsir.com.lb)

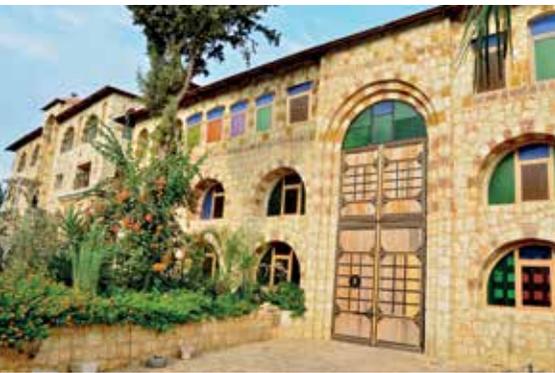
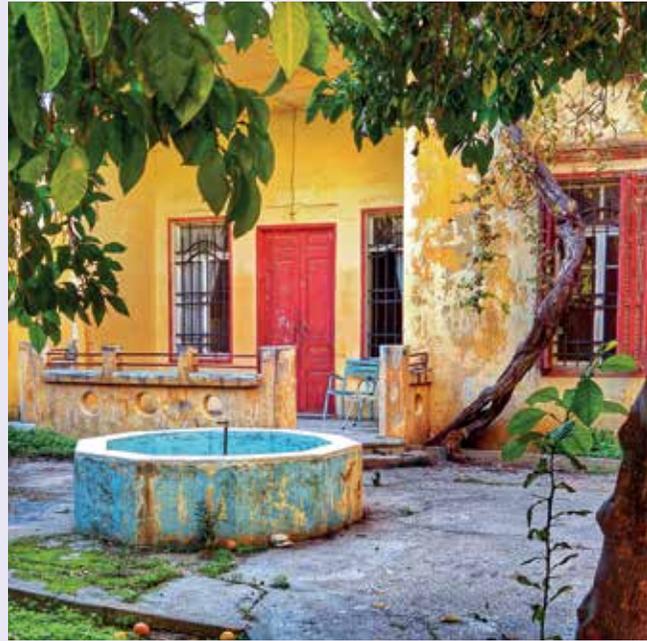
**#JammalTrustBank** (JTB), represented by its chairman Anwar Jammal, hosted a cocktail party at the Lancaster Plaza to celebrate 15 years collaborating with Vitas, a micro lending company. JTB was one of the first banks in the region to see the importance of microfinance and its impact on social development in the community.

For more news visit [Lebanontraveler.com](http://Lebanontraveler.com) & follow us on    

## Insta Snapshot MDAWAR, KARANTINA

Nature lover James Al Achkar snapped our “Instagram of the Issue” when he took a shortcut along the Karantina sea road. “I noticed a deserted street with lots of trees blocking the way in. I was surprised to see a lovely, colorful, old house concealed from the world,” Al Achkar tells LT.

Tag [#LebanonTraveler](#) in your Instagram shots to be featured in the next issue



### Spotlight KHAN AL SABOUN

Soap-makers Khan Al Saboun build on their centuries-old heritage with a new eco-village dedicated to promoting and preserving the tradition

#### 600 years of history

The Hassoun family has been making soap for the last 600 years. Their brand Khan Al Saboun is a soap-making authority in Lebanon. Dr. Bader Hassoun has maintained the family legacy, touring the world to find the ultimate ingredients of flowers and herbs, while continuing the recipes inherited from his ancestors.

#### Visit the eco-village

In 1990, Dr. Bader Hassoun and his family revived the old Khan, where the soap-making journey began, and transformed it into The Eco Village of Dr. Bader Hassoun (06 416648, Ras Maka El Koura, Tripoli).

Here visitors can see the traditional eco-friendly production process where organic products are turned into soap and learn about the family’s soap-making heritage. The eco-village will soon include a boutique hotel and a museum dedicated to the art of perfume making, along with an Eastern Spa and restaurant.

#### Go natural

The perfect gifts for the festive season, Khan Al Saboun’s products are kind on the skin. Handmade from organic, 100% natural ingredients, they include everything from aromatic and therapeutic soaps to essential oils, creams and skin care products. Try their cedar-oil soap, made with oil, honey and cedar oil fragrance, lavender or thyme. Their products are available at the eco-village, in the Eddahab Old Souk in Tripoli, in Beirut at Le Royal Hotel (*Dbayeh*) and online.

[khanalsaboun.net](http://khanalsaboun.net),  [Khan Al Saboun](#)

# Exit through the gift shop

Whether you're looking for gift ideas or to self-indulge, some of the best boutiques of Beirut can be found in its museums. LT went a little wild on a shopping trip around the city and found everything from hand-made concept jewelry to classical Oriental pieces for the home



## Beirut National Museum Boutique

1. Coasters of the doors of old houses, LL42,000
2. Tray and pitcher with Arabic calligraphy, LL105,000; LL237,000
3. Desk box, designed by Finikia, LL105,000

01 612260, [beirutnationalmuseum.com](http://beirutnationalmuseum.com)  
Mathaf, Tue-Sun 10am-5pm

## Mim Museum Shop

4. Mim mug, LL20,000
5. Silver and garnet ring, designed by Randa Tabbah, LL144,000
6. Mim steel business card holder, LL16,500

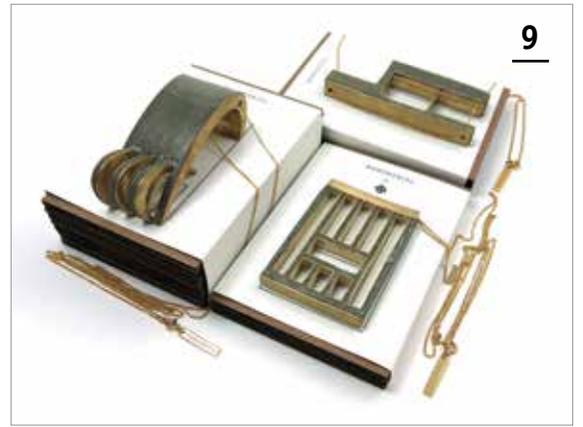
01 421672, [mim.museum](http://mim.museum)  
Innovation and Sports Campus, Saint Joseph University  
Damascus Street, Mathaf, Tue-Sun 10am-1pm; 2pm-6pm



7



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### American University of Beirut Archeological Museum Boutique

7. Sculpture inspired by the Phoenician alphabet letters by Lebanese sculptor Nayla Romanos Iliya, LL195,000

01 759665, 01 350000/2660/1

[aub.edu.lb/museum\\_archo](http://aub.edu.lb/museum_archo), American University of Beirut Campus, Bliss Street, Hamra, Mon-Fri 9am-5pm

### Sursock Museum Store

8. "In the Forest" pop-up children's book by Anouck Boisrobert and Louis Rigaud, LL38,250; a range of children's books are available  
 9. Gondole Tribute, brushed brass and concrete pendants, designed by Margherita exclusively for the Sursock Museum, LL300,000  
 10. Special Edition Urbacraft: Sursock Museum, customizable building, LL75,000

01 202001, [sursock.museum](http://sursock.museum)

Greek Orthodox Archbishopric Street, Achrafieh

Mon-Sun 11am-7pm; Thur 1pm-10pm; Closed Tuesdays



# THE GRAND AL BUSTAN AND ITS FAMILY

Perched on a hill in Beit Mery, the Al Bustan hotel has a long heritage. It's a landmark to the past, watching over Beirut from above. LT speaks to **Myrna Bustani**, daughter of its founder and president of the Al Bustan Festival, who has made the hotel an active hub for the arts and continued its legacy

#### WHAT IS THE HOTEL'S HISTORY?

There was a hotel in the same location called the Grand Hotel, that had been there since the 1930s. It had become derelict and was listed in an auction. My father, Emile Bustani, was a businessman and entrepreneur, and when he heard that the hotel was going to be auctioned he was interested. My mother and father used to go dancing there in the '30s. He bought it and wanted to transform it. They had to pull the old hotel down and the new construction started in 1962. When he died in 1963, my mother continued and completed the interior.

#### THE HOTEL MUST HAVE HAD A BIG PRESENCE EARLY ON FOR YOU – HOW DID YOU GET INVOLVED IN RUNNING IT?

The grand opening was in 1967 and that same year there was the Arab-Israeli war, so it didn't start on a good foot at all. Back then there was a French general manager who was very nice, but wasn't so successful. I was criticizing him all the time and so my mother asked me if I thought I could do better? I said yes. I planned to just work there for three months, but I stayed three years. After that, the Lebanese Civil War took place. The hotel was like a sitting duck

on top of the hill – everybody was shooting at it. Afterwards the hotel was in complete shambles, we had to re-do everything.

**WHY DO YOU THINK AL BUSTAN BECAME SUCH A LEBANESE LANDMARK?**

When we returned again after the Civil War I was insistent that everything should be like it was in the '60s. If a table was broken, we redid it in the same manner as before – we treated everything in this way. People stay here and they have an idea of what Lebanon used to be like.

**HOW DID THE AL BUSTAN FESTIVAL START AND WHAT WAS THE AIM?**

It started in 1994. I realized that classical music had disappeared from the scene in Lebanon. This saddened me because I benefited from being around in Lebanon during a wonderful time when we had very good musicians who came from all over the world. For the first year we had only 30 percent occupancy but that slowly changed. We never thought we would continue as long as we have; it's been 23 years. We are very pleased because we have succeeded in our mission to bring back classical music.

**HOW HAS THE FESTIVAL ITSELF EVOLVED?**

It has changed musically. The first year we only had one "tutti frutti" of opera, with four singers. Now we have full operas. Though our hall is small – we have to remove three rows of chairs to fit the orchestra, since we don't have an orchestra pit – and it is very difficult and expensive [to organize], now people are enjoying it and we are happy that our program has become much more dense and important.

**WHAT IS THE FEEDBACK OF THE MUSICIANS WHO PERFORM AT THE FESTIVAL?**

We have return artists that we ask back every year. They love the festival and are very happy to come. We actually have a problem... they never want to leave!

**WHAT IS THE THEME FOR THE 2016 EDITION OF AL BUSTAN FESTIVAL?**

The theme is "Midwinter Night's Dream," which covers Shakespeare in music. Next year is 400 years since his death, so we are featuring some of the music that was inspired by him.

**IS THERE ONE SHAKESPEARE PLAY THAT YOU ALWAYS RETURN TO?**

Shakespeare sounds wonderful in Arabic because it's rhythmic. I think the one that I like the most is Hamlet – we are bringing Hamlet here (4 January) with a performance from The Globe Theatre.

**WHAT IS IN THE FUTURE FOR THE AL BUSTAN HOTEL?**

We are building a beautiful hammam and spa. There was a 100-year old house next to the hotel that was falling to pieces; we built the spa there. We kept the outside exactly as it was before, even numbering the stones during construction so we could put them back in place. It should open in three to four months time.

**NAME ONE SPECIAL FEATURE IN THE HOTEL THAT GUESTS SHOULDN'T MISS?**

Without any hesitation, the bar. It has this view of Beirut, as if you are in a plane, coming into the city to land.

*Al Bustan Festival, 16 February-20 March, [albustanfestival.com](http://albustanfestival.com), 04 870400*



**A history in brief**

- 1930s** – Lebanese businessman and statesman Emile Bustani and his future wife, Laura, courted in Beit Mery's Grand Hotel over tea and dancing.
- 1962** – Emile starts construction of the Al Bustan, but tragically dies in 1963 when his plane crashes into the sea. Laura continues the hotel's renovation.
- 1967** – The new hotel opens. Laura names it Al Bustan (The Garden) – it was the first hotel of the time to take an Arabic name, when Beirut's hotels all took European names.
- 1992** – After the Civil War, renovation of the destroyed Al Bustan Hotel begins again – it was the first five-star hotel to be renovated after the war.
- 1994** – Emile Bustani's daughter, Myrna founds the Al Bustan International Festival of Music & the Performing Arts.

A photograph of a snow-covered tree in a winter landscape under a clear blue sky. The tree is the central focus, with its branches and trunk heavily laden with snow. The ground is a smooth, undulating expanse of white snow. The sky is a vibrant, clear blue. The overall scene is serene and captures the beauty of a winter day.

# The winter HIT LIST

*Photo: Haig Melikian*

If your calendar is looking cold this winter, we've got a whole bunch of suggestions to fill it with warmth. From tango lessons and a night at a cabaret to the best ski slopes in the country, *LT* have put together a list of the ultimate things to do and places to visit this season

## CULTURAL CALENDAR

### Time travel

This winter, Hamra theater, Metro Al Madina will transport you back to the golden age of Egypt – to the weddings and cabarets of the early 1900s. Their Hishik Bishik cabaret show is still going strong after almost three years. With 10 artists, musicians, singers, actors and dancers in every performance, Metro Al Madina has single-handedly brought back the Arab cabaret. Their cozy venue, features all of the quirks of the old-school cabarets – from red velvet curtains to gold padded wall furnishings. Take a cocktail in the futuristic “Metro Station” bar, straight out of a Stanley Kubrick film, and then head to the hall and settle in for the show. Reservation is a must. *Metro Al Madina*, 01 753021, [metromadina.com](http://metromadina.com),  *MetroAlMadina*, Hamra Main Street; tickets LL45,000, available at Metro 76 309363 and Antoine Online, [antoineticketing.com](http://antoineticketing.com)

### The big screen

Achrafieh’s art-house cinema, Metropolis continues to deliver an exceptional program of everything from local and international independent films, to retrospectives of master directors. In December, don’t miss their Garage Sale (19-20 Dec), when the cinema opens its doors to sell film posters, DVDs and cinema books. Held simultaneously on the first night is the launch of Arab film poster collector Abboudi Abou Jaoudeh’s book “Tonight” – a guide to films made in Lebanon from 1929-1979. January and February sees the return of the European Film Festival (26 Jan-7 Feb,) organized by the European Delegation and returning for its 22nd edition in Lebanon. The rest of the month is dedicated to screenings from the most acclaimed films of the Cannes Film Festival 2015, in the Cannes Coup de Coeur festival. *Metropolis*, 01 204080, [metropoliscinema.net](http://metropoliscinema.net),  *Metropolis Cinema*. *Metropolis Empire Sofil*, Sofil Center, Achrafieh

### Musical institution

The shows of Downtown live music venue, Music Hall, have become the very definition of how to party the Lebanese way. Reflecting the character of its owner Michel Elefteriades – eccentric entrepreneur and the self-titled “His Imperial Highness of Nowheristan,” a new nation he created – Music Hall is a platform for the unconventional. Each night a cabaret of short live music sets will get your heart racing, with Lebanese and international acts playing everything from Oriental and gypsy, to reggae, fusion and jazz. Acts aren’t announced, but they are all masterfully produced by Elefteriades himself, you might catch local singing legend Tony Hanna, backed by a Balkan brass band or a flamenco act brought in from Spain. Music Hall has special events over the festive season, including their luxurious New Year’s Eve party and Minuses and Pluses – the pre and post New Year’s Party from 25 December to 3 January. Music Hall. [themusichall.com](http://themusichall.com), Starco Center, Downtown. Thur-Sun, 10pm-4am



Photo: Charbel Bouez

## THE GREAT OUTDOORS

### Pine adventure

Located in Hammama, Pineland Hotel and Health Resort’s 250,000m2 of lands provides the perfect setting for an adventure weekend. Ride through the pine forest on horse back, mountain bike or ATV, try your hand at archery with views over Sohat Mountain or unwind with a day of fishing at a natural lake. Pineland can also organize hiking trips with local guides through the Metn region. If you want to stay overnight we recommend Pineland’s caves; cute stone houses offering a tranquil escape for couples. *Pineland*, 05 380000, 03 912444, [pine-land.com](http://pine-land.com), Hammama, Metn

### Snow steps

When enough snow falls, the Lebanese mountains are a skier’s paradise, but you can also try your hand at a whole host of outdoor pursuits from snowshoeing to cross-country skiing. The closest ski resort to Beirut is the recently renovated Zaarour Club in Baskinta, which features panoramic views from the slopes over Mount Sannine. Every winter, skiers flock to Kfardebian’s Mzaar Resort. It has probably the best facilities in the country and offers 80km of ski trails and 42 slopes to suit skiers, snowboarders and cross-country skiers at all levels. Faqra Club was founded back in 1974 and its slopes are on a private estate in Kfardebian. Surrounded by picturesque chalets and gardens you might be tempted to stay the night at L’Auberge de Faqra (09 300600). Laklouk’s first ski lift was constructed in 1958 and it remains the ideal setting for cross-country skiers with tree-marked mountain plateaus. At 2000m altitude, The Cedars Resort has one of the country’s longest ski seasons and it’s also one of the first. For cross-country skiers it’s hard to beat the scenic views that take in the Cedar Forest.





## INDOOR ACTIVITIES

### *The cosmos awaits*

Enter another universe, at CosmoCity, an entertainment center in Beirut Souks made by gamers for gamers. The first gaming and arcade project in Lebanon, CosmoCity is spread over two floors, and has a futuristic feel with the whole area lit with a neon glow. Offering the latest technologies, games and simulators, the center has something for every age group. They've brought in the most recent games on the market such as XD Dark Ride, the Battle-star Blasters, Dark Escape and Mission Possible Laser Maze; all offering hours of fun. For an alternative nightlife option, Cosmocity have launched Bar-Cade Nights, offering adults an escape from the usual routine, to experience a whole new dimension of game-orientated after hours entertainment. *CosmoCity, 01 998801, cosmocity.me,  CosmoCity, Ajame Square, Beirut Souks, Beirut Central District*

### *Learn dance steps*

If you're a klutz on the dance floor, make the most of the dark evenings and put some time in to learn the dance steps of love. Lebanon Dance Academy offers classes in salsa, Argentinian tango, Latin and ballroom dancing twice a week, to heat up the temperatures indoors. Once you've fine-tuned your mambo, cha cha or foxtrot, you'll want to flaunt your newly acquired dance moves at The Academy's dance parties – where Lebanon's dance community comes together 10 times a month (*Fridays at Nova Club, Sin el Fil; Sundays at The Lighthouse Bar & Lounge, Antelias; twice a month at Cosmopolitan Hotel, Sin el Fil*) to form probably the most rhythm-controlled dance floor in town. *Lebanon Dance Academy, 01 511894, 03 872013, lebanondance.com, Cosmopolitan Hotel, City Rama Street, Sin El Fil; two classes per week range from LL75,000-LL105,000*

Once you've fine-tuned your mambo, cha cha or foxtrot, you'll want to flaunt your newly acquired dance moves



## CREATURE COMFORTS

### *Beit El Qamar*

Perched on a hill above Deir El Qamar, in the heart of the Shouf region, Beit El Qamar is the latest guesthouse opening, completing Souk El Tayeb's trio of guesthouses. A homely mountain retreat for wintertime with seven bedrooms in a traditional building, surrounded by trees and vegetable gardens, Beit El Qamar creates the atmosphere of your grandma's home. Watch the local cooks prepare meals in the open kitchen and then enjoy the feast in their cozy indoor dining room, which looks out on a colorful terrace. Request "Grandma or Grandpa's room," and you'll enjoy a spacious room with a bathtub, a balcony and an impressive view over the Shouf Mountains. *Beit El Qamar, 05 511722, 03 661411, soukeltayeb.com, Deir El Qamar, Shouf*

### *Zenotel*

Need a little TLC? Check yourself into Zenotel, a wellness retreat hotel and spa located 24km from Beirut. Each of its 24 rooms is a mini-sanctuary of relaxation with a view to sea. If you can tear yourself away from the spa, with its sauna, steam room and Jacuzzi, Zenotel makes the perfect base to explore the region, with a range of ecotourism activities available nearby. After a day skiing at the nearby Zaarour, we recommend you book yourself in for a relaxing massage, with Clé Des Champs organic spa products and take a hot dip in the hydropool, that overlooks Beirut, followed by a hearty meal at their Earth Restaurant. *Zenotel, 04 984824, zenotel.me, metn, Bhersaf; prices starting from LL165,000 including breakfast*

### *The Grill and Lounge*

Winter is all about indulgence and The Four Seasons lounge offers an inviting atmosphere to drink and dine. Its drawing room-style interior, comes complete with a warming fireplace, wooden floorboards, low-level lighting, and comfortable chairs in which to recline and settle in for a spread from their Asian tapas menu. Get their mixologist to shake you up something special such as the classic Old Fashioned cocktail with Maker's Mark, brown sugar and bitters, choose from their range of 75 rare scotches or match a fine glass of red with their US prime beef burger with truffles béarnaise. *The Grill and Lounge, 01 761600, fourseasons.com/Beirut, Four Seasons Hotel Beirut, Minet EL Hosn; open daily, 7pm-2am*  
[Log on to Lebanontraveler.com](http://lebanontraveler.com) for more activities, destinations and tips

# 5

## things to do in Hadath el Jebbeh

Located in the North of Lebanon, the village of Hadath el Jebbeh stands at 1,500m altitude in an area of outstanding natural beauty, overlooking the dramatic Qadisha Valley, a UNESCO World Heritage site. From mountains and valleys to cultural and religious discoveries, Hadath el Jebbeh has it all. **Martine Btaich**, a professional in community and sustainable development, and vice president of the Lebanon Mountain Trail Association, explores this historic town



## ① Outdoor activities in and around the mountains

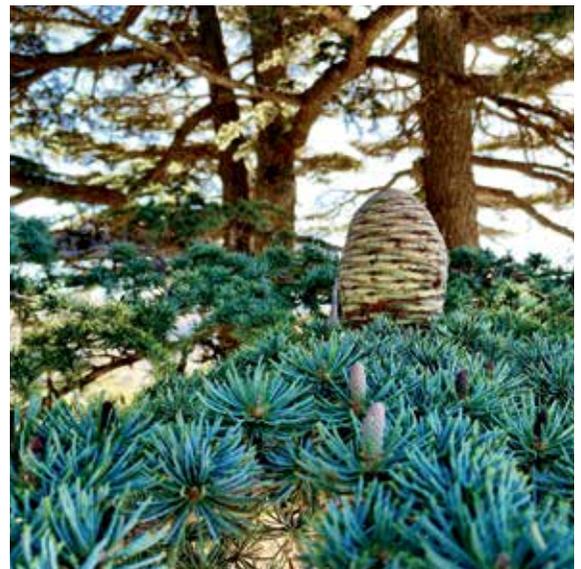
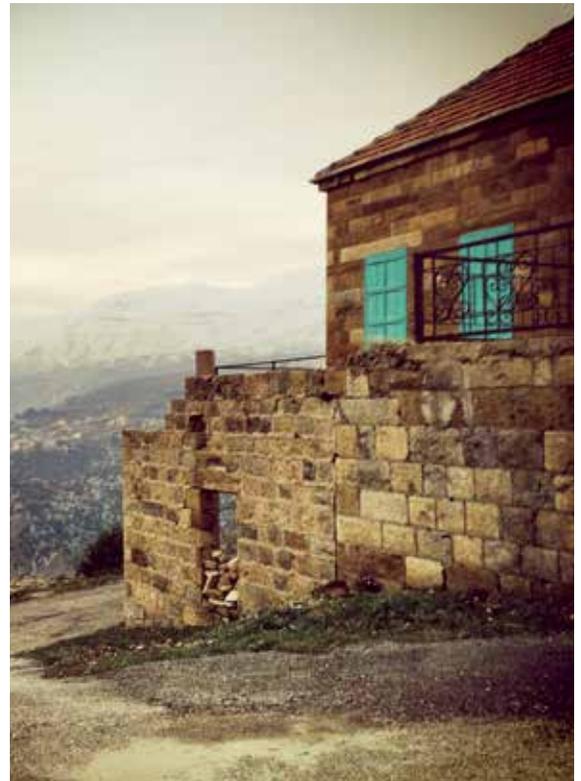
New trails have been created around Hadath el Jebbeh, offering an exceptional experience hiking or snowshoeing through the Cedar Forest. For high mountain enthusiasts, the trail towards Mar Semaan is a must. There, from the Makmel mountain and at the peak of Mar Semaan, you can visit the shrine of Mar Semaan and enjoy the panoramic view of the surrounding mountains. If you are lucky enough and if the weather is clear, you can see as far as Tripoli and the Palm Islands. And if you still want a further thrill, the trail continues to the Church of God, (*Kanisset el Rabb*), locally said to be “the highest church in the Near East,” which stands at 2,350m altitude.

## ③ Religious discoveries in the Qannoubine Valley

Listed as a UNESCO World Heritage site, the Qannoubine Valley is the most dramatic valley in Lebanon and is, according to UNESCO, “one of the most important early Christian monastic settlements in the world.” Here caves and shelters were turned into churches and monasteries for monks and hermits. A few of the monasteries are accessible by car, but the best way to discover them remains on foot. You can see the Assi el Hadath Grotto from afar; it was a refuge for local inhabitants during the Mamluk’s siege in 1283. The discoveries made in the grotto represent a major stepping-stone for medieval archaeology and Maronite history in Lebanon and helped enlist the valley on the UNESCO World Heritage list.

## ② Traditional architecture

The beautiful St. Daniel church, dating back to the 12th Century AD, stands at the center of Hadath el Jebbeh. The church was built on the ruins of an old monastery dedicated to the Prophet Elijah, which, according to popular tradition, was built on the ruins of a pagan temple. Afterwards, stroll around the old souk and admire traditional 18th Century stone houses. Don’t miss the ancient sarcophagus, said to belong to Queen Diya, the daughter of Naboukadnasar, King of Persia.





Photos: George Salameh

## ④ Mushroom harvesting

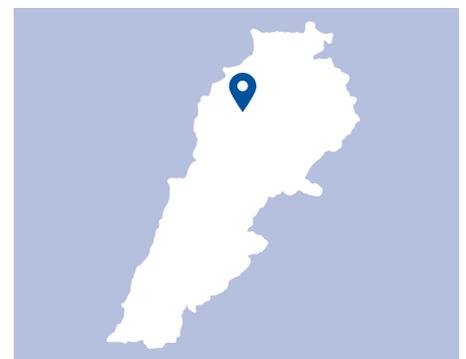
The cedar forest is home to more than 40 species of wild mushrooms, which range in color from white, black and grey to yellow and blue. The locals eat mushrooms locally named “boulbes” and the “aafess;” both are edible. In the fall season, especially in November, you can experience wild mushroom picking and later learn to cook and taste them at Auberge Hadath el Jebbeh (71 680222, [hadatheljebbeh.com](http://hadatheljebbeh.com).)

## Where to eat

Auberge Hadath el Jebbeh can prepare fresh homemade meals, by local cooks, upon request. *Richta* (soup with lentils and small pieces of dough and onions), *maacaron bi toum* (dough cooked with garlic), and seasonal dishes with mushrooms are some of the highlights. It's also a great base and center for exploring the area, with numerous activities on offer. Also make sure to eat at one of the small places around the town such as the family-run restaurant, Al Hawra (03 802091), which offers Lebanese mezze. For a fresh manouche, stop at Saj Lalo (03 398568) or Claude's (03 435085). Homemade sandwiches and yummy falafel are offered at Falafel and More (70 969916) and Chez Coco (03 147086).

## Where to sleep

Auberge Hadath el Jebbeh (same details as before) is an old house dating back to 1928, recently renovated to host guests visiting the area. They can arrange numerous activities and tours in the area.



## ⑤ The monumental cedars

Above the village is one of the most important high-density cedar forests in Lebanon; it includes around 300,000 *Cedrus Libani* trees, some of them over a thousand years old. The forest sheltered Prince Bachir II during the Ottoman persecution; now hikers can walk along the trails between the tall trees and learn about the rich fauna and flora of the area. Go with a local guide (71 680222) to explore the forest, and organize your cultural and adventure tours including mountain biking, climbing and snowshoeing.

# MEET

## MEDITERRANEAN EXPERIENCE OF ECO-TOURISM

[www.medecotourism.org](http://www.medecotourism.org) | [www.meetnetwork.org](http://www.meetnetwork.org)



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# MEET the Mediterranean



The Mediterranean's varied landscapes and ecosystems, along with its rich cultural heritage, make it an ideal region to support eco-tourism. The Shouf Biosphere Reserve's **Mirna Riman**, explains the Mediterranean Experience of Eco-Tourism (MEET) project and its role in helping to build a sustainable tourism industry in Lebanon

**WHAT IS MEET?**

The Mediterranean Experience of Ecotourism (MEET) project aims to expand the diversity of tourism and encourage better seasonal distribution across the Mediterranean region. In a network of eight countries of the Mediterranean (Italy, France, Spain, Jordan, Lebanon, Malta, Greece and Tunisia) the project hopes to help boost the countries’ socio-economic development. The Shouf Biosphere Reserve is the partner coordinating communication strategy, tools and dissemination.

The MEET project has created a cluster of ecotourism packages in 25 Mediterranean protected areas. The project beneficiaries in Lebanon, in addition to the Shouf Biosphere Reserve, are Jabal Moussa Biosphere Reserve, Horsh Ehden Nature Reserve, Tannourine Cedar Nature Reserve, and Tyre Coast Nature Reserve. The aim is to improve the quality of the ecotourism on offer in protected areas in order to build appealing packages, which will help to conserve natural and cultural resources and revitalize less developed communities.

Local and international ecotourism experts have been involved to develop these packages through training of the protected areas’ team, in order to increase their ability in welcoming and dealing with overseas tourists. “This project offers the reserves in Lebanon a great chance to exchange experiences with [its] Mediterranean partners,” says Kamal Abu Assi, project coordinator in the Shouf Biosphere Reserve. “They are benefiting from test visits carried out by international experts and representatives of ecotourism companies to improve the services in our protected areas.”

**THE ECOTOURISM PACKAGES**

“Two ecotourism packages were created through the project ‘Lebanon Cedars and Sea Phoenicia Package,’ that includes six days in the Shouf Cedar Nature Reserve and Tyre Coastal Nature Reserve,” Pascal Abdullah, the ecotourism expert in the project and the manager of Responsible Mobilities says. “In addition to the nature reserves, the package includes cultural heritage sites such as the monuments of

Tyre, the traditional village of Deir El Kamar and Beiteddine Palace. The second package, ‘Lebanon Myth, Forests and Adventures,’ includes Jabal Moussa Biosphere Reserve, Horsh Ehden Nature Reserve and Tannourine Cedar Nature Reserve.”

“**On a seven-day journey, visitors can roam through North Lebanon’s mythical landscapes...**”

The packages offer diverse experiences around the country, where visitors can discover the rich heritage of lands that were once inhabited by the Phoenicians and explore the cities where they left their mark. They include visits to the country’s most stunning protected natural habitats from the oldest cedar forests in history to the sandy beaches of the Tyre Coast Nature Reserve. Local tour operators carefully tailor the tours to offer visitors an authentic experience – from hiking along countryside trails to learning about traditional life, meeting local villagers and tasting food from different regions. With a sustainable tourism approach, the tours have a responsible attitude towards travel, encouraging an understanding of nature and respect towards the environment through protection activities and an understanding of local traditions.

**EXPERIENCES**

On a seven-day journey, visitors can roam through North Lebanon’s mythical landscapes, uncovering a mosaic of history, culture and village life that is worth protecting. Meet the locals of Jabal Moussa Biosphere Reserve, who decided to protect the valley of the Phoenician God Adonis; learn about Maronite history and how to write your name in the Syriac language with a monk in the Qadisha Valley; enjoy the majestic scenery of the northern Lebanon chain and immerse yourself with the scents of the last protected cedar forests and be enchanted by local stories in the protected forests of Tannourine and Ehden. Take the time to breathe freely and enjoy the journey.

**Book a package:** 05 350150/250, [info@shoufcedar.com](mailto:info@shoufcedar.com), [shoufcedar.com](http://shoufcedar.com), [medecotourism.com/meetnetwork.org](http://medecotourism.com/meetnetwork.org)

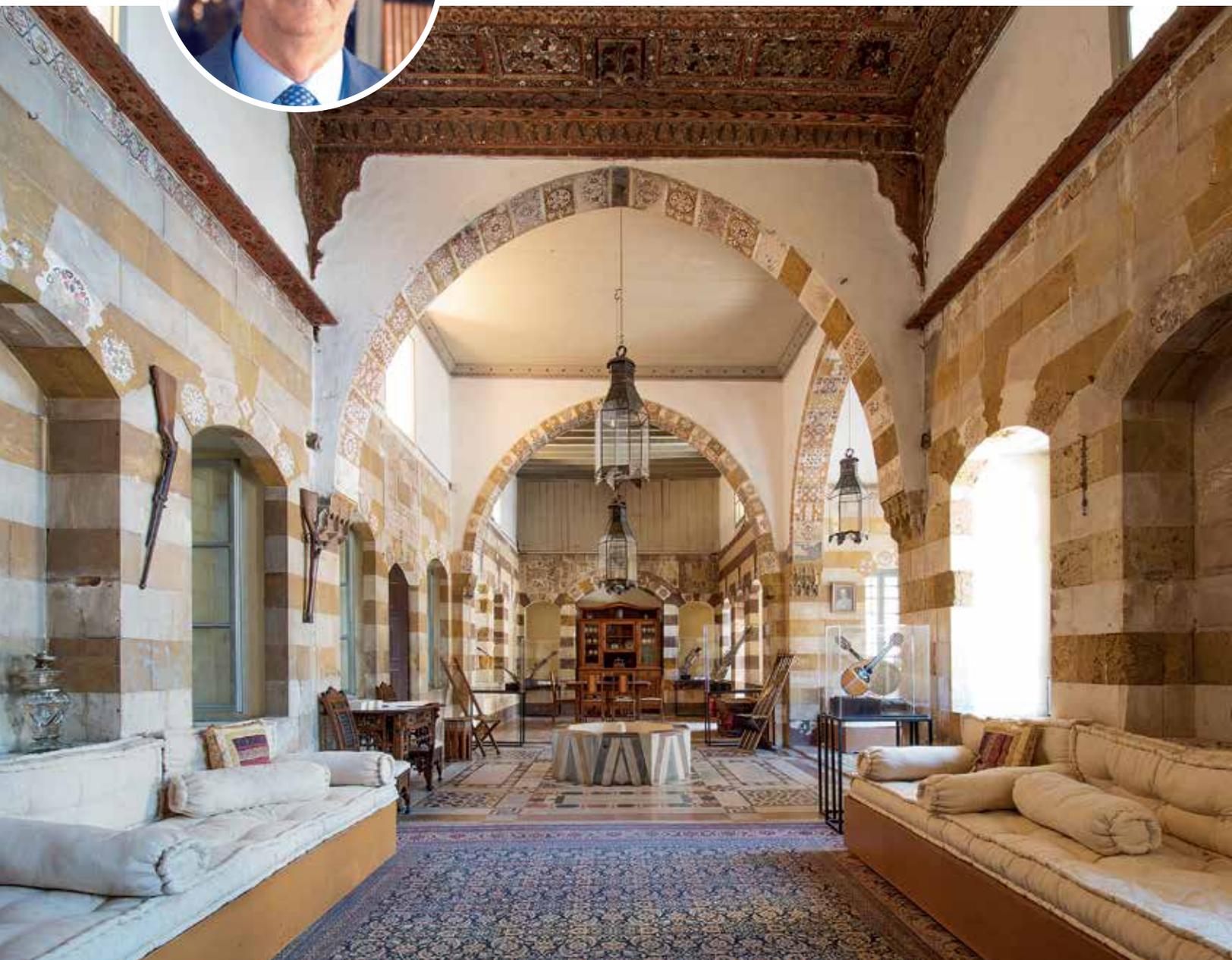
Photos: Shouf Biosphere Reserve



# An Ottoman palace



Sidon's historic Debbane Palace is one of the few remaining examples of Ottoman architecture in the city. LT meets **Raphael Debbane** who transformed it from a family home into a museum and opened it to the public



Debbane Palace is an 18th Century building in Sidon, built by Ali Hammoud in 1721. The atmospheric space features typical diwans (Oriental style living rooms), a liwan (a long narrow-fronted hall), several rooms and an open-air courtyard, with the characteristic features of the Ottoman period – brown and white stripes of stone and intricate mosaic tiles make up the interior. Despite its location on the bustling streets of Sidon, inside the house is a peaceful escape.

Youssef Debbane bought the house in 1800 and the family lived there for generations. “We have fantastic memories in the house,” says Raphael Debbane, member of the board and chairman of the agricultural committee of the Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture of Beirut and Mount Lebanon; and president of the Debbane Foundation. “I used to live there and got married there in 1967. It’s very big; I remember playing in the huge living room and terrace. Before 1975 we used to go to the house almost every weekend with our children.” When Debbane’s grandfather first moved into the building, he built another level to accommodate the whole family. “People specialized in architecture are surprised when they see how this floor was added without delineating the original Ottoman design; it’s very impressive,” he says.

In 1978 the Debbane family was forced to leave their home with the advent of the Lebanese Civil War. It became a home to Palestinian refugees who fled from the camps in the South, staying there until 1982 when Israel bombarded the area. When the Debbane family returned after the war, the house was destroyed and they started the restoration process. “We created the Debbane Foundation in 1999

with the aim to restore the house and transform it into a museum showing the architecture of Ottoman houses,” Debbane says. The restoration process began in 2000 and took around two years.

The Debbane Palace receives close to 2,000 visitors a month, with tourists from around the world visiting to see this monument to the past. “It’s really a prominent historical palace in Sidon, we don’t have many of them,” Debbane says. “We believe that it is our duty to protect it and open it to the public to show the valuable history of Sidon.”

Debbane is positive about the future of Sidon with the numerous projects underway to preserve the city’s heritage. “We are lucky to have active deputies working hard for the sake of the town,” he says. “I visited the Museum of Sidon one month ago. It’s very impressive – they have been doing archeological research there for years and have found civilizations dating back 5,000 years.” The museum, which is still under construction, is being built over the archeological site with a glass viewing floor.

The Debbane Foundation are continuing to develop their museum too with plans to transform the upper floor of the house into a museum sharing the story of the 16 sarcophagi that were found in Sidon and are now exhibited in the Istanbul archaeological museum. “They were found just 600m from our house. They call them the Sarcophagi of the Kings of Sidon. In the Necropolis of Sidon they found the Alexander Sarcophagus, it’s made from marble and is over 2,000 years old – it’s absolutely incredible,” Debbane says.

*07 720110, Al Mutran Street, Sidon*  
[museumsaida.org](http://museumsaida.org)

“**We believe that it is our duty to protect it and open it to the public to show the valuable history of Sidon.**”

### Raphael Debbane’s tips

#### Eat

“Saida Rest House (07 722469) is a good restaurant in a nice location, facing the sea castle of Sidon. It’s the best place to have fish. Sidon is known historically to have very good sweets and halawa made from sesame paste and pistachios are very nice here too.”

#### See

“There is an old khan – a huge 80m-wide square – owned by the French government, but restored by the Hariri Foundation. It’s an interesting place with a lot of charm. There are also hammams – some of the big ones need restoring, but there are a few that are still open such as the 18th Century, Al Ward Hammam. Also in Souk al Najjarine (market of the carpenters) craftsmen still work with wood in small workshops.”



# THE SWEET TOOTH of the Levant

The Food Heritage Foundation's **Zeinab Jeambey** visits Lebanon's main cities to highlight local pastries and their makers

Equal to our fanaticism for Lebanese gastronomy is our pride in Arabic sweets and desserts. The legacy of our desserts lies in the hands of master pastry chefs, known as *halwanji*, who spend years perfecting a dessert recipe and rise to fame with their sweet specialty.

## Halawet a'rozz bi ashta by Haddad Pastry

A testament to the heritage of Haddad Pastry Shop, the great grandfather's work permit dates back to 1933. They started their business by specializing in *jazariyyeh*, sesame, hazlenut, pistachio or cashew brittles; and rice dessert filled with cream, named *halawet a'rozz*

*bi ashta*, or better known as *halawet shmayseh*. The word *shmayseh* derives from *shams* (sun), referring to the very low fire over which the rice, sugar, water and rose water cook for seven hours, until they become a homogenous gelatinous mixture. The mixture is then formed into small disks, filled with cream and sprinkled with powdered sugar. Al Haddad experimented with the recipe and created a version mixed with powdered pistachio nuts. This dessert is mostly consumed during Ramadan and in summer, since it is light and contains no ghee.

Haddad Pastry Shop, 06 440174, 06 439093, Abu Samra, Dannawi Square, Tripoli



Haddad Pastry. Photo: Eltas Khlaf



*Halawet a'rozz. Photo: Elias Khlaf*

### Halawet a'rozz by Halimeh Harmouche

For the past 30 years, Halimeh Harmouche has been working in the family business making dairy products, and specializing in *halloumi* cheese and *jebneh chaghale*, the sweet cheese used in her famous *halawet a'rozz*. Made of rice, sweet cheese, sugar, water, orange blossom water and mastic, the process is labor intensive: all ingredients are pounded over a fire for two to three hours until the rice and cheese form a homogeneous white mixture with an “out of this world” taste. Harmouche’s *halawet a'rozz* is special as she makes the cheese out of fresh whole milk brought from nearby farms.

*Harmouche Pastry Shop, 06 435766, 71 654582, Tripoli*

### Tamriyyeh by Abu Adham

Mohammad Khafaja, also known as Abu Adham, is a master pastry chef in the dessert *tamriyyeh*, a skill passed down through his family. Mohammad’s grandfather mastered *tamriyyeh* in its birthplace, Nablos, Palestine. The dessert is originally made during Saints’ holidays and Assumption Day and was once sold in quarts (four cups) in front of churches. It consists of a thinly spread dough made from semolina, water and salt, cut into cubes and filled with a cooked paste of thick semolina, sugar, water, orange blossom water and mastic. It is then fried in sunflower oil and sprinkled with powdered sugar. Exempt from any dairy or animal products, it is vegan and can be consumed during Lent. In Palestine, people use the term *moutammar*, originating from the word *tamer* (meaning dates,) to refer to something roasted, grilled or fried to a golden color, thus the name *tamriyyeh*. Today, Abu Adham is the only pastry master chef in Lebanon specialized in *tamriyyeh* and has trained his nephew to continue the legacy.

*Patisserie Ward, 03 915306 (Jul - Oct), Bhamdoun  
To try the delicacy all year around contact  
Abu Adham, 03 675901*



*Abu Adham making tamriyyeh. Photo: Food Heritage Foundation*



Sanioura sweets. Photo: Firas Sanioura



Homemade qazha. Photo: Firas Sanioura

### The reshaping of ghraybeh by Sanioura Pastry Shop

The Sanioura family has built their reputation for pastry making since 1859. The chefs at Sanioura explain that their ancestors were experimenting with different ingredients when they came up with a “strange” dough, in Arabic, “gharibeh,” from which the name of the dessert, *ghraybeh*, was derived. Later on, they remolded the dough into lozenge shapes, which were easier to fill with dates and pistachio and to pack for export to Syria and Palestine. The new shaped pastry was called *sanioura*, after the family name of its master pastry chefs. Made solely from ghee, flour and powdered sugar, *sanioura* pastries preserve well.

*Sanioura Pastry Shop, 07 724157  
Riad el Soloh Street, Sidon*

### Qazha by Patisserie Gondoline

*Qazha* is hardly known outside of Sidon, yet it is by far the healthiest of Arabic desserts. Known as “the food of the poor” and usually homemade, *qazha* (also known as *habbet al baraka* in Arabic, and meaning nigella seeds in English,) is originally from Jerusalem, Palestine. It is made of corn flour, sesame, sugar, olive oil and nigella seeds ground to a paste and is black in color. *Qazha* is usually prescribed for breastfeeding women to increase their milk flow and for its health benefits for newborn babies, since it is rich in good fatty acids. Ahmad Al Jouaidi, owner of Patisserie Gondoline, renowned for its *qazha*, recalls how his grandmother often used to make it at home and conserve it in large glass jars.

*Patisserie Gondoline, 07 725906, Wastani Street, Sidon;  
01 858556, Bir Hassan - near Iranian Embassy, Beirut*

The Sanioura family has built their reputation for pastry making since 1859

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*Food Heritage Foundation, 71 731437*

 *Food Heritage, food-heritage.org*



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# Going extra virgin

Olive oil has a long history in Lebanon; but with an advance in technology over the years that heritage has been refined. LT looks at the production of extra virgin olive oil; its numerous health benefits and how to taste a good oil from bad

Lebanon has one of the oldest histories in the world of olive oil production and the tradition remains deeply ingrained in the country's culture. Many families still grow their own olives and take them to the local mill for pressing; others are loyal to the olive oil of a small-scale farmer or mill-owner from whom they've been buying for years. Technology though has significantly improved the process of creating olive oil and awareness is growing about the quality and health benefits of extra virgin olive oil.

## THE HEALTH BENEFITS

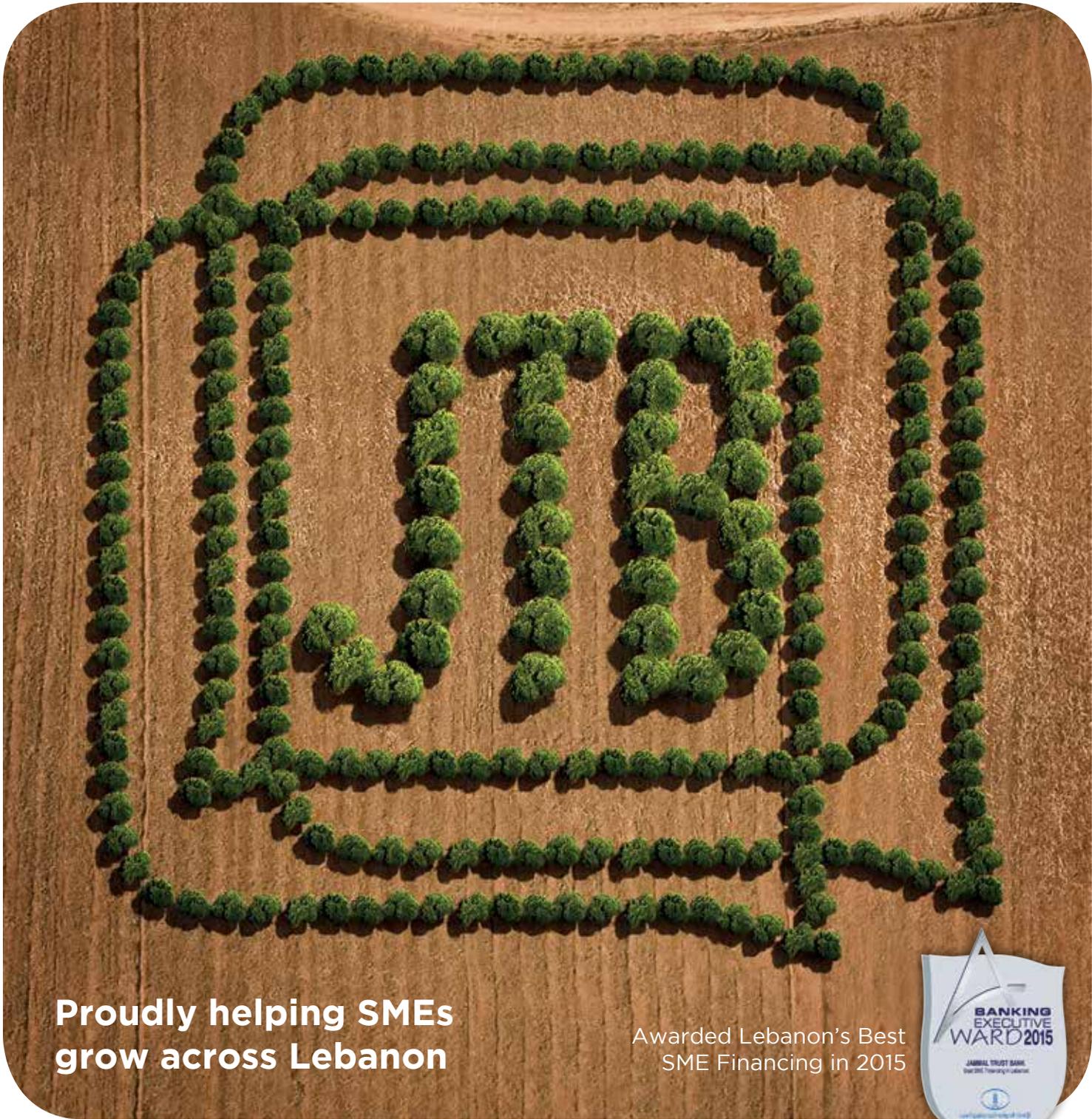
To produce a quality extra virgin olive oil every detail of the production process should be considered – from ensuring the lands and trees from which the olives come are organic, to taking care of how they are transported and processing them in a fully equipped mill with the latest technology. Many olive oils on the supermarket shelf are refined, removing the imperfections to make it smoother and more sellable, though in the process removing the taste, bitterness and health benefits. The International Olive Council (IOC) considers extra virgin olive oil the highest quality olive oil and to achieve classification it must follow a certain production process and meet standards. Extra virgin is unfiltered, meaning it is purer and a higher quality oil with antioxidants called polyphenols and anti-inflammatories that are good for the health.

The Ministry of Agriculture will soon launch a lab in Lebanon, dedicated to tasting extra virgin olive oil. The panel will be made up of 20 tasters and is due to launch in the New Year. It aims to accredit extra virgin olive oils in Lebanon; making it easier for the consumer to establish the quality they are buying.



Olive groves in Baino, Akkar. Photos: House of Zejd





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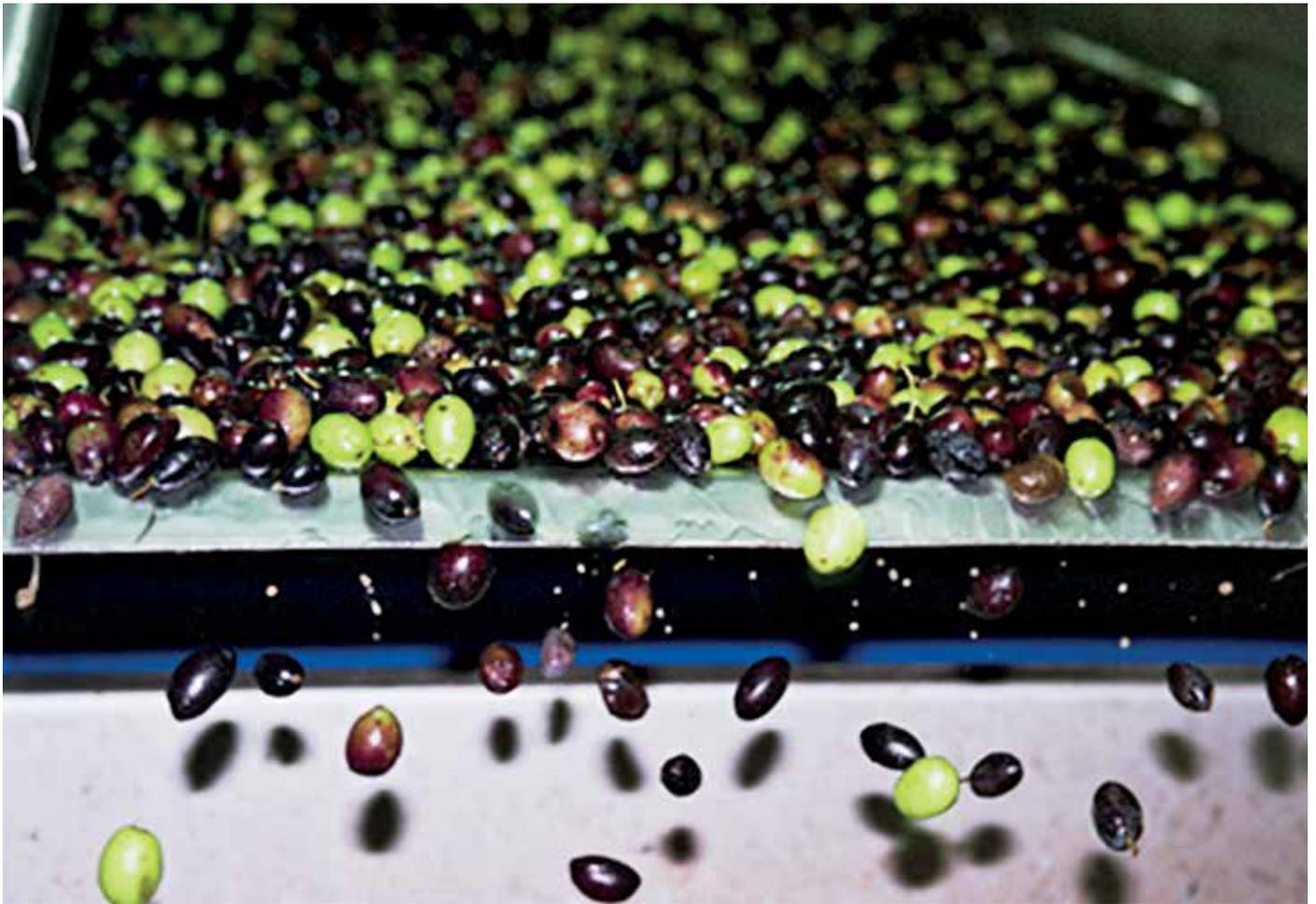
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### THE PRODUCTION PROCESS

There are several key elements in the production process that ensure a good quality extra virgin olive oil. The fruit harvested should be unharmed and gathered in crates rather than bags. They should be taken directly to the mill for processing, without a period of storage. Then after the leaves are taken out they should be pressed in stainless steel machinery, without much water, at a stable temperature. Finally the olive oil should be stored in stainless steel tanks.

### FIGHTING HABIT

People's loyalty to producers who create olive oil through a traditional and perhaps unhygienic process can be hard to break. If someone has been buying from the same producer for 20 years, they are unlikely to change, since there is a trust there, even if the oil's quality has not improved. Though after years of projects and funding in the industry, educating producers on the technical issues of olive oil production, things are slowly changing.

### TASTE BEFORE YOU BUY

Taste and smell are the keys to choosing a good olive oil; with the more bitter tasting and pungent the smell, the better the oil. Though it might take some

time to educate your palette there are key warning signs to look out for: fermented, rotten or stagnant water smells are all obvious pointers to a bad oil. If you're not yet confident about your palette – a simple knowledge about the production process will help you ask questions to assess whether the olive oil from your supplier is up to standard.

For the first time this year, the Beirut Cooking Festival, hosted The World of Olive Oil event, made possible with the financial support of the International Olive Council. The event featured daily sessions and workshops with celebrity chefs, expert tasters, dieticians and doctors that revealed the quality and benefits of extra virgin olive oil. Some of the questions addressed included: How to identify extra virgin olive oil, the positive and negative attributes, how to buy olive oil and how to pair extra virgin olive oil with different kinds of food, thus raising awareness of not only the product and its uses but the different varieties available across the different regions in Lebanon and their distinct tastes. If more outreach initiatives such as this are created to educate the public on the benefits and quality of extra virgin olive oil, the industry will slowly change for the better.

*internationaloliveoil.org*



# Homey Atmosphere

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# The winter workout

**LT** has checked out some of the city's most popular gyms, exercise classes and spas and there's certainly something for every taste – from 30-minute high intensity workouts in a nightclub setting to indoor cycling to a rock soundtrack. Here are our eight picks around Beirut so you can get a head start on the New Year's resolution fitness rush

## The late-nighter

**Name:** Phoenicia Spa and Wellness

**Location:** Minet el Hosn

**Opening hours:** Daily 7am-10pm

**Monthly membership:** Starting LL375,000



Located in the iconic Phoenicia Hotel, this gym has the benefits of being open 24 hours a day, in case you feel like a late night workout session. It offers state-of-the-art machines with a stunning view out to sea, plus a large variety of exercise classes including yoga, Pilates, zumba and aqua aerobics available at different intensity levels. Though monthly membership is steep, access to their indoor and outdoor pools, along with sauna, steam and Jacuzzi make it worth every penny; plus gym members get spa and F&B discounts and free valet parking.

01 357030, Phoenicia Hotel, Mezzanine Level, Minet el Hosn, [phoeniciabeirut.com/spa-and-wellness](http://phoeniciabeirut.com/spa-and-wellness)

## Pedal-passionate

**Name:** Exhale

**Location:** Saifi Village and Bliss Street

**Opening hours:** Mon-Fri 8am-1.30pm; Sat 9am-1pm; Sun 5-7.30pm

**Monthly membership:** Starting LL262,500



Exhale is a workout studio with two core fitness angles. "Exhale [Ride]" is the only studio dedicated to indoor cycling in Lebanon (available in Saifi.) In their signature spinning classes – a high intensity, low impact workout on an exercise bike – you'll pedal (often uphill) to a rock soundtrack. With a variety of classes, they offer the perfect combination of motivation and fun. "Exhale [Train]" focuses on functional training through small group classes such as boxercise and hatha yoga; along with personal training and is available at both Saifi and Bliss locations.

01 985798, Mukhalassiyeh Street, Saifi Village; 01 364638, Koreitem Building, Bliss Street, [Facebook ExhaleBeirut](https://www.facebook.com/ExhaleBeirut) [Instagram ExhaleBeirut](https://www.instagram.com/ExhaleBeirut)

## The trendsetter

**Name:** TrainStation

**Location:** Achrafieh

**Opening hours:** Mon-Fri 7am-9pm; Sat 8am-1pm

**Monthly membership:** Starting LL120,000



Opened by two sisters who are passionate about fitness, TrainStation is a wellness and fitness studio offering top rate exercise and one-to-one training sessions. TrainStation's main feature is their wide array of classes, which suit a variety of tastes and levels. Their classes include Pilates, 360 circuit training, abs attack, sparta endurance and more. TrainStation's latest addition is The Unit, a self-contained studio dedicated to Energy+, a new fitness concept that combines high intensity 30-minute workout sessions with a nightclub style atmosphere, complete with mood lighting and music.

01 322103, 03 322105, Sayegh Bldg Selim Bustros Street, Achrafieh [trainstation-studio.com](http://trainstation-studio.com), [Facebook TrainStationStudio](https://www.facebook.com/TrainStationStudio)

## Pure luxury

**Name:** PureGray

**Location:** Downtown

**Opening hours:** Daily 6.30am-10pm

**Monthly membership:** Starting LL525,000



The PureGray Health Club and Spa offers a sanctuary of calm in the heart of Downtown Beirut. Its pristine gym is equipped with Technogym machines and you can enjoy tailor-made programs made by its expert personal trainers to help you achieve your fitness goals. Its spa is not to be missed with custom-made therapies that combine European and Eastern philosophies – a variety of treatments, facials, massages and alternative medicine is available. Offering different membership packages, the best value is the spa and gym yearly membership which works out at LL337,500 a month, and along with unlimited gym, sauna and pool use, comes with a whole range of benefits including a complimentary night in an executive suite, 24 personal training sessions, two massages, a tailor-made personal fitness program, along with other discounts.

*01 962885, Martyr's Square, Beirut Central District (Downtown)*

*legray.com,  Le Gray Beirut*

## The ultimate extravagance

**Name:** The Royal SPA

**Location:** Dbayeh

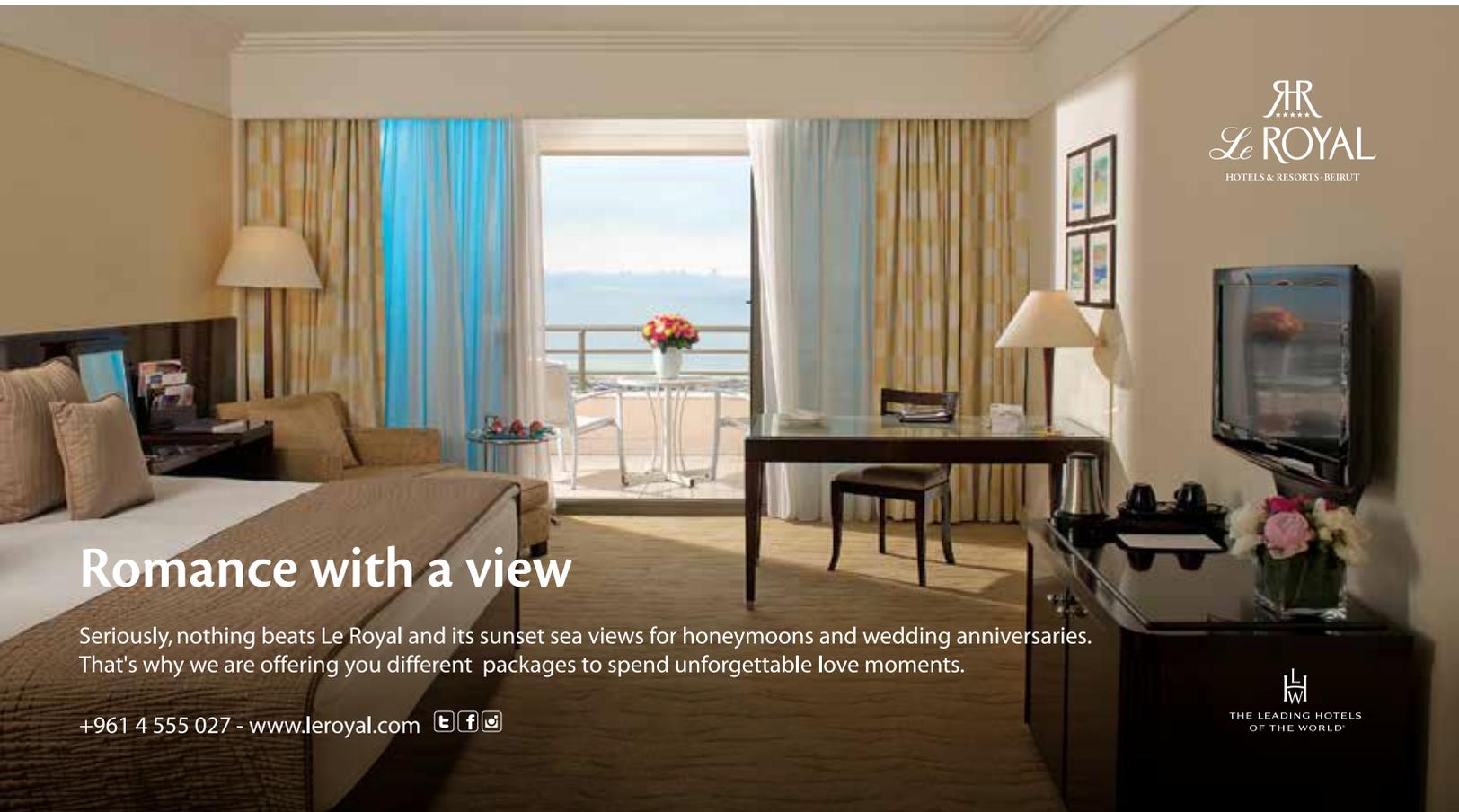
**Opening hours:** Mon-Sat 6.30am-10.30pm,  
Sun 6.30am-9pm

**Monthly membership:** Prices on request



This award-winning spa at Le Royal Hotel is a four-floor complex with a glass façade that overlooks the Mediterranean Sea. Complete with a fully equipped gym with personalized training, a Turkish *hammam*, sauna, steam and Jacuzzi and an indoor pool with a sea view, you won't want to leave. The spa, which offers a wide range of face and body treatments and massages is simply out-of-this-world – you'll leave fully rejuvenated.

*04 555444, leroyal.com/Beirut, Dbayeh Leisure Hills Complex, Dbayeh, Beirut*



  
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## Elite exercise

**Name:** G spa

**Location:** Achrafieh

**Opening hours:** Mon-Fri 7am-11pm; Sat 7am-9pm; Sun 10am-8pm

**Monthly membership:** Starting LL150,000



G spa offers a rounded health, beauty and fitness experience, including a top-level gym, reshaping department, luxurious spa and hairdresser. Its gym is filled with high-tech equipment such as the I Moove – which allows a dynamic and noninvasive approach to your body through various applications;

the Queenax – multidimensional functional training through interacting with your surroundings and the Kinesis Wall, which offers a 3D free-moving workout that has revolutionized muscle training. A team of experienced trainers and physiotherapists create personalized functional training

based on detailed assessments and health and nutrition guidelines to mold your body the way you want. There is also a full program of studio courses and aqua fitness classes. The reshaping department offers the latest trends in liporeduction such as cryotherapy and manual and mechanical slimming techniques. After a full work out, G spa – the only spa in the Middle East awarded the French quality label, spa-A – offers the ultimate recovery with their wide range of treatments and exclusive products; French brand Cinq Mondes and Swiss brand Phyobiodermie. Later unwind with a fresh cold-pressed Qi juice from their poolside juice bar.

*01 210220, Elias Sarkis Avenue, Achrafieh*  
[gspa.me](http://gspa.me), [f G spa Beirut](#)

## Best value

**Name:** ABBA Fitness Club

**Location:** Bourj Hammoud

**Opening hours:** Mon-Fri 7am-10pm; Sat 8am-8pm

**Monthly membership:** Starting LL50,000



This Bourj Hammoud gym, fitness club and martial arts academy is a hidden gem of the city – and home to some of the neighborhood's serious body builders. Tucked away on the 11th floor of Master Mall, ABBA has a stunning view over Achrafieh and the Port District so you can watch over the city while on the treadmill. As one of the most reasonably priced monthly memberships in town, ABBA offers a bare bones work out spot, with no pretensions. The helpful trainer, Mano, guides gym goers through a work out program at no extra cost. A variety of daily classes are also available including zumba, aerobics and tae bo.

*01 241024, 11th Floor, Master Mall, Armenia Street, Bourj Hammoud,*  
[f ABBA Fitness Club](#)

## The full experience

**Name:** Genesis

**Location:** Verdun

**Opening hours:** Mon-Fri 6.30am-11pm; Sat 8am-10pm; Sun 10am-9pm

**Monthly membership:** Prices available upon request



Spread over a vast 3000m2 in Verdun, Genesis offers the A-Z of fitness with a variety of the latest machines covering cardio, circuit, weight lifting, aerobic training and spinning. Their classes offer something for every taste from body pump and Pilates to Latino cardio, abs, Oriental dance, yoga and Brazilian butt. If you fancy a game of squash there are two courts, plus a six-lane swimming pool, Jacuzzi, sauna and a spa to unwind afterwards. And there are expert trainers on hand in every area.

*01 864646, 01 866161; Spa 01 812210, 01 812213, Heliopolis,*  
*Building, Lebanon, Verdun, [genesisclub.net](http://genesisclub.net), [genesis-spa.com](http://genesis-spa.com)*  
[f Genesis Health CLUB](#)

# Stories of pride



# Character of the Orient

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Minet El Hosn-based boutique, **Orient 499** has become an identity in itself, showcasing the work of Lebanese artisans and designers. Its co-founder Aida Kawas speaks to LT on her love of all things Lebanese

Facing the iconic shell of the Holiday Inn hotel in Minet el Hosn, Orient 499 was established in 2006 by Aida Kawas and Frank Luca, both lovers of arts and crafts from the Middle East. The boutique has garnered a deserved reputation for offering unique artisan and designer pieces, showcasing items that perfectly capture a fusion between tradition and modernity and reflect the character of the Orient. Featuring the work of around 200 artisans who work in wood, copper, mother of pearl, glass and furnishings, Kawas is proud of the fact that numerous families are able to live from Orient 499. The boutique has helped breath life into the artisan work of the past, while remaining relevant for the future.

Kawas settles down at a mother-of-pearl inlaid table and pours Arabic coffee from an Orient 499 copper coffee pot and delicate tray, and shares her story.

## HAS LOCAL HANDICRAFT ALWAYS BEEN A PASSION?

It's been my interest since I was a young girl – at 18 I bought a carpet with the first money I received, which you could say was unusual at that age. I have memories of going to an artisan shop with my mother, in an old house by the sea; though it closed a long time ago. These are my first memories of how and why I fell in love with handicraft. I worked in a shop in Paris, with some friends, called Laymoun from 1985 to 1994, selling handicraft from Lebanon, but I moved back to Lebanon the same year.



*Iron calligraphy with gold leaf 1m, LL1,140,000 (\$760)*

## ORIENT 499 GOES BEYOND THE TYPICAL LEBANESE ARTISANAT – HOW DID YOU REACH THE FUSION OF TRADITION AND MODERNITY?

I am very traditional in a certain way, but I'm also very young and modern in my head. Orient 499 is a reflection of the way I live – this mixture between the two. My partner Frank Luca, who is Belgian, also has this feeling for the Orient, but is very modern. It is this mixture between Frank and me that made what you see today.



*Tea glasses with copper saucers and copper bird cover, LL49,500 (\$33)*

**IS THE MODERNIZATION OF LOCAL CRAFTS A WAY TO PRESERVE THEIR HERITAGE?**

The times have changed; we don't live in tents anymore and the Internet and technology has transformed the world, so it would be stupid to re-do the same things we have always done. When kids see their parents living well from handicrafts they come back to it. They see it is a better living – you are independent and are not working in an office all day. We helped many very small artisans to become big, because we believed in them.

**HOW HAS ORIENT 499 EVOLVED SINCE YOU OPENED?**

We certainly grew in size; we used to occupy just half the space; when the owners proposed to us to rent another part of the building we took it immediately. I love the area; I can't imagine moving from here. We are in the midst of the hotel district, the sea is also close by. It's a mixed neighborhood that I call the golden triangle. I love looking out on the old Holiday Inn; when they say they will destroy it my heart aches. It's a piece of history, so we work very well together.

**WHAT DESIGNERS DO YOU WORK WITH?**

Generally I work with artisans because their way of working is closer to my own, but there are a few designers who I always work with. We have featured the work of Karen Chekerdjian since we first opened; there is Hubert Fattal, an interior designer who also makes objects; the jewelry of Nada Zeini and the work of Abdallah Hatoum, who also does the window display and decoration. I often collaborate with Hatoum; he is a very close friend. I love fabrics myself and since I can't find them in Lebanon I have brought them from Paris, India, Egypt, Turkey and Syria. I have designed the clothes of Orient 499 since the beginning.

**IS THERE A GROWING TREND TOWARDS RETURNING TO THE ROOTS OF LEBANON'S CULTURAL PAST?**

Roots don't have a lot of meaning in [the modern] world, where everything is open and roots have become mixed together. What's much more important nowadays is to have the feeling that things are done with spirit. You need to be able to see that pieces have been handmade and are not just mass produced in a factory in China. We should be proud of our cultural heritage and this is why a lot of people come to Orient 499. We are proud to show people that we are maintaining our cultural heritage; the heritage of Lebanon and the region.

***Orient 499***

*499 Omar Daouk Str., Hammoud bldg, Minet El Hosn, Beirut, 01 369499, 03 411624, orient499.com*



*Handmade copper sugar bowl with spoon available in silver, LL67,500 (\$45) and yellow copper, LL57,000 (\$38)*



*Antique iron bed, LL6,450,000 (\$4300) with Copper Stools from Karen Chekerdjian, LL1,950,000 (\$1300)*

*Embroidered hand-woven najaf abaya, LL1,425,000 (\$950)*



**We are proud to show people that we are keeping our cultural heritage**

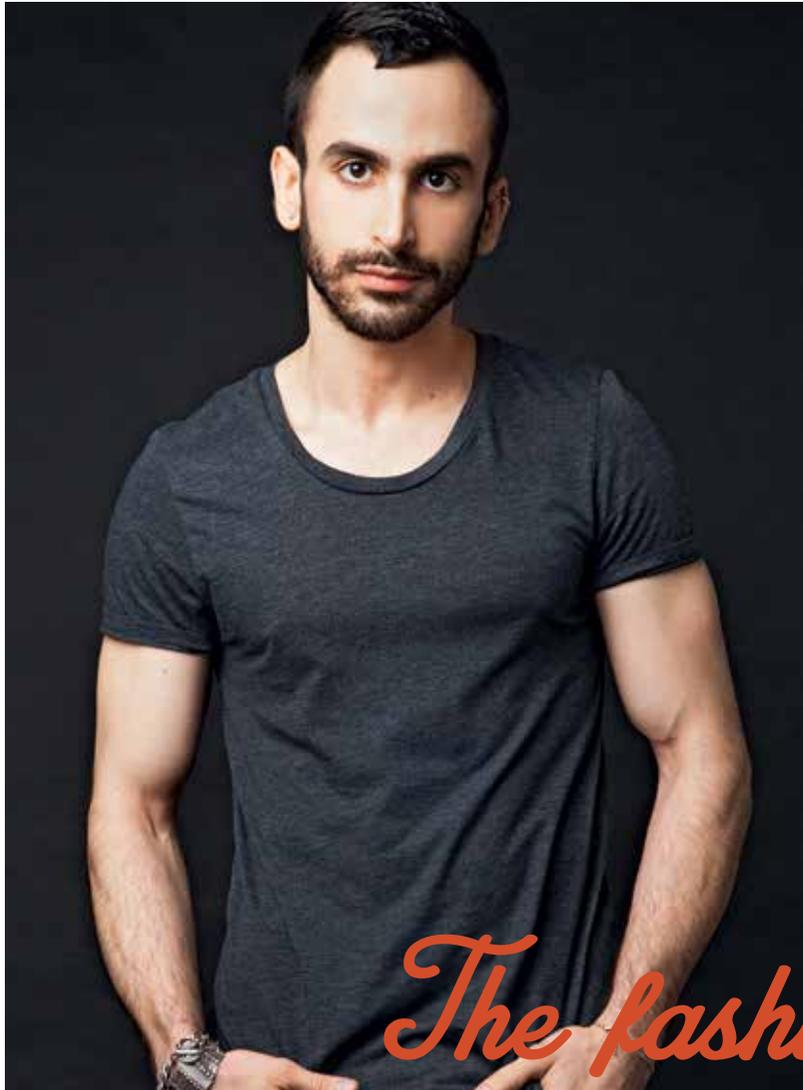
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## *The fashion creative*

Lebanese-Armenian fashion designer **Krikor Jabotian** started his atelier at the age of 23. Six years on and he's built a solid reputation for his luxurious haute couture designs that have just gone global. He sat down with LT to talk about inspiration, embroidery and that Regina King Emmy Award dress

Lebanese fashion designer Krikor Jabotian hit the international headlines in September when American actress Regina King was awarded an Emmy for Outstanding Supporting Actress in a Limited Series or Movie for her role in ABC's American Crime. When she accepted the award at the Los Angeles ceremony, it was one of his dresses she was wearing – an elegant white ankle-length gown, embellished with pearls... at the after party she sported another of his designs. "We are thrilled to have our first Hollywood appearance by an award winner. The first day I didn't really understand what was happening. The second day I understood how big this was," Jabotian says, sitting in his Tabaris atelier. "It's created a lot of exposure and buzz for us – a lot of people were requesting the dress afterwards."

*"The Last Spring" - Spring/Summer 2015 collection.  
 Photos: Krikor Jabotian*

Though this was the first Krikor Jabotian design to appear on the Red Carpet in Hollywood, the in-demand designer is already well established in Lebanon. After graduating from the Beirut ESMOD school of fashion, he went on to work in renowned Lebanese designer Elie Saab's creative department. "It was a super-enriching experience, especially working one-on-one with Elie Saab," Jabotian says. "He taught me to love embroidery; I used to have a repulsion towards it, then I thought if it was done with taste, you could turn embroidery into jewels." It's since become one of the defining characteristics of his style.

After less than a year of working with Saab, Jabotian launched his first collection at Starch Foundation, a non-profit organization that helps launch the work of emerging designers. His evening collection of long gowns came in midway between couture and ready-to-wear and was an instant hit with the public. "When I first started in Starch I never imagined that soon I would have my own atelier and launch myself as an independent designer. But, then I felt that people were relating to my work and they started placing orders for custom-made gowns. It was quite a huge responsibility at a very young age," Jabotian says.

At 23, Jabotian launched his own Achrafieh atelier and after only a year the demand for his work was so high that he moved to a bigger space in Tabaris. Six years on and the business has become a mini-empire. He has back-to-back appointments with clients in his spacious atelier; spread over three floors of an old building where he works on custom-made haute couture gowns, often for weddings. He has transformed what was a small atelier into a big family business, employing his mother, father, sister and close friends. It's become his second home. "I spend much more time here with my team than in my apartment. I believe that working in a healthy environment with people you trust is very important for being productive," Jabotian says.



**INSPIRATION**

Jabotian cites Dior as an early influence, but closer to home his grandmother was a significant figure. He used to watch black and white Egyptian movies with her, during which she would tell him about the different cuts, necklines and flared skirts she used to wear in the '50s. "She used to sew her own dresses when she was younger – I learned a lot from her."

Being of Armenian origin, the country's culture has always had a strong presence for him: "We went to Armenian schools and learned the history. It's a beautiful way to preserve our heritage and culture. I think it's quite interesting to have these different worlds combining indirectly in my work."

Though Jabotian stays abreast of the latest trends, working mainly in haute couture, he sets his own rules. "When you do couture it's like you are selling dreams and each

“

**When I first started in Starch I never imagined that soon. I would launch myself as an independent designer**

designer's own fetish, their fantasies, their world. I attract a specific kind of clientele because they can relate to my world."

**IT'S ALL ABOUT TRUST**

The first process of a commission starts with a meeting in Jabotian's atelier, to establish the client's personality and tastes. "I might get inspired by her personality, her job, or the way she dresses," Jabotian says. During the second appointment Jabotian shows the client a proposal – perhaps a sketch, fabric suggestions, embroidery and samples. "If it clicks, then we'll be able to work together. The client needs to trust me, because when the client comes here I don't have ready-made dresses for her to try on. It's a matter of trust and energy."

**READY-TO-WEAR LINE**

Jabotian was approached by Vogue Italy to take part in the Vogue Fashion Dubai Experience, which took place in October. Eight designers from around the world were selected to create a collection and share



it on a runway in front of fashion gurus and industry experts. The ready-to-wear line for Spring/Summer 2016 was his first runway fashion show. "It was a toned-down version of what I usually do. I kept the same spirit and ambiance but made something more practical... though it is still very dramatic," he laughs.

**Krikor Jabotian Atelier**

01 204793, 71 883737

[krikorjabotian.com](http://krikorjabotian.com)

**f** Krikor Jabotian, **ig** KrikorJabotian  
Dakdouk Building, 4th Floor, Tabaris, Selim  
Bustros Street, Beirut

# الصحة بتليق لسفرتنا



# SHOWCASING HERITAGE

A remarkable museum only 15 minutes from Beirut in Beit Mery shows Lebanon's history through the eras

Few people are aware of the existence of the Lebanese Heritage Museum, but its vast collection that covers the history of Lebanon makes it an essential visit. Founded in 2003 in Jounieh it later reopened in 2013 at the General Secretariat of Catholic Schools in Lebanon in Ain Najm, Beit Mery. Its 14 sections cover every era of Lebanese history: the Phoenician times, Romans, the Byzantine and Islamic eras to Lebanon under Ottoman rule. Halls are also dedicated to important figures in Lebanese history, such as Youssef Bey Karam – the Lebanese maronite who fought in the 19th Century civil war and started a rebellion against the Ottomans in Mount Lebanon; the scholar, historian and judge Semaan Khazen Al Ehdeny; statesman and historian Jawad Boulos' Patriarch Arida and a collection of the works of renowned Lebanese artist Saliba Douaihy. The collection is extensive and includes Roman sarcophagi, ancient drinking vessels, Byzantine columns, decorative Islamic tiles and Ottoman weapons. A walk around the museum, leads you on a timeline through Lebanese history, giving insight into the civilizations that have left their impact on the country.

The collection started in early 1900 by historian and writer Samer el Khazen; growing in size when his son, Joseph Semaan Khazen, began collecting archeology and antiques. His son Simon

el Khazen set up the Samer el Khazen Association in 2000 and opened the museum a few years later with the aim to preserve Lebanese heritage and make it accessible to the public – continuing the work of his father and grandfather before. "I was born in this ambiance so it was attractive to me. I continued the work of my grandfather and father by establishing a museum," Simon says. "The museum highlights all the cultures that passed through history on Lebanese land."

Though the museum's collection shows a wider scope of the country's heritage, it also reflects a more personal history of the El Khazen's, a prominent aristocratic family in Lebanon. Artist Saliba Douaihy was a family friend and within the museum's collection of his works is a charcoal portrait of the young Simon and his brother Fouad.

Alongside the museum, El Khazen started the foundation with the aim to reprint books on Lebanese history, particularly the works authored by his grandfather who published three books on Youssef Bey Karam; another nine were never released. "We are re-printing these 12 books in a very modern way," Simon says. "We also just finished a book on the artist Saliba Douaihy – an active artist in Lebanon who exhibited all over the world."

**Lebanese Heritage Museum**  
03 850800, [lebaneseheritagemuseum.org](http://lebaneseheritagemuseum.org)





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The museum highlights all the cultures that passed through history on Lebanese land





## *Of the lands*

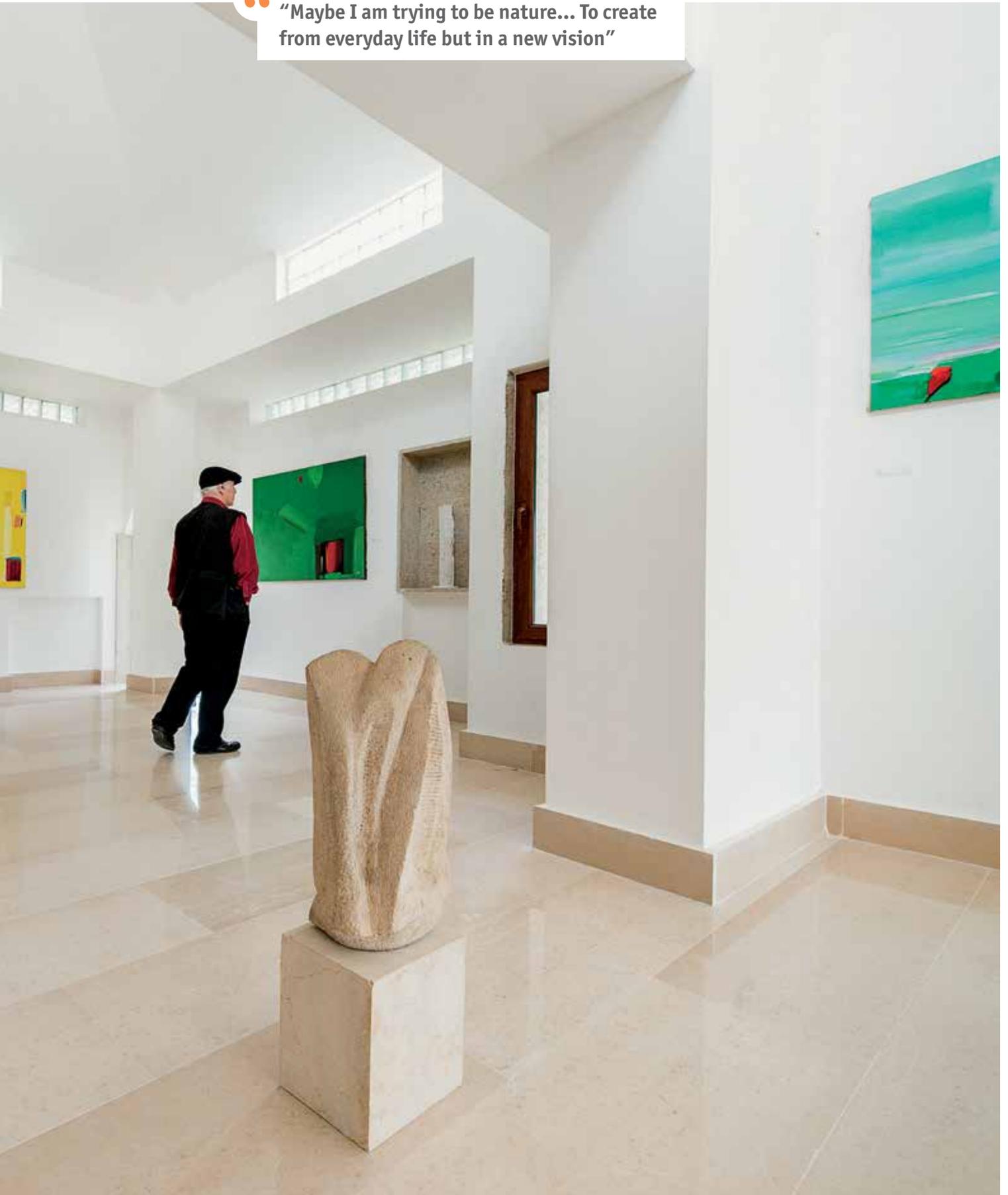
Lebanese artist **Jamil Molaeb**'s artwork is ingrained in the local traditions and nature of his hometown of Baissour. He speaks to **LT** about returning to his roots and creating a cultural movement from his museum

Lebanese artist Jamil Molaeb sits in a Hamra café drinking coffee. The painter and sculptor's hometown of Baissour has a large presence in his life, but coffee and conversation in the cafés of Beirut is also part of his daily routine. "This used to be the legendary Horseshoe Café," Molaeb says, wearing his characteristic flat cap. "I've been coming here for years. It's where we sit, share ideas and discuss in the artistic community." Molaeb has been an active part of Lebanon's arts scene for decades. He won the 3rd prize for sculpture in 1967 at the 7th Salon of the Sursock Museum and received a distinction in painting at the 18th Salon almost three decades later in 1995. He's also spent much of his career as an art educator teaching the next generation of artists in Lebanon at the Lebanese American University.

Molaeb's work is not limited to one style; his paintings range from brightly colored minimalist compositions to folkloric scenes that show the traditions of village life. "I don't like to repeat my tradition, but at the same time I can't forget my tradition, because my body is tradition, my blood is tradition," Molaeb says.



“Maybe I am trying to be nature... To create from everyday life but in a new vision”





Photos: Thierry Van Biesen

Despite the local customs that Molaeb's paintings often represent, he is every bit the modernist. He is a master of color; his wide palettes, touched by the sun, are partly taken from his previous travels. After training under renowned Lebanese artists such as Chafic Abboud and Paul Guiragossian at the Fine Arts Institute of the Lebanese University, he spent a year in Algeria before enrolling in the Master of Fine Arts program in 1984 at New York's Pratt Institute, and he later obtained a doctorate in artistic education from Ohio State University. His travels took him through the Middle East, Europe and Asia and he has exhibited all over the world, and in Galerie Janine Rubeiz in Beirut. "I lived all my life in Baissour, but, I did a lot of traveling," Molaeb says. "Like any other artist, I needed to develop myself. In Algeria I became myself. I saw beautiful colors, beautiful women, landscapes and houses – every time I travelled somewhere I collected many experiences. When I came back to Baissour this transferred into my art."

At Molaeb's home in Baissour, the nature that has a constant presence in his artwork, surrounds. The space outside his home is lined with his sculptures and mosaics. The view looks out over Barouk and Mount Sannine – a stretch of rich green land that dips into a valley between. Inside, Molaeb settles in the front room for coffee where he was drawing birds earlier in the morning. "I respect everything in nature. My responsibility is to leave this nature clean. To leave this beauty and to copy it in my work so others can see what can be made from this beautiful nature," he says. "I am in a relationship with reality. I would like to transfer this reality in my way without losing the feeling of modernity. What is better than to be in a relationship with the apple that you pick directly from the tree? Maybe I am trying to be nature, to be myself, to create from everyday life but in a new vision."

Two years ago Molaeb created the Jamil Molaeb Museum, adjacent to his home. It's an impressive structure, built in local stone and created with the help of architect George Arbid. "My museum is not separated from my work and my sculptures. There is this relationship between my house and the landscape, the valley, Sannine," he says. The museum is an impressive feat; three floors exhibit a huge collection of his paintings and large windows look out on the very lands that he reflects. The ground floor is dedicated to paintings that show scenes of daily life in the area – harvesting in the fields, collecting water from the local spring and a local bridal shower. The first floor features a collection of his sculptures and wood cuts and the top floor features his more minimalist pieces – bright strips of blue show endless horizons where sea and sky meet.

"Bringing people to the museum makes some kind of cultural movement to remind people what we can do ourselves if we come back to our village," Molaeb says. "Instead of going to the city I will bring the city to my village. I am trying to come back to my childhood when I had a relationship with the earth and also live my modern life." Besides being an exhibition space the museum also features a stage to house cultural events such as poetry readings, theater performances, concerts and film screenings. In August they held the Molaeb Festival for Chamber Music and Fine Arts, a successful two-day event that hosted eight musicians from around the world performing classical music concerts. Molaeb is doing more than reflecting the life and nature of his hometown through his paintings – he is bringing life to the area and creating a cultural hub.

**Jamil Molaeb Museum**  
03 622892, Baissour

# O MONOT — hotel —

*Chic & Modern Luxury Boutique Hotel*



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# To-tea-lly mad for it!

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Originating in south west China and a bona fide tradition in the UK and across the Middle East, tea has become the most widely consumed beverage in the world after water. Rich and rare blends have changed the face of this popular thirst-quencher from a herbal remedy to a rather sophisticated drink. **Taste & flavors** discovers the best tea spots in town

## WHERE TO SIP

### 1 *Ladurée*

Away from the hustle and bustle of Downtown Beirut lies Villa Zein, an oasis of tranquility and home to Ladurée's tearoom. Beneath the olive and pine trees, tea lovers can savor the aromatic taste of Melange Ladurée, a delicate infusion of citrus fruit, rose, vanilla and earthy cinnamon.

*01 992992, Villa Zein, Bab Idriss, Omar Daouk Street*



### 2 *Oliver's*

Nestled in the heart of Beirut's Gemmayzeh, Oliver's is reassuringly cozy. With large sofas and an extensive library, it makes an ideal choice for enjoying a traditional brew. Extensive assortments of loose-leaf teas are available including Gaba Oolong and Gunpowder Green varieties.

*01 566375, The Alleyway, Gouraud Street, Gemmayzeh, [f](#) Oliver's Kitchen and Coffee*



## 3 *Café Diem*

A sanctuary for breakfast fanatics, Café Diem serves gourmet tea by renowned Parisian specialists Maison de Thé Mariage Frères. Relish the flavorsome taste in the warmth and comfort of the café or purchase a box to sip at home.

01 333607, Building 8, Petro Trad Street, Sodecco, Achrafieh, [cafediem.fr](http://cafediem.fr), [Facebook](#) Café Diem Restaurant



## 4 *Les Gourmandises*

The newly reopened Les Gourmandises brings traditional afternoon tea to Verdun's fashionable Bristol Hotel and Achrafieh's Rue du Liban. A lavish medley of superior teas are available to enjoy with scones, jam and fresh cream.

01 353438, Bristol Hotel, Madame Curie Street;  
01 320050, Rue du Liban, Achrafieh  
[lebristol-gourmandises.com](http://lebristol-gourmandises.com)



## WHERE TO BUY

### *Awan*

Tucked away on Port Street, Awan tea shop is a haven for tea enthusiasts. Offering over 70 varieties of original and flavored fine teas from around the world, it is the perfect place to browse for an armful of herbal pick-me-ups to indulge in at home.

01 444288, 71 713536, [Facebook](#) Awan tea shop  
Boulos Fayad Bldg (Gezairi), Port Street

### *Blue House Tea*

Entering the Blue House opens the door to the exclusive world of premium organic artisanal tea. Hand-picked and rolled by international master blenders, the range includes the signature Phoenician Silk, a black tea aged in organic oak and royal jelly honey with Persian saffron.

01 444080, [theblue.house](http://theblue.house), [Facebook](#) The Blue House Official

### *Kusmi Tea*

Hundreds of colorful tea boxes decorate the shelves in the Kusmi Tea shop. Rich and aromatic, the much loved Russian-style blends include Sweet Love, a combination of Chinese black tea, spices, liquorice and pink pepper and Euphoria, a blend of roasted maté, chocolate and orange.

01 322066, 04 402729, ABC Achrafieh and ABC Dbayeh  
[kusmitea.com](http://kusmitea.com), [Facebook](#) Kusmi Tea Liban

### *The Food Dealer*

Mar Mikhael's organic deli is a real treat for those seeking premium grade hot chocolate and tea. Customers can purchase a variety of branded boxes or hang out at the charming store for a freshly brewed cup.

01 570942, 70 666324, [Facebook](#) The Food Dealer

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# CORAL

Beirut Al Hamra Hotel 



## Spacious Suites that Meet Your Needs

Coral Beirut Al Hamra Hotel offers a peaceful and refined ambience ideal for working or winding down. Filled with exceptional charm and warmth, the 4-Star hotel features 100 beautifully designed spacious rooms, including the Ambassador Suites that includes 2 beautiful Bedrooms, a Living Room, a Dining Area, a Kitchen and a Rooftop Terrace with Pergola and outdoor seating. A wide range of facilities tailored to suit your needs ensure you world-class hospitality.

**Managed by HMM - Hospitality Management Holdings**

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 info.alhamra@coral.hmh.email  hmshotelgroup.com/coralbeirutalhamra



# *Your hands-on* guide to Lebanon



Photo: Charbel Bouez



# Getaways

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

## 1. FAMILY SKI ESCAPE *Laklouk*

Laklouk is both a winter and summer escape; located on a plateau at an altitude between 1750m and 2000m it is encircled by jagged ridges and terraces bearing thousands of trees. In addition to alpine skiing, it is also one of the best resorts for cross-country skiing, back-country skiing or snowshoeing. Mostly visited by families, Laklouk is unique from other resorts as the area surrounding the slopes is almost completely free of construction. A newly developed road to the region allows you to reach the slopes in only 40 minutes from Jbeil.



Photo: Charbel Bouez

**SLEEP** In Laklouk you can sleep at the cozy Shangri-La Hotel or the slightly larger Nirvana Hotel which also offers several private chalets (09 430006, 03 441112, [Lakloukresort.com](http://Lakloukresort.com)), or go for an overnight stay in the nearby Ehmej village at Arz Ehmej (70 227730).

**EAT** Enjoy traditional Lebanese mezze at Al Arraj (03 627010), Seif El Bahar (03 894487) and Mrouj (03 661372) or you can eat besides the fireplace at Shangri-La Hotel and enjoy international dishes.

**SEE** Stop on the way to Laklouk at Annaya to visit the monastery of Saint Maron – Sanctuary of Saint Charbel.

## 2. WINTER WONDERLAND *Bnachii Lake*



Photo: Al Midan Association

Bnachii Lake offers the ultimate winter setting and since 2008 NGO Al Midan (06 664466, [almidan.org](http://almidan.org)) has organized “Christmas by the Lake” between December and early January. The shores of the lake are surrounded by Christmas decorations and each year they raise the biggest Christmas tree in Lebanon, at 22m high and 10m wide. The lake becomes a center of festivity with parades, games, theatrical plays and Christmas carols. The festival features a special children’s section that includes a Christmas train and boat, plus games such as kayak polo and bungee jumping. The festival also features a market of Christmas gifts and handicraft, Christmas cakes and sweets.

**SLEEP** Stay at the beautiful Olive Gardens Resort (70 159901, [oliveresort.com](http://oliveresort.com)), nestled in the middle of the Koura region.

**EAT** Enjoy Lebanese mezze at Bnachii Lake Restaurant (06 550550, 03 969796) or stop in Amioun on the way to taste the famous pizza of Napoli (06 952355, 03 655630, [pizzanapoli-lb.com](http://pizzanapoli-lb.com)).

**SEE** Take the time to visit the churches of Amioun and the impressive Wildlife Taxidermy Museum (06 550500), which contains over 3,000 sea and land animals as well as a huge collection of birds.

### 3. MEET SANTA CLAUS *Hammana*

Prominent French writer, poet and politician Alphonse De Lamartine called Hammana Valley “one of the most beautiful prospects ever presented to the human eye to scan in the works of God.” Every year the Municipality of Hammana organizes a small festival to celebrate Christmas. It’s a great place to pick up Christmas gifts made by local artisans and soak up the festive spirit. Kids can also meet Santa, as he makes his yearly visit to Hammana, offering sweets and posing with them for a photo (05 530109, 05 530049, Hammana Municipality.)

**SLEEP** Soha village (05 530109, 05 530049, *sohavillage.com*) is a new resort containing chalet rentals, a full-scale restaurant, gazebos, eco-lodges and many other attractions. A stay here, on the Al Knaiseh Mountain, offers a stunning view overlooking the majestic La Martine Valley.

**EAT** Enjoy a Lebanese meal at Chaghour Hammana (03 379844, 71 544534), a charming restaurant by the water and old water mills.



Photo: Hammana Municipality

### 4. SNOWSHOEING *Kfardebian*



Discover snowshoeing and cross-country ski trails from Warde, Ouyoun El Siman; here the white landscape of the upper plateau, close to Sannine, is beautiful. The trails are accessible to all levels, from kids to advanced skiers, with certified Nordic trainers available to guide (09 710109, [beity.org/cross-country-skiing-trails](http://beity.org/cross-country-skiing-trails)).

**SLEEP** There is a variety of accommodation available around the Mzaar, Kfardebian resort, from the 5-star InterContinental Mzaar hotel (09 340100, *icmzaar.com*) which also offers a spa and chalet rentals. For a welcoming and affordable overnight stop, head to Auberge Beity (09 710109, 03 214871; *beity.org*) in Kfardebian.

**EAT** After a long day on the slopes you’ll be ready for a hearty meal in the mountains. La Cabane (03 722217) is a good place to stop when skiing. There is also the popular restaurant Le Montagnou (09 314441, 03 341441, *open Fri-Sun*) for fondue and raclette, or grab a quick snack at one of the many restaurants in the Mzaar InterContinental hotel.

**SEE** Visit the natural bridge of Fakra and the Roman temples covered by snow - not to be missed.



# Best Beds

The elegant guesthouses of **L'Hote Libanais** offer a homely feel with hearty traditional breakfasts and a distinctive cachet. Here is a peek inside three of L'Hote Libanais' gems across the country



Photo: Elie Khoury

## Beit Marsala, Zouk Mosbeh

A family of artists, painters and sculptors run Beit Marsala and creativity radiates from all corners of the house. The garden of mandarins and daisies is a rare piece of greenery in the surrounding urbanised landscape and the house stirs the imagination and offers an inspiring escape from daily stress.



Photo: Natheer Halawani

## Dar Al Achrafieh, Beirut

Jamil Azar, the first host handpicked by L'Hote Libanais, warms his traditional Beirut home with his care and passion for designing textiles. Breakfasts at Dar Al Achrafieh are particularly reputed for the stories and advice Azar shares with his guests. The balconies of the rooms overlook Sursock, one of the city's oldest and most prominent neighbourhoods.



Photo: Natheer Halawani

## Dar Qadisha, Qadisha Valley

Dar Qadisha is nestled in a valley where cedars and ancient monasteries abound. Jacqueline Helwanji hosts her guests like family members, and concocts homemade jams, which she serves for breakfast along with local goat cheese. Guests leave her house feeling like they stayed with their grandmother in the Lebanese countryside.

## L'HOTE LIBANAIS

L'Hote Libanais is a platform of 13 guesthouses and one boutique hotel around Lebanon. Launched 15 years ago it was the first project of its kind in the country, offering guests a home away from home.

*All guesthouses are part of the L'Hote Libanais network and can be booked on, 03 513766, [hotelibanais.com](http://hotelibanais.com)*

# On the table



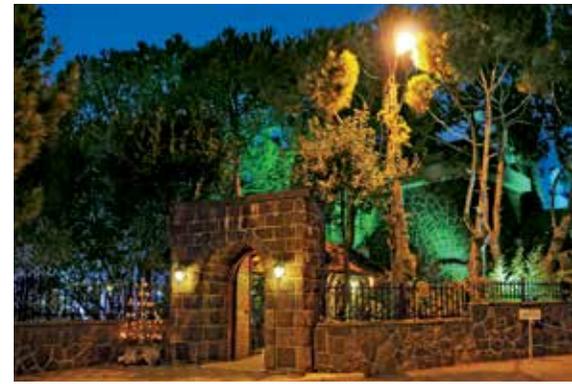
A successful businessman as co-founder of jewelry establishment the House of Aziz and Walid Mouzannar, **Walid Mouzannar** is also a passionate foodie who presides over The Lebanese Gastronomy Academy as secretary general. That's why LT asked him to take us out for dinner – here are five of his dining favorites in Lebanon



## La Gargote

"This restaurant specializes in French cuisine. I've been going to La Gargote (aka Le Gargotier) in Broumana for the past 40 years and they still sustain their quality of food and service. The ambiance is really nice – it's cozy; perfect for winter and a familiar restaurant where you'll always see friends. I always have the Poulet a la Provencale."

04 960562, [Broumana](#)



## Fadel

"Fadel Bikfaya is one of the cleanest Lebanese restaurants with excellent service. The setting is family-oriented, making it perfect for a family lunch on the weekend. Their meat dishes are excellent and the meatballs in particular are amazing there."

04 980979, [Naas, Bikfaya](#)



## Chez Sami

"I consider Chez Sami to be the best fish restaurant in Lebanon. I've been going there for over 25 years, from when they first began as a very small restaurant. It has a great location by the seafront. My favorite dish is the local Sultan Brahim fish, Merou and *fattoush*."

09 910520, 03 910520, [chezsamirestaurant.com](#), [Facebook](#) [ChezSami](#), [Maameltein](#), [Jounieh](#)



## Burgundy

"Burgundy has the best chef in the country for his creativity and the restaurant uses the best products. It has modern décor and attracts a high-end clientele. My favorite dish is the wagu beef as a main and the frog legs as a starter, which they are known for."

01 999820, 03 074949, 752 [Gouraud Street](#), [Saifi Village](#)

## Al Sultan

"I discovered Al Sultan by accident and have been there over 15 times. When I invite friends they always tell me that I'm crazy for taking them, but once they've eaten there they all end up taking the card. It has the best birds that you can eat in Lebanon – they're my favorite dish along with the *hummus*. The olive oil they use is also great. The place has a headwaiter that has been working there for the past eight years, who gives great service."

03 598525, [Bhamdoun](#)



- 1** BALIMA CAFÉ
- 2** NADA DEBS
- 3** BOK JA
- 4** TAJALLIYAT
- 5** RANDA TABBAH
- 6** VICK VANLIAN
- 7** MEAT THE FISH
- 8** JOHNNY FARAH
- 9** HARRY'S BAR
- 10** AL AMINE MOSQUE
- 11** ST. GEORGE CHURCH
- 12** ROMAN BATHS
- 13** U ENGERY
- 14** BRGR.CO
- 15** AYYAM GALLERY
- 16** BAR THREE SIXTY
- 17** SAMIR KASSIR GARDEN
- 18** WALL ST.

**ZAITUNAY BAY**

Indulge yourself in some local produce at Saturday's Souk el Tayeb (farmers' market)

**BEIRUT SOUKS**

Perfect for an architectural & historical Beirut stroll

Wirt between the many trees of this garden

**SAIFI VILLAGE**



# Urban trail

## Downtown

Beirut's central Downtown district has a variety of atmospheres from the lively to the serene. The neighboring Saifi Village is for daytime wandering; despite being surrounded by major roads, it's a tranquil bubble in the heart of the city. Lebanese guide company, **Zawarib**, takes us on a tour highlighting everything from hip eateries to designer boutiques

Say goodbye to the noise of Beirut and clear your mind at **Balima Café** (1 - 01 985295), before entering **Nada Debs** (2 - 01 999002, [nadadebs.com](http://nadadebs.com)), a contemporary home design boutique that uses Middle Eastern craft, and **Bokja** (3 - 01 975576, [bokjadesign.com](http://bokjadesign.com)) - a design and craft studio. **Tajalliyat Art Gallery** (4 - 01 987205, [tajalliyat.com](http://tajalliyat.com)) and **Randa Tabbah Contemporary Jewelry** (5 - 01 975030, [signumrt.com](http://signumrt.com)) are also worth a visit.

**Vick Vanlian's** (6 - 01 983962, [vickvanlian.com](http://vickvanlian.com)) snazzy window designs will add some complimentary pizzazz to your day. Next door, **Meat The Fish** (7 - 05 441205, 01 993606, [meatthefish.com](http://meatthefish.com)) offers a welcome break with their exceptional seafood, fish and meat products and daily specials. Then pop into the handmade leather goods shop of renowned local designer **Johnny Farah** (8 - 01 974808, [johnnyfarah.com](http://johnnyfarah.com)).

Around the corner, **Harry's Bar** (9 - 01 996600, [HarrysBarBeirut](https://www.facebook.com/HarrysBarBeirut)), located on the road where the old tram used to pass, offers succulent Italian food with great ambience. Make your way carefully across the busy junction overlooking Martyrs' Square and admire the detailed work of **Al Amine Mosque** (10), Downtown's newest, and further along visit the **St Georges Greek Orthodox Church** (11) with its underground crypt museum.

A walk through Downtown is full of visual stimuli, not least the archeological remains of its **Roman Baths** (12), discovered and excavated during reconstruction work after Lebanon's Civil War in the 1990s. The top of the steps offers a fantastic view of the Serail - the government building and its beautiful architecture.

If still in relax mode, book yourself a massage at **U Energy** (13 - 03 090888, [uenergy.me](http://uenergy.me)), located off a quiet courtyard.

Beirut Souks, originally the historical souks of the city that prevailed for centuries, now modernized, hosts a variety of events throughout the year. Make sure to visit during the month of December where a bundle of joyful Christmas choirs, concerts and children's shows and activities take place.

As you begin to get hungry, savor a succulent burger at **Brgr.Co** (14 - 01 333511, [brgr.co](http://brgr.co)) in Beirut Souks. Foch Street and Allenby Street used to be the main routes in and out of the city's port during Roman times. Once satisfied with the hustle and bustle, hop into a service-cab and request to be dropped at the Beirut Towers facing All Saints Church near the Corniche. Over there, **Ayyam Gallery** (15 - 01 374450, [ayyamgallery.com](http://ayyamgallery.com)) can offer a culture fix with the works of some of the best contemporary artists of the region on display.

As the sun begins to dip make your way to **Bar Three Sixty** (16 - 01 971111, [legray.com](http://legray.com)) to enjoy a cocktail coupled with a panoramic view of the city. For more fun under the stars cross over to the **Samir Kassir Gardens** (17) and hop into **Wall Street Bar & Grill** (18 - 76 997992, [wallstlb](https://www.facebook.com/wallstlb)) where music and smiles collide in perfect harmony.

*A collaboration between Lebanon Traveler and Zawarib - guiding you around the city*

**Zawarib**  
The Mapping Company



USEK Christmas Concert. Photo: USEK university

# AGENDA

## DECEMBER

### Tue 1

#### Beirut Chants Festival

This yearly festival returns for its eighth edition, celebrating Christmas with live choirs and classical musicians in churches around the city. This year Beirut Chants will host renowned pianist Julien Libeer and cellist Boris Andrianov, accompanied by the Tchaikovsky competition first prize winner Alexander Ghindin with Concilium Musicum Wien, the chamber orchestra from Vienna.

1– 23 Dec. Various locations. [f](#) Beirutchants

#### Christmas Bazar

In the month of December, Zahle boutique hotel celebrates Christmas with a special bazar – the perfect place to find unusual gifts for family and friends. Beit el Kroum, Zahle. [book@beitelkroum.com](mailto:book@beitelkroum.com)

### Sat 19

#### Beirut Christmas Village

Beirut Souks gets into the festival spirit with a whole host of activities during the city's first open-air Christmas market. 48 stands will sell hand-crafted trinkets, ornaments, jewelry, handmade toys, sweets, clothes and Christmas decorations. There's also entertainment for all ages including the first ever 100 Santa Claus Parade. 19– 29 Dec. Gata.pro. Beirut Souks, Fakhry Bey Street, Downtown

#### Christmas Village, Qab Elias

The Bekaa Valley village, Qab Elias celebrates the lead up to Christmas with seasonal festivities, chants and night celebrations in the village square. Organized by the Municipality of Qab Elias - Wadi el Delm. 19–23 Dec. 08 500721

### Tue 22

#### USEK Christmas Concert

The Holy Spirit University of Kaslik (USEK) will hold a traditional Christmas concert – “Christmas: Peace, Love and Hope.” The concert will feature the USEK choir, conducted by Reverend Father Youssed Tannous, the dean of the faculty of music at USEK. Tickets available at [usek.edu.lb](http://usek.edu.lb). 8pm. John Paul II Amphitheater, USEK, Kaslik, 09 600000

### Sat 26

#### Tripoli tour

Join Tripoli-native Mira Minkara for one of her now famous guided tours in Tripoli. This one takes in the city's old souks where Crusaders, Mamlouks and Ottomans left their marks until today. LL30,000; bus LL15,000. Mira's Guided Tours

#### Christmas Parade

Don't miss Jezzine's street parade for

Christmas– it's a time to let loose and enjoy the festive season. Organized by the Jezzine Municipality. 07 780026

#### Christmas Recital

Enjoy a special Christmas concert – a recital in Mar Jerjes Church in Roum. Organized by Roum Municipality. 07 810027

### Sun 27

#### Wadi Slib hike

A hike around the Kesrouan area of Wadi Slib taking in old hamlets and watermills. 7.30am. Meeting point Hikmeh School, Sagesse, Charles Malek Avenue, Achrafieh. LL40,000 including transport and guide. Liban Trek

#### Falougha to Ain Zhalta hike

Hike along Lebanon's best preserved and longest trail, the Lebanon Mountain Trail, from Falougha to Ain Zhalta village. LL36,000. Footprints

### Mon 28

#### Fire station visit

Take the kids on a trip to meet the firefighters in this visit to the fire station – an inspiring and educational trip for them to meet Lebanon's heroes. 3–6pm. LL30,000. NEOS Kids

# JANUARY

**Sat 9**



## Tripoli tour

Mira Minkara guides visitors around Tripoli's modernist architectural gem – The Exhibition Fair of Tripoli, designed by Brazilian architect Oscar Niemeyer. LL30,000; bus LL15,000.  
**Mira's Guided Tours**

**Sun 10**



## Jisr Al Qadi hike

A hike around the Aley area of Jisr Al Qadi, along the Safa river, stopping for a visit at local pottery workshops. 7.30am. Meeting point: Hikmeh School, Sagesse, Charles Malek Avenue, Achrafieh. LL40,000 including transport and guide. **Liban Trek**

**Sun 17**



## Snowshoeing

Celebrate the winter season with a 10km snowshoeing hike in Laklout. 8am. Meeting point: Furn el Chebbak, Facing Sagesse

# FEBRUARY

**Sun 7**



## Jezzine hike

A hike in south Lebanon's Jezzine, passing by the "Blue Pond" and old coal mines. 7.30am. Meeting point Hikmeh School, Sagesse, Charles Malek Avenue, Achrafieh. LL40,000 including transport and guide. **Liban Trek**



## Snowshoeing

If your lover is the outdoorsy-type, share your love of nature on Valentine's Day with a day of snowshoeing close around the historic town of Hadath el Jebbeh. 8am. Meeting point: Furn el Chebbak, Facing Sagesse University. LL65,000 including transport, food, guide and equipment rental. **ProMax**

**Sat 20**



## Tripoli tour

Mira Minkara returns to Tripoli to guide

University. LL65,000 including transport, food, guide and equipment rental. **ProMax**

**Wed 20**



## Photomed Liban

The yearly Festival of Mediterranean Photography returns, for its 3rd edition in Lebanon. International photographers such as Edouard Boubat and Alessandro Puccinelli will be exhibited, along with Lebanese photographers such as Elise Haddad, Randa Mirza and Karim Sakr. 20 Jan- 10 Feb. Photomedliban.com, 01 497494. Locations: Beirut Exhibition Center, Institut Francais du Liban, Byblos Bank Headquarters, Hotel Le Gray Beirut and Station.

**Sat 30**



## Snowshoeing

Enjoy a day snowshoeing in the dramatic scenery around the cedars of Bcharreh. 7.30am. Meeting point Hikmeh School, Sagesse, Charles Malek Avenue, Achrafieh. LL40,000 including transport and guide + LL12,000 equipment rental. **Liban Trek**

visitors around the old district of the city taking in its old souks where Crusaders, Mamlouks and Ottomans left their marks. LL30,000; bus LL15,000. **Mira's Guided Tours**

**Sun 28**



## Denniyeh hike

A hike along the beautiful river valley of Nahr Moussa, named Ouyoun as-Samak. 7.30am. Meeting point Hikmeh School, Sagesse, Charles Malek Avenue, Achrafieh. LL40,000 including transport and guide. **Liban Trek**



## Mazraet el Teffeh hike

This moderate-level hike, at 9km, explores the area of Mazraet el Teffeh, a village in the north Lebanon Zgharta district. 8am. Meeting point: Furn el Chebbak, Facing Sagesse University. LL45,000 including transport, food and guide. **ProMax**

## Regular Events

### Jabal Moussa hikes

Unveil the hidden treasures of Jabal Moussa Biosphere Reserve, with a full day of hiking. Open from 8.30am-3.30pm. Meeting point: Qehmez, Baydar el Showk. 09 643464, 71 944405. LL8,000

### Horsh Beirut

After years of protest and 22 years since it closed, Beirut's biggest park, Horsh Beirut, is open every Saturday. Make it your Saturday destination and enjoy the vast green space in the middle of the city. Every Saturday; 9am-7pm

### Paragliding tandems

Any day of the week, depending on weather conditions, you can paraglide above Jounieh – a heart racing and adrenaline-pumping activity with an amazing view. Mon-Sat, 1-5pm. Ghosta, Jounieh. **Lebanon Paragliding**

## ADDRESS BOOK

### Footprints

03 876112, footprints.club

### Lebanon Paragliding

03 559992, lebanonparagliding.com

### Liban Trek

01 329975, 03 291616  
 libantrek.com, info@libantrek.com

### Mira's Guided Tours

70 126764,  Mira's Guided Tours, miracoqui34@gmail.com

### NEOS Kids

03 733818  
 neoslb.com, nour@neoslb.com

### ProMax

03 955642, promaxsports.com

For daily event updates visit  
**lebanontraveler.com**

# Valerie Abou Chacra

23-year-old **Valerie Abou Chacra**, a student in Communication Arts at the Lebanese American University, was crowned winner of the ultimate beauty pageant, Miss Lebanon 2015. But where does she see beauty around the country? LT put her on the hot seat to find out.

## IF SOMEONE WERE VISITING LEBANON FOR 24 HOURS WHERE WOULD YOU TAKE THEM?

We would start the day in North Lebanon, visiting the beaches of Chekka and afterwards visit the historical city of Jbeil. Then we would head all the way up to the Shouf to visit Beiteddine Palace and have lunch in one of the nearby popular Lebanese restaurants. Afterwards, we would go to Sidon to have a stroll in the small streets of the city. At the end the day, we would go back to Beirut to have dinner in Downtown and of course party till dawn.

## TELL US ABOUT YOUR HIDDEN GEM IN LEBANON; ONE DESTINATION AWAITING DISCOVERY.

Chouwen River.

## NAME ONE VILLAGE OR REGION THAT FEELS LIKE HOME AND WHY.

The village Edde, near Byblos – I spent my childhood there.

## WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE OUTDOOR ACTIVITY IN LEBANON AND WHERE DO YOU DO IT?

Cycling in Afqa.

## NAME ONE OF YOUR URBAN SECRETS.

Escape the Room (*78 999052, escapetheroom.me, Gouraud Street*), a real live escape game in Gemmayzeh where you have 60 minutes to solve a series of puzzles to escape the room.

## IF YOU WERE LOOKING FOR A NEW OUTFIT WHERE ARE YOUR FAVORITE PLACES TO SHOP?

In Downtown Beirut.

## WHERE IS THE OLIVE OIL IN YOUR KITCHEN FROM?

South [Lebanon], Kfarhatta.

## NAME THREE RESTAURANTS YOU GO TO FOR A HEARTY WINTER MEAL.

Le Relais de l'Entrecote (*01 332088, Abdel Wahab el Inglizi Street, Achrafieh*), Le Montagnou (*09 341441, montagnou.com, Kfardebian*) and Classic Burger (*01 333606, cbj.me, Sodeco, other branches available*), which never fails to have my heart.

## IF YOU WERE GOING AWAY FOR A WEEKEND TO THE MOUNTAINS WHAT WOULD BE IN YOUR BAG?

Sunglasses, camera, iPod, earphones, running shoes and a bottle of wine.

## YOU WERE PICKED AS LEBANON'S BEAUTY FOR 2015, BUT WHERE DO YOU SEE BEAUTY IN THE COUNTRY?

In the people of Lebanon; they are known for their great minds and welcoming spirit.

 Miss Lebanon





# CHEZ SAMI

Restaurant

Maameltein 03/910520 - 242428

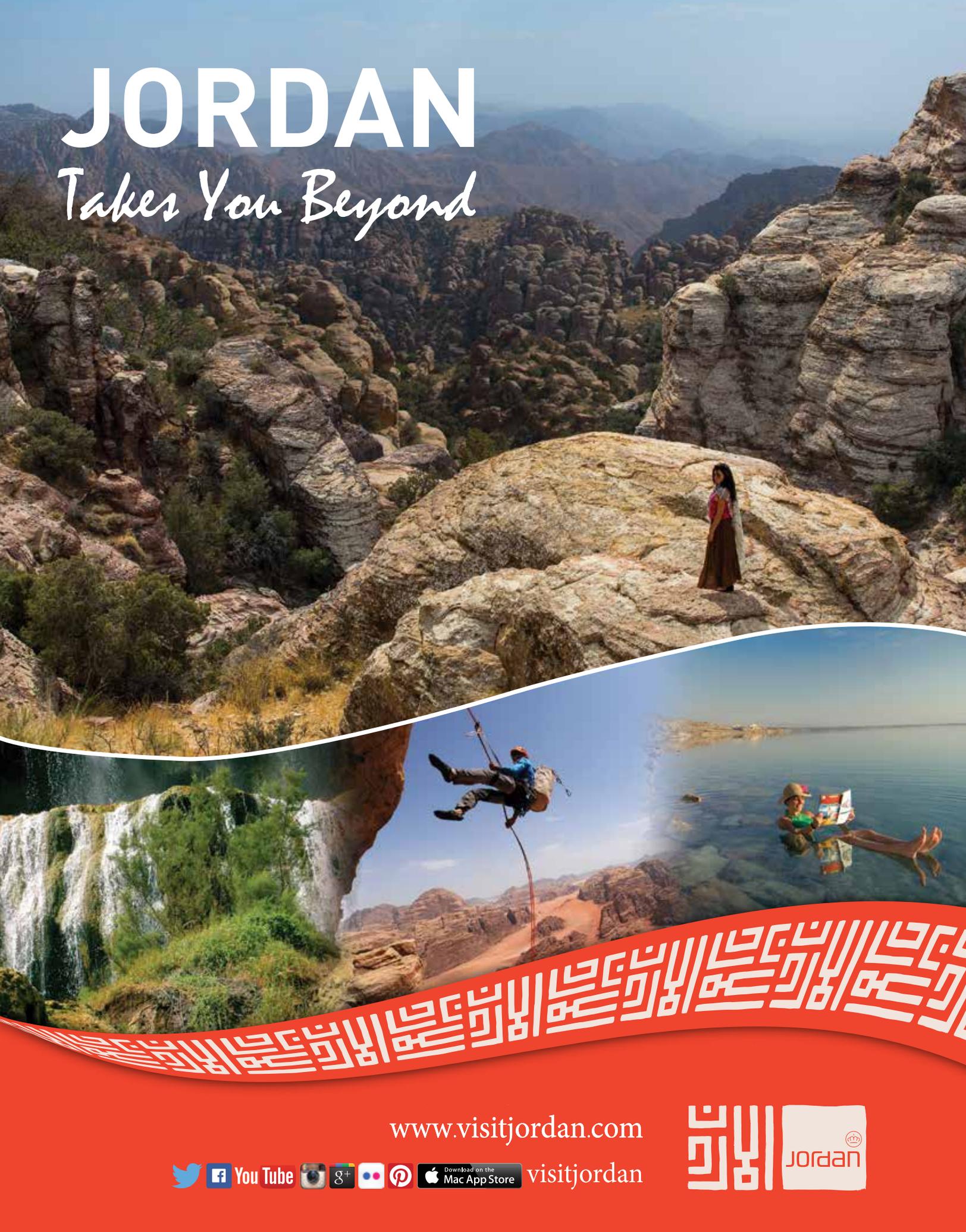
09/910520 - 646064

Fax: 09/646164



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