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# Lebanon Traveler



+ YOUR HANDS-ON  
GUIDE TO LEBANON

A publication of Hospitality Services in a joint venture with Beyond Beirut | Issue 19 | June - August 2016

GET SET FOR A  
**SIZZLING  
SUMMER:**  
**+70**  
DESTINATIONS

**FESTIVAL FEVER**

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW  
**LÉA SALAMÉ**

**BEIRUT**  
HIPPODROME'S  
**100-YEAR  
HERITAGE**

**SPORTSMAN  
SILVIO CHIHA**  
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**48 HOURS  
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# Lebanon Traveler

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This issue's cover photo was taken at Rai Beach Resort in Jbeil by Lebanese photographer Elie Habib.

☎ 76 777797

📍 Rai Beach Resort

🌐 [raibeachresort.com](http://raibeachresort.com)



Photo: William Khouchaba

## The Summer Starts Here

As temperatures peak, summer is the time to slow down and enjoy Lebanon. With a significant number of Beirutis relocating to their family homes in the mountains or beachside chalets, it's the season when the country's rural areas come to life and long sun-filled days revolve around gardens and terraces. Time to enjoy the great outdoors, explore diverse landscapes and meet local villagers.

In the summer, the country's cultural sphere blossoms with activity with festivals taking place in almost every region. From Byblos International Festival's stage that protrudes into the sea, to the ancient Roman temples of Baalbeck as a backdrop, we certainly know how to put on an atmospheric spectacle. Music concerts feature a whole host of international artists and the Arab world's contemporary greats, so start planning your schedule now.

This issue, we head up and down Lebanon's coastline, exploring everything from coastal nature reserves to historical ruins by the sea. We take you to some of our favourite spots for a leisurely picnic and go on a weekend roadtrip to Bisri, discovering that the journey through this rich valley is just as important as the destination.

In the capital, we head to the iconic Beirut Hippodrome, which this year celebrates its 100-year anniversary of horse racing tradition, and Zawarib takes us on a tour of the nearby sleepy neighborhood of Badaro to explore its wide tree-lined streets. As usual, we've packed this issue full of prominent personalities, interviewing French-Lebanese journalist Léa Salamé, waterski champion Silvio Chiha and the Director of Byblos International Festival Latifa Lakkis.

Use Lebanon Traveler as a guide for exploring the country and you'll discover that summer holidays are best spent at home.

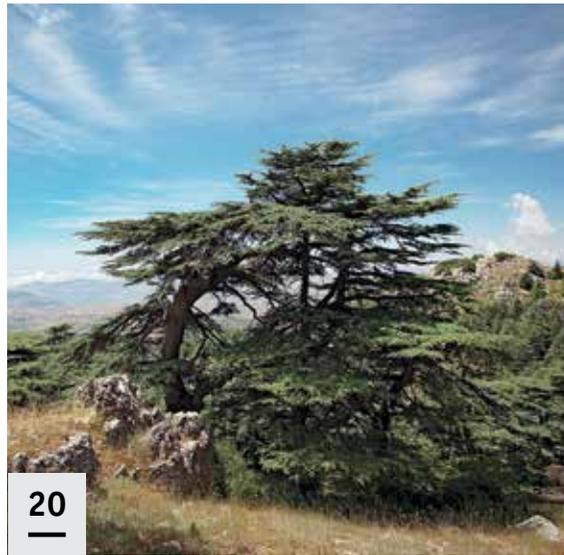
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## Contributors



### William Khouchaba

Travelling Lebanon with his camera, William Khouchaba reflects his passion to Lebanon in photos, especially at touristic and ecological sites that reveal its heritage.



### Samer Abi Saab

Born and raised by the beach, Samer Abi Saab's passion for water sports has no limits. His career in banking and finance didn't stop him from being a windsurfer instructor at White Beach, Batroun.



### Nour Farra-Haddad

Nour Farra-Haddad, PhD, is a religious anthropologist and researcher, manages her own travel consultant company NEOS and is also the author of Eco-Lebanon and Wiz Kids guidebooks.



### Zeina Zeineddine

Graduating with a BA in international business management, Zeina Zeineddine now works as a HR officer at the Shouf Biosphere Reserve.



### Elsa Sattout

A passionate conservationist, practitioner, scholar and teacher Elsa Sattout strives to communicate the value of reconnecting with nature for human well-being through an interpretation of places and spaces.



### Zeinab Jeambey

Zeinab Jeambey developed Darb el Karam, Lebanon's first food tourism trail for the Food Heritage Foundation. She is currently project manager at the Lebanon Mountain Trail Association.



### Reem Joudi

Reem Joudi studied international economics, but considers writing her true passion. She currently freelances for L'Hote Libanais and curates her blog, Third Culture Canvas.



### Ramzi Semrani

Coming from the beautiful village Jaj, Ramzi Semrani started his photography career four years ago; it's his way to show the whole world the real Lebanon.



### Kuba Ryniewicz

Kuba Ryniewicz is a photographer and creative producer based in the North East of England. His work is strongly related to travel and portraiture of various traditions in their relation to art and nature.



### Dany Faddoul

Growing up on the shores of Batroun, Dany Faddoul soon got into water sports. After discovering his passion in photography, he started documenting beach life.



### Clement Tannouri

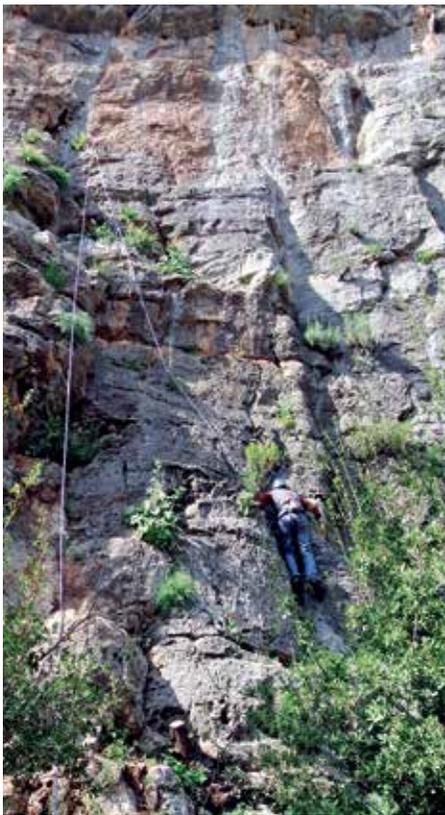
Photographer Clement Tannouri plays with talent, ingenuity, and expertise. His photographs are artworks imprinted with authenticity and essential beauty.

# News

## Development TANNOURINE CLIMBING ROUTES

To date, 130 climbing routes have been created in the Tannourine district of north Lebanon. Offering a variety of levels, it has become the most important center for rock climbing in Lebanon. The LIVCD-funded project is now near completion and both route builders, The Rock Climbing Association for Development (RAD) and the local Municipality President, have shared their excitement about it reaching its final stages. As the first project of its kind the wider region, it provides an important boost for rural tourism in Tannourine and aims to attract rock climbers from all over the world.

[f RAD.org, r-a-d.org](#)



## On the stage CIRQUE DU SOLEIL



The now world-famous Cirque du Soleil has announced a series of unique performances coming to Lebanon this September. Based on the adventure of Icarus, from Greek mythology, their new show "Varekai" sets the scene at the summit of a dormant volcano, within a mystical forest. Parachuted from the sky, a young man embarks on an adventure to explore the wonders of the new world of Varekai.

7-11 September (Wed 7-Fri 9, 8pm; Sat 10, 4.30pm and 8pm; Sun 11, 4.30pm) Forum Du Beyrouth. Tickets available at Entertainment Ticketing, Antoine Ticketing or by calling 01 494479. Tickets LL60,000-LL450,000

## Culture fix REOPENING NABATIEH'S STARS CINEMA



Nabatieh once had a number of cinemas serving its population but after Stars Cinema closed in 1990, the south Lebanon town has been without a cultural space. That is set to change soon though, as Kassem Istanbouli, the founder of performing arts platform Istanbouli Theater, is working on reopening it. Finding success with his transformation of the old Al Hamra Cinema in Sour into a cultural space, Stars Cinema will become a platform to build cultural projects for the community.

70 903846, [faneyat.com](#)

## 5 MINUTES WITH... Christian Ghammachi



Lebanese photographer and videographer, **Christian Ghammachi** talks to LT about his "Rise Above Lebanon" aerial video that captures unseen parts of the country

### HAS YOUR SHORT FILM AND BOOK "RISE ABOVE LEBANON" CHANGED HOW LEBANESE SEE THE COUNTRY?

I hope it reminded people in Lebanon that we have a country that's very diverse and beautiful. We have a tendency to be trapped in our daily problems and forget where we live. My hope is that Rise Above Lebanon made people think: "Wow! I didn't know it looked that way. I should take a look." Also to emphasize that Lebanon is not just about night clubs and beaches. There is more to it than that.

### WHILE SHOOTING WAS THERE ONE LANDSCAPE THAT SURPRISED YOU?

There are places that I didn't even know existed. I had never heard about Chouwane lake. I was mind blown. It's not just the lake, the forest and mountains around it are so lush. I discovered other places I had never seen from that angle above – such as ABC Mall in Achrafieh.

### WHAT ARE YOUR TIPS FOR GETTING THAT UNUSUAL SHOT?

For anyone wanting to get into photography, the trick is to get out of Beirut, get in the car, go to the mountains and explore. It's about the people as well. There are so many incredible characters on the road. Slow down, take your time and pay attention to everything around you.

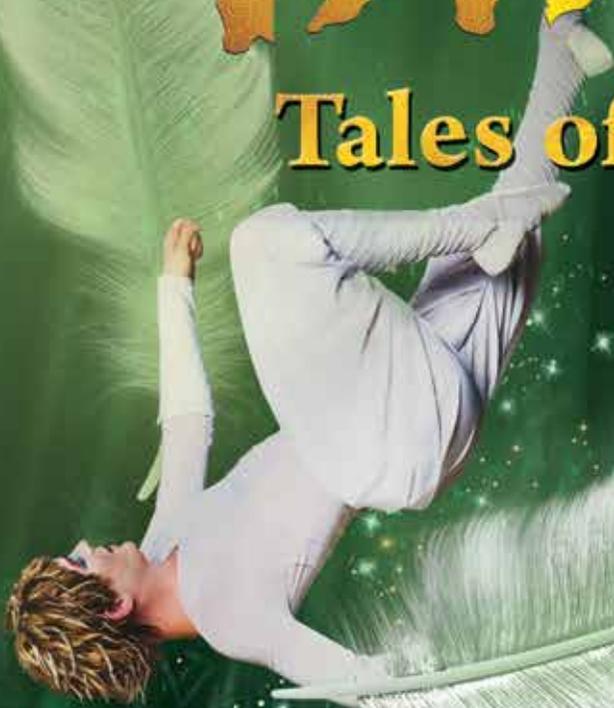
[christianghammachi.com](#)

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## Tales of the Forest



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*Spotlight***LAS SALINAS SPA**

Since launching in 2015, Las Salinas Spa has become the destination for relaxation in north Lebanon. LT sat down with owner Maher Deiri to get the lowdown

**WHAT'S UNIQUE ABOUT LAS SALINAS SPA?**

It's definitely one of the best spas in Lebanon. It was built to satiate all guests' needs and requests while continuously providing the best services. The highly professional and well-trained team of university graduates are entirely devoted to help guests relax and revitalize.

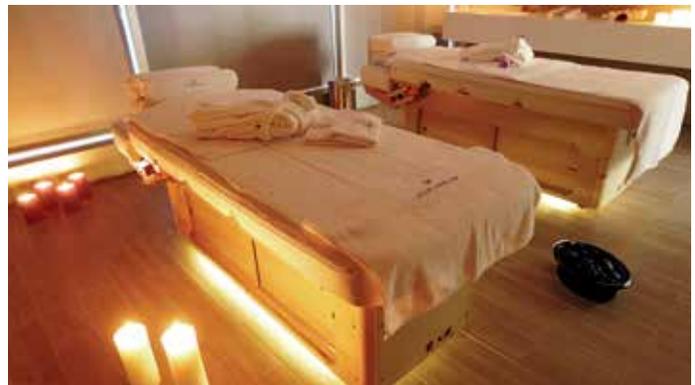
**WHAT FACILITIES ARE ON OFFER?**

The spa is part of Las Salinas Resort, situated in Anfeh. The ground floor includes locker rooms, an exceptional fitness facility, an aerobic studio, high-end spa treatment section, an advanced slimming center and a therapeutic center. The first floor includes an infinite edge-heated swimming pool overlooking the Mediterranean Sea, a remarkable aqua facility with aqua sports equipment, a pool bike, saunas, steam rooms and the first salt cave therapy room.

**WHAT TREATMENT WOULD YOU RECOMMEND OUR READERS TRY?**

Our unique Turkish bath treatment and the sports massage treatment for its great benefits to the body.

[06 540970](tel:06540970), [lassalinas-lb.com/spa](http://lassalinas-lb.com/spa), *Anfeh Coastal Road*

*The foodie's trail***NOGARLICNOONIONS HITS TRIPOLI**

Food blog NoGarlicNoOnions (NGNO) recently launched The Foodie's Trail, in collaboration with the Ministry of Tourism, taking visitors on a range of tours that explore the hidden corners of Lebanon and its food heritage. Tripoli is the first stop, where food enthusiasts can discover great food, hidden culinary geniuses, innovative dishes and local traditional plates, using knowledgeable local guides. Famed for one of the biggest souks in Lebanon, Tripoli is as authentic as it gets, and a great place to discover street food and hidden restaurants in its winding streets.

[nogarlicnoonions.com/tours](http://nogarlicnoonions.com/tours), [youtube.com/rahayel](https://www.youtube.com/rahayel)

*Design for social change***SALIM AZZAM JOINS STARCH**

Upon graduating, Lebanese designer and illustrator, Salim Azzam decided to use design as a force for social change, documenting oral narrative traditions and local customs through his work. This year he's part of Starch, an NGO that supports new design talents. They will be exhibiting his work; shirts and dresses

featuring his illustrations, embroidered by local craftswomen. Through the embroidery, these women tell their own stories and the final product is Azzam's first fashion collection, Sitt el Sitat.

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



# RAI

BEACH RESORT

## A new addition to Lebanon's coastline, Jbeil beach resort **Rai** marks the start of the summer season

Spread over 6,000m<sup>2</sup> on the coastline of Jbeil, Rai Beach Resort celebrated its soft opening earlier this month. Owned by three partners: Elie Fawaz, Charbel El Badawi and Elie Farah, the resort features two pools, six private bungalows, each equipped with a private Jacuzzi and lawn area and a seafront dining area that looks out over the entire space. It also boasts a pool bar and a huge stretch of sandy beach. Rai has created a serene space for Lebanon's beach goers. The resort is dotted with palm trees, colorful flowers and stretches of green lawn and features a waterfall that falls into the pool. White sun loungers are centered around the large circular pool, located just a stone's throw from the open sea.

"We chose Jbeil as the location as it's a nice area and now it's really developing," says Elie Fawaz. "We will be opening three different restaurants that will offer various types of food: seafood, an international restaurant and a new concept Diego, which will offer Spanish fusion." The menu of Diego will include fresh fruit cocktails such as gin basil, and a light tapas menu; with the concept open from sunset until midnight for visitors looking to spend their evenings by the sea. In addition, there will be DJs and a live local band on the weekends.

If you're looking for a more luxurious experience with friends, rent one of Rai's bungalows (LL450,000, 11am-7pm or 8pm-10am, inc. one bottle of wine and six guests; LL675,000 for full 23 hours). The private space, veiled behind greenery, includes a Jacuzzi, green area for sunbathing and modern bungalow complete with a double bed and bathroom.

76 777797, [f Rai Beach Resort](#), [raibeachresort.com](http://raibeachresort.com)  
Weekdays LL30,000; Weekends LL40,000



# Home garden haven

Whether it's an urban balcony with a city view or a green space at the family mountain home, outdoor spaces are our sanctuaries. LT scoured this year's **Garden Show and Spring Festival**, ahead of the crowds, to find the best pieces for beautifying your gardens



Dessert plate, LL18,000; steel magazine holder, LL198,000 at I.D. Project 01 694698, [idplebanon.com](http://idplebanon.com)



Home & Deco wooden swing, LL1,199,900 at BHV Citymall, Jnah; Khoury Home, Dora; and Rabieh 01 905000, [bhv.com.lb](http://bhv.com.lb)



Decorative "garden" hooks, LL30,000 at Boutique du Monde 01 585830, 03 585830, [boutiquedumonde.com](http://boutiquedumonde.com)



Rotative barbeque, LL337,500 at Raw Equip 76 866080

Fatboy snacklight rack red table, price available upon request at Pleinsud Gallery 01 202221, [f Pleinsud Gallery](https://www.facebook.com/PleinsudGallery)



Handmade wooden bench with leather seats "The Mexican Hat Dance," from LL2,400,000 at La Tiendita 01 330837, [latiendita-lb.com](http://latiendita-lb.com)

Kilner 5-liter glass drinks dispenser, LL59,900; Eda Plastiques Toscane plant pot, LL52,900 at Home and Beyond 05 951814/5; 09 645102/3 [homeandbeyond-lb.com](http://homeandbeyond-lb.com)



Six colored glass mugs, LL50,000 at Boutique du Monde 01 585830, 03 585830, [boutiquedumonde.com](http://boutiquedumonde.com)



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# LÉA SALAMÉ, THE WOMAN IN GOLD



*Photo: courtesy of Inter France*

Interviewing the “Best Interviewer of the Year” is quite a daunting task. And, when it comes to interviewing GQ Magazine’s “Woman of the Year”, it becomes a real adventure. TV presenter Elsa Yazbek Charabati speaks to the French-Lebanese journalist **Léa Salamé**, just before she embarks on another major step in her career

**Life is smiling at you léa salamé! You are not only the panelist of popular late-night talk show “on n’est pas couché” (we’re not asleep) and the main interviewer of france inter radio in the morning, but you were also voted “woman of the year” in 2014 and a couple of months ago named the “best interviewer of the year” in france. What’s the importance of such titles for you?**

It’s great recognition, I’m so happy about it. But it makes me feel more responsible. I’m already a workaholic; I wake up at 5 o’clock in the morning and am sometimes buried in the work. I’m addicted to my job.

**French people adore you. You represent the guts of a younger generation of journalists. Did being the daughter of the former Lebanese Culture Minister Ghassan Salame help in your career?**

At the beginning yes, it [helped] in my early training, but then I relied on myself and my work. I really am a workaholic. Some rare times, when I prepare delicate interviews, I ask my dad for advice as he has great knowledge, but most of the time I count on my own preparation. To prepare the show, I read two or three books per week. This program is a real arena; we want things to be said, to happen, we want it to be different from other programs. But let me tell you a secret: I’m still afraid before every show. It’s a huge responsibility.

**Being chosen as a panelist in Laurent Ruquier’s popular show “On n’est pas couché” was a boost to your career. Tell us about this.**

From France 24 to I-Télé, I’ve chosen

a journalistic career specialized in international news. My versatile Lebanese culture (my mother is Armenian) and my ability to speak many languages, has helped me a lot in this field.

**Hala or Léa Salamé? You decided to change your name when you were a child. Why?**

I was born Hala, a name that I liked until I experienced racism. It was the only time I felt racism in France. I was seven or eight at school and some friends used to call me Allah, Allah Akbar! They couldn’t pronounce the H. I used to explain to them, it is Hala, meaning welcome, but no way. So a couple of years later, at 12, I decided to change my name, and I don’t regret it. Now it’s Léa.

Every word I utter, every expression I make, is analyzed and commented on... it’s not easy

**Do you consider yourself more French than Lebanese?**

At 12, I used to ask myself: “Who am I really?” I wasn’t the typical blond blue-eyed girl, like most of my friends. That was until my uncle told me to stop trying to choose between my identities and take them as a millefeuille. It really helped me see clearer. So, yes, I am very French. My life, my work, my friends are in France, but when I spend a couple of months far from Lebanon, I don’t feel good. I need

both countries. Being Lebanese is a plus, an added value. I’m conscious about it and when I can add a little word, a reference to Lebanon in my programs and interviews, I do it.

**What place in Lebanon is still in your memory and heart?**

Hamra. When I was born we used to live in Hamra. It’s a place where I have my childhood memories during the war in our little apartment. I also like Mazraat Kfardebiane, my father’s hometown. It’s one of Lebanon’s most beautiful villages and the place where my beloved grandma was buried.

**You are famous and yet you dress simply and are very approachable. Is celebrity an advantage or a burden?**

Every word I utter, every expression I make, is analyzed and commented on... It’s not easy. The media is always around me. If I disappear from Paris for a couple of days, rumors arise: I’m engaged, married, pregnant! But yes, [being a] celebrity is nice sometimes, when people recognize me and greet me in the street. But I don’t seek to be popularized, I just want to be a journalist.

**You have interviewed many French personalities. who would you like to host from lebanon?**

Walid Joumblatt and someone with whom I like to discuss politics with: Samir Franjeh.

**And now after this interview tell us, what do you prefer, interviewing or being interviewed?**

Definitely interviewing!

# HERE COMES THE SUMMER

Say hello to the summer with **LT's** destination tips around the country. From atmospheric overnight stays during festival season to scenic picnic spots in the countryside, here's how to spend the ultimate holiday at home



Windsurfing in Batroun. Photo: Samer Abi Saab

## TRAVEL LEBANON

For travel ideas for the summer in Lebanon, make a beeline to the Travel Lebanon event, held simultaneously with The Garden Show & Spring Festival ([the-gardenshow.com](http://the-gardenshow.com)) on 24-28 May, at Beirut Hippodrome. Exhibitors from around the country will be present to showcase the beautiful rural destinations and stunning landscapes on offer. Meet traditional craftspeople, local cooperatives and associations, food producers and regional municipalities to get deep inside the varied culture and traditions around the country; then plan your summer exploring the wealth on offer at home.

## SUN, SEA AND SURF

Take a break from beach bronzing and immerse yourself in Lebanon's surf culture. Over the last few years, an active community has developed with surf schools and passionate surfers up and down the country offering lessons. North Lebanon often has the ideal weather and waves for surfing. Board 'n' Surf (03 734601, 03 283413, [C-Flow Beach Resort, Jbeil](http://C-Flow Beach Resort, Jbeil)) is the first surf school in Jbeil and offers everything from surf lessons to stand up paddle, even yoga sessions out at sea on the board. Board 'n' Surf founders Karim Flouti and Andre Dargham are experienced surfers who instruct children, teens and adults. "We are keen to teach skills and expertise and to share our passion for surfing," says Dargham. Flouti insists that while he wants his students to have fun, safety is a high priority. "We provide a safe environment combined with thorough safety guidelines to start enjoying surfing stress free," says Flouti. And if you're a stressed out parent dreading the long summer holidays, you'll be happy to hear of Board 'n' Surf's summer camp in collaboration with Bouddha Club for all levels. Looking for a board to call your own? Check out the work of Paul Abbas, Lebanon's first surfboard shaper at P.A. Surfboards (03 947256, [P.A. boards](https://www.facebook.com/p.a.boards), [thesurfboardproject.com](http://thesurfboardproject.com)). From his workshop in Bouar, the passionate surfer handcrafts beautiful surfboards for the country's growing surf community.

For lessons in windsurfing, get in touch with Samer Abi Saab (70 090048, *LL25,000 per session, LL15,000 with instructor*), who instructs at White Beach, Batroun. "I have been teaching windsurfing for the last 10 years. It became a passion to let other people share the rush behind this great water sport," he says.

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Horsch Beirut. Photos: Olga Habre

## PICNIC SPOTS AROUND THE COUNTRY

As summer gets into full swing, it's time to take your meals outdoors and enjoy a leisurely picnic during the long summer days. Explore the country and head into nature to find your perfect picnic spot. For a luxury outdoor eating experience, be well prepared with Ezetil's four-person picnic set (LL119,900 at *Home and Beyond*, 09 645102/3, 05 951814, [homeandbeyond-lb.com](http://homeandbeyond-lb.com)), which comes complete with cutlery and glasses. Stop along the way at a roadside food stall or shop to pick up local produce like olives, pickles and fresh fruit.



From mountain spots with incredible views to tree-shaded riverside locations and public beaches, there are plenty of picnic-perfect locations on offer around Lebanon. Hamat attracts scores of picnickers from spring to fall, who come for its cool climate and tree-shaded lands. Located at 287m atop a hill overlooking Batroun, Hamat offers great views and is home to Our Lady of Nourieh, a historic shrine and monastery. Nahr el Kalb is another popular destination for its riverside picnic spots within a green valley. If you're heading south, make Bkassine your picnic destination for the day. The charming village, surrounded by the largest pine forest in the Middle East, offers a number of beautiful backdrops in which to enjoy

your summer spread. The Bkassine Picnic Area (Maroun Aziz 03 421885, Bkassine Park, Jezzine) has a number of wooden shacks selling tempting additions to your picnic.

If you prefer to avoid the summer traffic and stay in Beirut, head over to the city's biggest green space, Horsch Beirut (*open every Saturday to the public*). The vast 400,000m<sup>2</sup> park is an oasis in the heart of the city, where families can be found every weekend dotted between palm trees and jungle-sized plants, sitting on the grass around narguileh and homemade mezze plates.

## GO FOR THE FESTIVAL, STAY FOR THE WEEKEND

With scores of music, cultural and rural festivals taking place throughout the summer, this season requires careful diary planning. The program of concerts with international and regional stars, also provide an excuse to stay for the weekend and explore the region. Hotels and guesthouses fill up quickly over the festival period, so book as early as possible. Byblos International Festival ([byblosfestival.org](http://byblosfestival.org)) is always on point with its lineup, bringing a mix of iconic musical legends and prolific bands from the more contemporary scene. Don't miss the concert of Arabic rock band, Mashrou' Leila (5 August). The homecoming concert, marking the end of a sold-out worldwide tour of their most recent album "Ibn El Leil," is sure to offer an incredible atmosphere. If you can get a room at the seafront Byblos Sur Mer Hotel (09 548000), you'll likely be rubbing shoulders with the stars at breakfast and the impressive stage built over the sea is just a short walk away.

Beiteddine Festival ([beiteddine.org](http://beiteddine.org)) is set in Beiteddine Palace in the Shouf Mountains, providing an atmospheric



Jean Michel Jarre performs at Baalbeck Festival on 30 July

backdrop to concerts that include British soul and pop singer, Seal (17 July), Romeo and Juliet performed by Ballet Preljocaj (19-20 July) and Iraqi singer Kadhim Al-Sahir (5-6 August), among others. A number of charming accommodation options are nearby, such as guesthouse Beit el Qamar (05 511722, [soukeltayeb.com/beit-el-qamar](http://soukeltayeb.com/beit-el-qamar)) or historic mountain hotel Deir el Oumara (05 511557/8, [deiraloumara.com](http://deiraloumara.com)).

Baalbeck Festival ([baalbeck.org.lb](http://baalbeck.org.lb)) continues a long cultural heritage with a summer of concerts in the breathtaking Roman ruins of the city. Make sure to book for Caracalla Theater's latest musical "Along the Silk Road" (22-23 July) for impressive and colorful dance shows. You also won't want to miss pioneering French electronic musician Jean Michel Jarre (30 July), international music sensation Mika (4 August) and jazz fusion from the Bob James Quartet (12 August). Book at the legendary Palmyra Hotel (08 370230) for a room with a view overlooking the Roman temple ruins or if you're on a budget, Pension Shouman (08 372685) is a great little find.



# Long Live

# Summer Days

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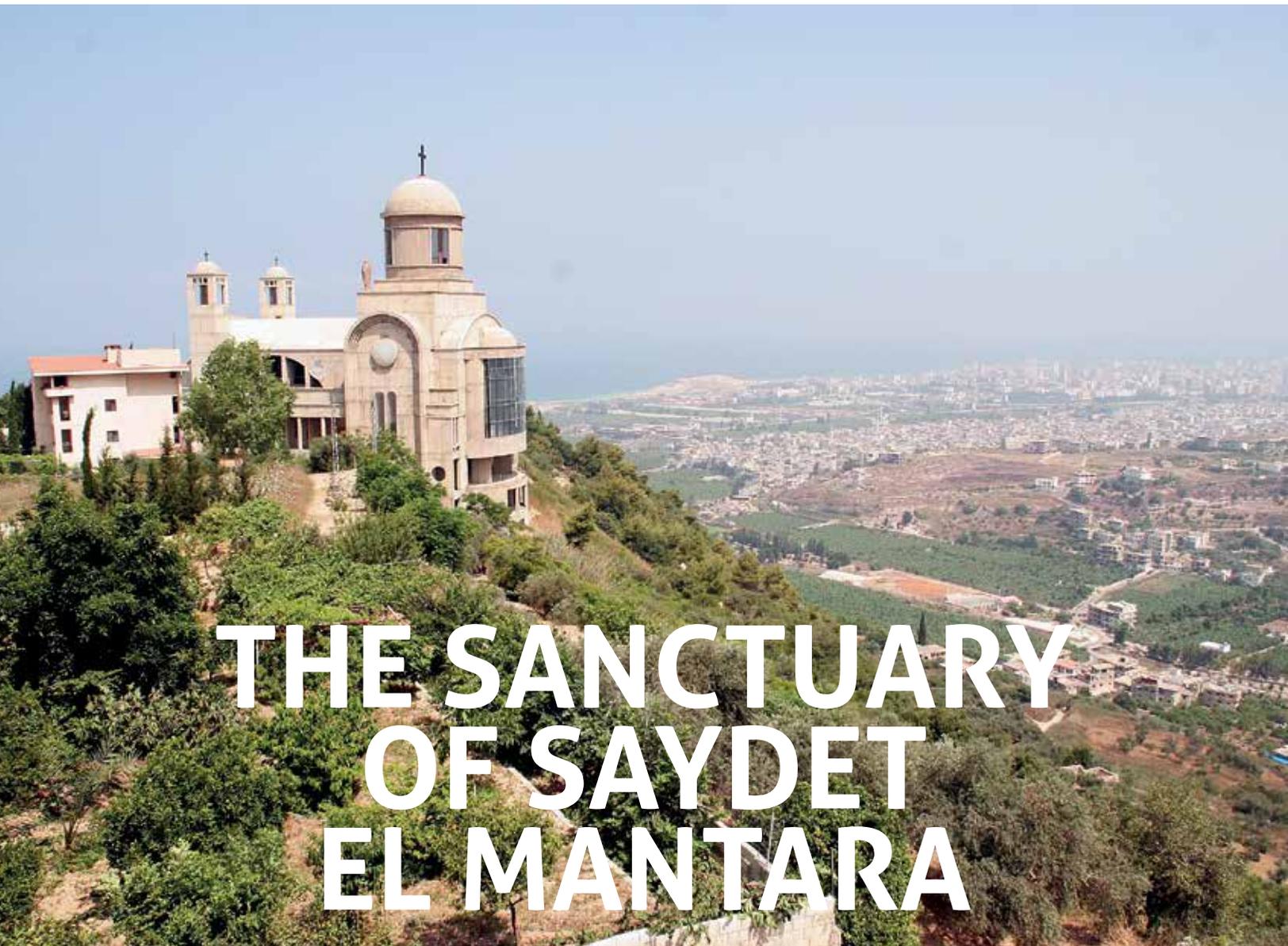
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Religious anthropologist and researcher, and founder of NEOS Tourism consultancy, **Nour Farra-Haddad**, takes us on a trip to one of Lebanon's most important pilgrimage sites, the sanctuary of Saydet El Mantara

In south Lebanon, at the entrance of Maghdouché village, the Greek-Catholic Marian shrine of Saydet El Mantara (Our Lady of Awaiting) is an established national pilgrimage site. Though the site has been recognized by the Ministry of Tourism (MOT) for a number of years, with many travel agencies already having integrated it into their biblical tours, it has only just achieved its status on the world

map of religious tourism, which will be marked at the end of May. The move is the result of years of effort from the religious authorities of the sanctuary and the MOT to achieve its international recognition.

The shrine of Saydet El Mantara is a place of pilgrimage shared by all religious communities and one of the major touristic sites in south Lebanon. Many historians believe that the devotion to the Virgin Mary

in Lebanon, replaced the worship of the goddess, Astarte, the icon of Phoenician worship. So many of today's Christian shrines and temples in the country were converted from Astarte places of worship, including the Shrine of Saydet El Mantara. Many years prior to the birth of Christ, the sanctuary's location was chosen as a watchtower for the priests of the goddess. The traditional tale behind the history of

Saydet El Mantara purports that the Virgin Mary, as a Jewish woman, was prohibited access to some cities at the time. Some popular traditions say that the Virgin Mary waited in a cave in Maghdouché during her pregnancy with Jesus and others during the time Jesus Christ was preaching in Sidon.

Traces of a Roman road near the shrine demonstrate that the cave was probably on the road linking Jerusalem to Sidon, via the ancient Roman city Caesarea Philippi and the site Pnias, both located at the foot of Mount Hermon. In 324AD, Saint Helena, the mother of Emperor Constantine I the Great, built a chapel dedicated to the Virgin Mary at the location where the tower currently stands and the chapel was decorated with an icon of St. Luc. Due to religious persecutions taking place in the 8<sup>th</sup> century, the entrance to the cave was hidden, only to be rediscovered accidentally in 1726 by a shepherd who found an altar and a wooden icon. Since then, it has become a

place of pilgrimage, and in 1860, the Greek-Catholic community took ownership of the land and developed it. In the early 1960s, Bishop Basil Khoury had the hexagonal chapel built, along with a 28m high tower topped with the statue named “Madonna and Child,” by Italian artist Pierrotti. A few years ago construction started on a large basilica with a seated capacity of 1,200, which though incomplete is already decorated with beautiful mosaics and colored glass windows.

On 29 May 2016, the Bishop of Sidon, Mgr. Elie Haddad, with the Association “In the footsteps of Jesus Christ” (a team of specialists who trace the pedestrian routes followed by Jesus Christ in south Lebanon), supported by the MOT, will bring together hundreds of religious personalities, politicians, NGOs and tour operators to celebrate the recognition of the Greek-Catholic shrine of Saydet El Mantara (Awaiting Lady) as an

international Marian shrine. The sanctuary will be relocated on international maps of religious tourism, with the support of the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO). The General Secretary, Dr Taleb Rifai, will be attending the ceremony with several of the organization’s delegates. Through the event, Minister of Tourism Michel Pharaon wishes to develop religious tourism and promote the thousands of religious sites spread across the country.

*For more info contact Rev. Samir Nohra  
 07 200436, melkitesaida.blogspot.com*

## How to get there

Just after Sidon, there is a well indicated turn to the east signposted Maqam Saydet El Mantara, just 75m from the vegetable market. The sanctuary is located at the top of a hill, at the entrance to Maghdouché, overlooking the coast and the city of Sidon. The cave and basilica is accessible for the disabled and open throughout the year.

## What to see

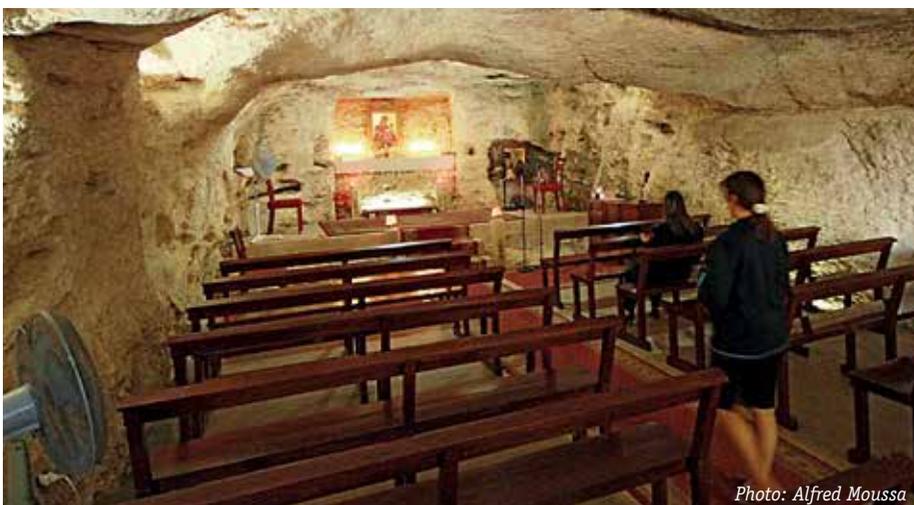
A long promenade of approximately 4,000m<sup>2</sup> separates the chapel and tower. The cave has been restored as a rock chapel and at its entrance is a statue of a Virgin waiting in front of a well. A trail at the sanctuary illustrates the biblical events, which according to oral tradition, are said to have taken place in Lebanon. Along a path lined by rosemary and olive trees, they are commemorated through steles carved in stone. Under the great basilica, a multi-purpose room and hostel have been built. At the entrance of the site there is space for parking and a shop with souvenirs and religious items, a large cafeteria and toilets.

## Celebrations

Every year, on 8 September, the birth of the Virgin Mary is celebrated at the sanctuary. The day before, the statue of the Virgin Mary is carried to the sound of hymns and prayers, with a procession of torches from the square of the village to the sanctuary. A torch-lit walk is also organized on the eve of 1 May, attracting thousands of worshippers.



*Photos: Ministry of Tourism*



*Photo: Alfred Moussa*



Photo: Zeina Zeineddine

# 48 HOURS IN THE SHOUF

A nature-lover's paradise, with cultural and historical heritage to match, the Shouf region provides most visitors with the love-at-first-sight effect. The Shouf Biosphere Reserve's **Zeina Zeineddine** takes us on a tour of what not to miss on a weekend escape

lebanontraveler.com

The Shouf region in Lebanon stretches over a surface of 495km<sup>2</sup> (4.7 percent of Lebanon's entire surface) and is located in the southern part of Mount Lebanon. The region represents the best prospect for long-term conservation: unique scenic land, antiquity, archeological sites, rich mountainous nature, and, above all, authentic people who still maintain their customs

## DAY ONE

### MORNING

While driving up to the Shouf region from Beirut, you will pass by one of Lebanon's prettiest villages, Deir el Qamar. The village has an interesting history that reflects the country's tolerant religious roots, once hosting a church, synagogue and mosque within its central square. Start the day with a coffee on the terrace of Beit al Qamar (03 661411, [soukeltayeb.com/beit-el-qamar](http://soukeltayeb.com/beit-el-qamar)), a traditional Lebanese home transformed into a guesthouse. Afterwards, take a walk along the streets of Deir el Qamar to get a real taste of the beautiful architecture of Lebanon's old villages; characterized by red roofed houses and arched windows.

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*Niha Fortress. Photo: Roland Ragi*

## AFTERNOON

Spend a few hours over a traditional Lebanese lunch at one of the Barouk guesthouses before taking a cultural tour of Barouk with local guide Lilian Amatouri (05 350350/150). Take in archeological landmarks of the area such as Al Noss watermill and the Al Wata grape press, to connect with the village's past. The watermill was built in the Ottoman period and features two limestone arches. Villagers used to gather here during grape harvesting season. The Al Wata press was built on the site of a Roman grape press and has been used to produce grapes from Roman times until the 1970s. Afterwards visit the Rachid Nakhle Cultural Center (03 217651) to see the works of village poet Rachid Nakhle and the Prince of Prose, his son Amin. Watch their short documentary on the natural, historical and touristic attractions of Barouk. In the evening, pass by Barouk's water spring, the main source of drinking water for the village.

## EVENING

Guesthouses in the area can prepare a delicious traditional homemade dinner from seasonal products. If you want to get deeper into the area's food culture, request a gastronomy session at Akram Mahmoud Guesthouse (05 240882, 03 829102), where Akram and his wife will show you how to prepare the Shouf's traditional home cuisine.

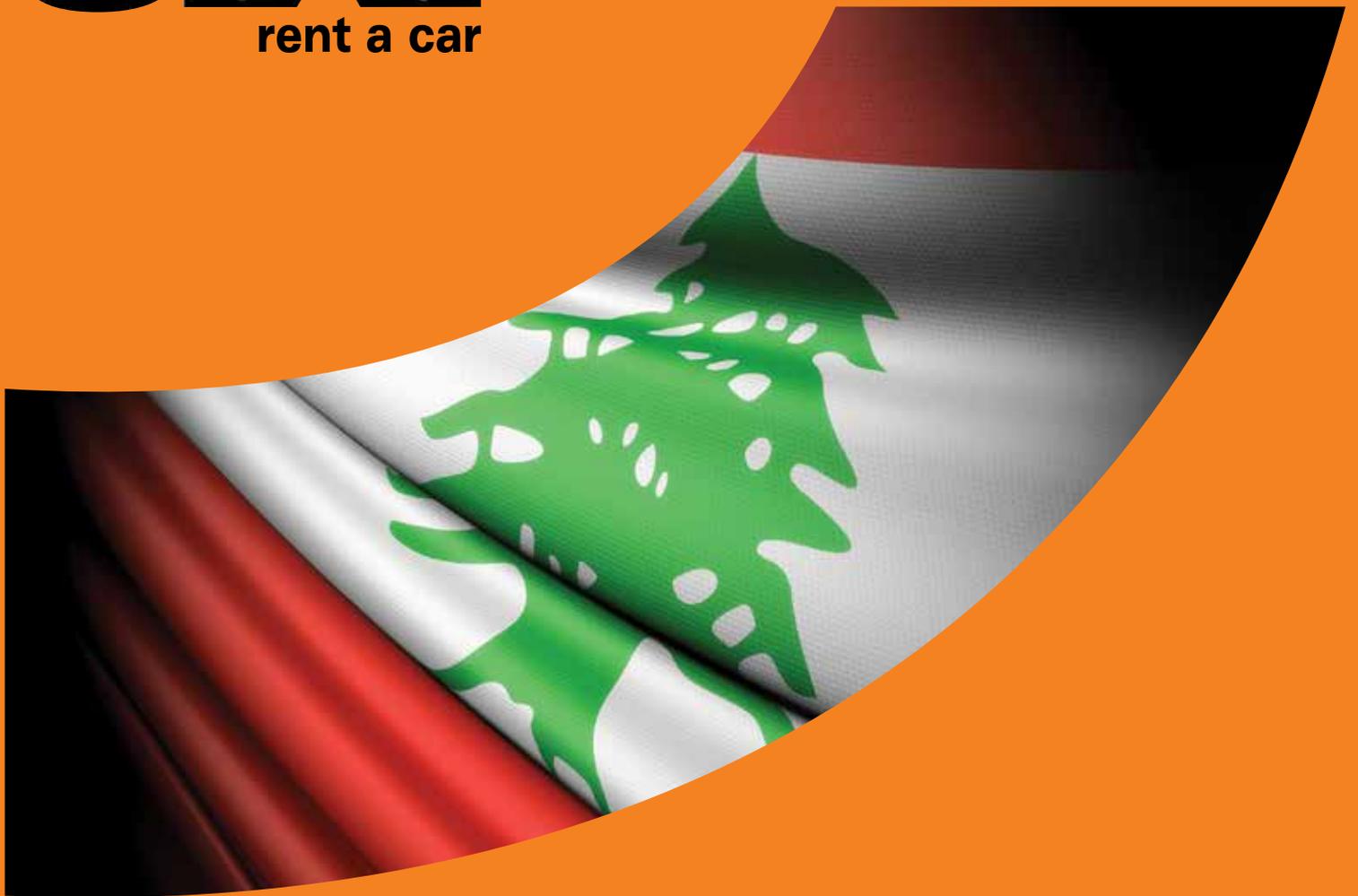
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*Deir El Qamar. Photo: Ministry of Tourism*



*Lebanon's Cedar forest, Barouk*





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## DAY TWO

### MORNING

Enjoy a traditional homemade Lebanese breakfast of homemade fig jams, local cheeses, olives, *manoushe* and warm flatbreads spread with *labneh* and wild thyme at the guesthouse. Then connect with the Barouk countryside with a session of farming or harvesting (*Cezar Mahmoud*, 03 051106). You'll get a taste of village life with local farmers collecting cherries, apples or figs, planting crops and collecting honey from beehives.

### AFTERNOON

Rent a mountain bike from the Shouf Biosphere Reserve (05 241171) at the Barouk Forest entrance and cycle along the trail to enjoy the view of surrounding mountain peaks and green forests. Alternatively, take a shorter hike to Ain Zhalta/Bmohray Cedar Forest entrance and explore one of the oldest documented cedar forests in history, with some trees estimated to be over 2,000 years old, along with a variety of flora and fauna. For a longer hike, explore the mountains of the reserve and pass by Ain Zhalta's spring, taking a break under the shade of the old cedar trees.



A gastronomy session at Akram Mahmoud



Biking in the Shouf Biosphere Reserve, Barouk

### EVENING

Before the sun sets, visit the Assaf brothers' sculpture atelier (*Mansour Assaf*, 03 737528) in Ain Zhalta to see modern sculptures and statues of past and current personalities from history, religion, culture, science and art, carved from Italian marble, limestone, basalt and bronze. The nearby Niha Fortress, a significant historical and cultural monument that is carved into the cliff, dates back to around 975AD and offers stunning views of the valley below. Later, take dinner at the Houssam El Eid Guesthouse (03 217299, 71 131104) in Ain Zhalta to enjoy a traditional dish such as *shish barak* with sumac, *emayshi* or macaroni with *keshek* or at one of the many nearby restaurants.

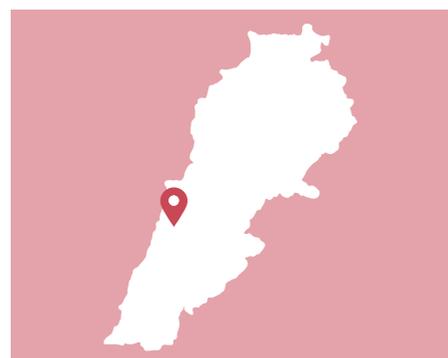
Shouf Biosphere Reserve  
05 350250/150  
shoufcedar.com,  Shouf Cedar Reserve

### Where to sleep

In Barouk, stay in **Akram Mahmoud Guesthouse** (05 240882, 03 829102) or **Boustany Guesthouse** (05 240036); both can accommodate six guests. In Ain Zhalta stay at the **Houssam El Eid Guesthouse** (03 217299), which also can host 6 guests or stay at **Calmera Hotel** (05 240542).

### Where to eat

Breakfast, lunch and dinner can all be provided by local guesthouses, even if you're not staying overnight. In Barouk there are a number of good restaurants located next to the river offering Lebanese mezze and rural dishes, such as **Baytna Restaurant Al Barouk** (05 240540), **Al Challalat Restaurant** (03 387228), **Al Midyaf Parks and Restaurant** (05 240578) and **Tourist Restaurant** (05 240587). For more options and info visit shoufcedar.org





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# CHAMPION OF THE WATER

Lebanese sportsman **Silvio Chiha** has mastered everything from judo to water skiing. But it's his character and commitment to Lebanon that has made him the champion of a generation. He speaks to LT on his training routine, motivation and favorite destinations around the country

Silvio Chiha certainly knows a thing or two about dedication. At the age of 26, the fresh-faced athlete is already a champion of the Asian waterski world and holds a long list of accolades and titles in everything from wakeboarding to skiing and judo. Between his waterski training sessions in Dubai or Europe, the release of his recent book and film, "Lebanon Through My Eyes," and his role as an ambassador for drug addiction NGO Oum el Nour, Chiha also ran as Jounieh's Municipality candidate in the 2016 elections. A tall order you might think by any measure, but for someone who started skiing at the age of two and competing at 14, Chiha knows what it means to put in the hours. "It all started when I was very young and my mum used to encourage me to go and train in all kinds of sports: judo, tennis, football, basketball... everything," Chiha says. "After a while I realized I had a talent for skiing, water skiing and judo and started competing. Once I started winning it became an addiction." A multi-talented sportsman, Chiha has topped national and international

competitions, across a wide range of sports, though its waterskiing he's excelled in. His most recent title was first place in the Asian Water Ski Championship 2015.

**When your brain tells you to stop you have 60 percent more to give**

”

Though Chiha has been flying the Lebanese flag in the international sports world for many years now, it was his participation in LBC's prime-time reality TV show "Splash," where celebrities compete in a pool, that first brought his name to wide public recognition. Since then, he's become probably the most recognizable face in the Lebanese sports world. But behind the public persona and competition wins, are hours of behind-the-scenes effort. Though waterskiing requires training just twice a day

for 20 minutes, a strict health and fitness regime is essential. "My lifestyle is very difficult, it's very strict. I pay attention to my food, the way I train and I run a lot," he says. Mental determination is also key. "I have the kind of character where I don't give up. I'm always pushing my limits. There is a theory that I believe that when your brain tells you to stop you have 60 percent more to give. I have learned to push myself to those extremes."

## THROUGH HIS EYES

Created and managed by Sportscode and produced by Lebanese photographer and videographer Charbel Bouez, the short film "Lebanon Through My Eyes" was released in the summer of 2015. Filmed around the country, the video highlights some of Lebanon's lesser-known destinations, showing Chiha on adventures in breathtaking locations everywhere from Anfeh to Chouwane. He is captured elegantly flipping and cutting through the water on a wakeboard, while effortlessly manoeuvring



Photos: Akl Yazbeck / Sportscode Images

sharp bends and tight spaces; along a tree-lined river, the north Lebanon coastline and lakes surrounded by mountains.

“Most of the places [featured] were new discoveries for me. It was an amazing experience because I discovered Chouwane, Qornet el Sawda and Chekka,” Chiha says. “Though I knew some of the places, it was the first time I had gone so deep into them to see that they are so rich. I love Chekka because I can waterski there without a lot of crowds, boats or jetskis. And Ehden too is one of the most beautiful places in the Middle East.” After the video went viral, the idea came about to create a book, under the same name. “We had a photographer with us who took some amazing shots of the whole project so when the movie was released, we decided to put them together in a book.” The book was published earlier this year, with all proceeds going to Lebanese NGO Bassma ([bassma.org](http://bassma.org)), dedicated to rehabilitating and empowering deprived families to reach self-sufficiency. “I think

what kept Lebanon going during and after the war was the family spirit we have; so the best thing I could do is support an NGO which supports families.”

Having had to travel for training in waterskiing, because of the lack of facilities in Lebanon, Chiha is well aware of the difficulties facing the country’s future sporting talents and he’s set on sharing the importance of sports with a younger generation. “I am trying to go to every school I can, to tell these kids not to give up. It’s a project I started in collaboration with my media partner, Sports961. This country needs the younger generation to find their passion and build a future. They need to have hope.” Despite already being a champion in several sports, Chiha’s ambitions haven’t shrunk. “I want to fly the Lebanese flag all over the world; to continue to show the beautiful parts of my country. To show the right picture of Lebanon and that we still have a country to fight for.”

[silviochiha.com](http://silviochiha.com), [teamnine.com](http://teamnine.com)

## WHERE TO LEARN

### Seven Seas

Experience life in the fast lane and rent a boat for the day from the Zaitunay Bay-located Seven Seas. 01 379770.

### Batroun Water Sports

Run by windsurf champion Malek Daou, who has dedicated his life to teaching surfing and windsurfing, Batroun Water Sports offers a variety of single classes or 13-hour courses. 03 156402, [batrounwatersports.com](http://batrounwatersports.com)

### Lagon Yacht & Ski Club

Located in Jounieh Bay, Lagon Yacht and Ski Club has expertise in wakeboarding, waterskiing, ski pontoon and sailing. Spread across a vast 9,000m2, the resort is also known for its waterskiing and nautical shows, so if you prefer spectator sports, you’re in the right place. 09 931380

# BISRI: A RIVERSIDE ROADTRIP

Biodiversity conservationist **Elsa Sattout** uncovers Bisri, a little-known village located in the heart of a valley where nature meets history



On the way to the valley of Bisri, also known as Nahr El Awali, beautiful landscapes and stories from the surrounding villages unfold. The journey reveals a rich region in need of further exploration; a calming landscape in which to hike in or bike through when you're in search of a break from everyday life. A drive through the area's rolling hills offers spectacular views from whichever of its multiple entrances you access the valley from: Iqlim el Kharoub in the Shouf, the mouth of Nahr El Awali at the coast, Sidon or Jezzine.

If entering the valley from Al Awali River, on your way to Bisri valley, endless rows of carob trees interrupt your field of sight in Alman and Joune villages, until you reach the hill's summit. But in the openings of those green borderlines you can glimpse the puzzled landscape, made up of mosaics of olive groves, fruit tree orchards and the abandoned terraces of Eshmun valley.

Make your first stop the Temple of Eshmun, also known as Bustan El Sheikh. Built in the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC, the temple was once a worship site dedicated to Eshmun, the Phoenician God of healing. It is believed to be connected to the nearby Temple of Marj Bisri. Nowadays, the temple features a wealth of different architectural styles influenced by the first Persian empire as well as Greek and Roman empires.

In Joune, ruins of the castle of Lady Hester Stanhope (1773-1839) still stand on a

north-facing hill. The British explorer of the Near East was proclaimed the Queen of Palmyra by the Bedouins, before becoming a renowned prophet in the Druze region in Lebanon. After Joune, visit Deir El Moukhalles (the Monastery of Saint Savior), surrounded by stone pine forests and vineyards. The monastery was founded in 1733 and has one of the earliest printers and rare manuscripts. Visit its beautiful old church and marvel at the collection of icons from another time. The priests have numerous stories to tell such as that of the Well of Kuzma. It was named after an atheist from Dyar Baker, on the border of Turkey, who dug the well up in 1775. Kuzma later converted to Christianity and continued the rest of his life as a priest in the monastery. In the same area, don't miss the Deir Saydet El Bechara (Convent of Lady of Annunciation, *Sister Najwa Mehanna, 03 164931*). Dating back to 1737 and famous for the annual Holy Cross celebration on 13 September, it offers cheap accomodation.

Only after a long and scenic drive through the valley will you spot Bisri village, located where the road ends and an old church dating back to 1252 is located. The small village, 60km from Beirut and at 400m altitude, overlooks farmlands and offers a beautiful natural habitat. Here you can see colorful birds such as bee-eaters, along with thrushes, great tits and blackbirds and hear the corn bunting jangling their keys. In private gardens, traditional flower varieties

can still be seen such as snapdragon, roses and spur-valerian. Continuing on through the valley you will see the remains of the Temple of Marj Bisri; four black granite columns and decorative stone blocks, along with the historical church of Saint Moses El Habchi and the remains of Saint Sophia's Monastery.

While rambling through the valley, you will come across Deir Saydet El Intikal (Monastery of Our Lady of Assumption), which also offers accomodation. Built in 1733 on the farmlands of Kashkaya, the monastery's land expanded over the farmland of Kessaret el Zaaroura and Debaghah and includes a church from 1790. Pine forests border the road down to the miraculous Church of our Lady of Rugged Land (1739). It was damaged by the war and rebuilt many times.

At the end of the day, take the exit of Mazraet el Matehne down to the coast to Sidon and end your journey with a coffee fronting the Mediterranean sea.

## Where to eat

Plenty of restaurants in the area offer traditional Lebanese mezze such as **Tal El Qamar** (71 898921) in Joune, **Istirahat El A'ilat** (03 411262) in Bisri Valley and **Vall Vai** (03 764972), if you arrive from the Sidon road.

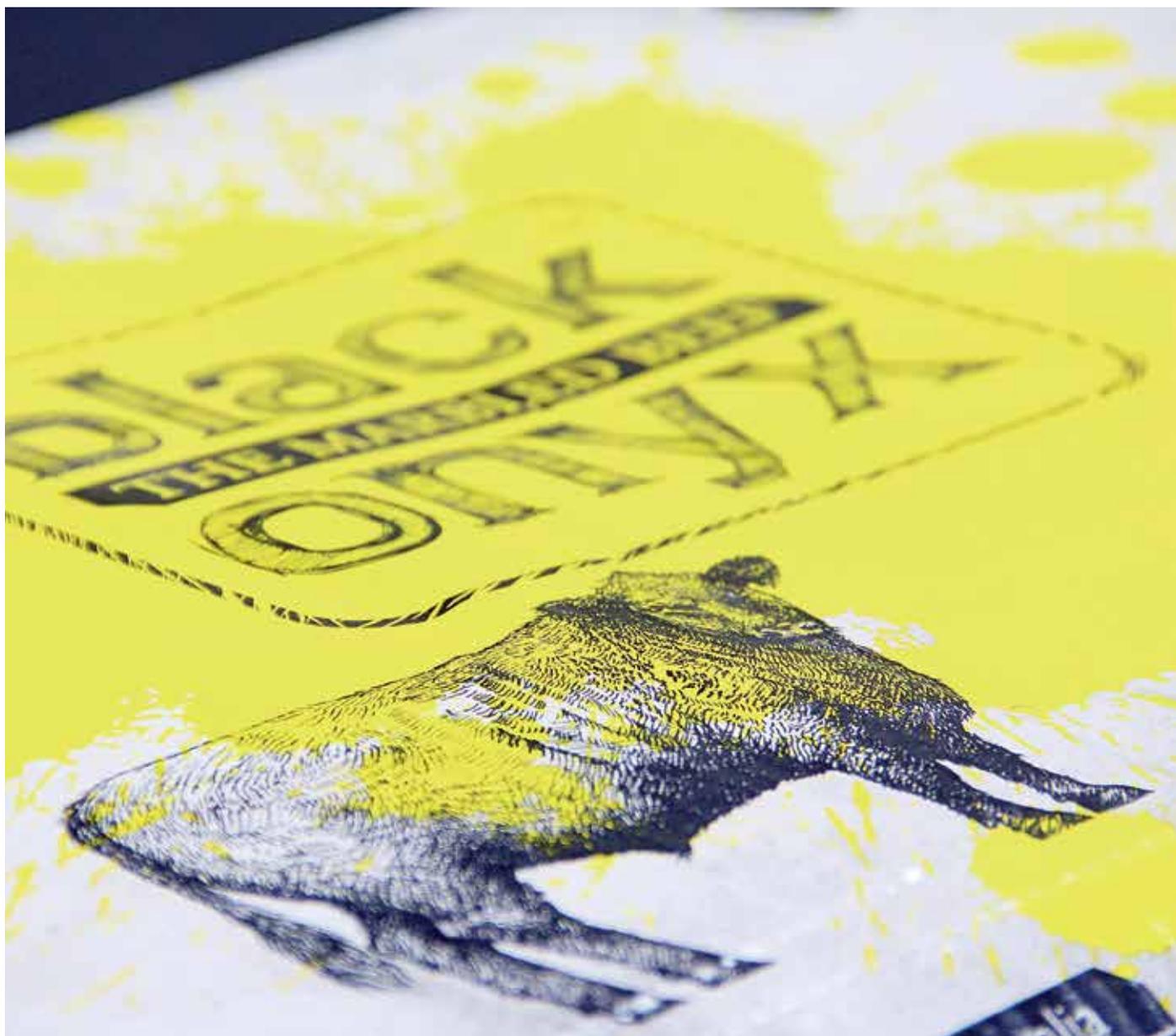
## What to buy

The convents sell traditional local products such as rose water and orange flower water, water of sage and oregano, syrups such as rose, sour orange and mint, a variety of pickles, olives and olive oil, carob molasses, local wine and *arak*, *labneh*, *zaatar* mix for *manousheh*, oregano and sumac.



Photos: Elsa Sattout





# LEON SEMERJIAN: BACK TO THE ROOTS OF CURING MEAT

Foodie and meat lover **Leon Semerjian** has just established his business of curing meat and making sausages. The Food Heritage Foundation's Zeinab Jeambey meets the young entrepreneur in his industrial kitchen in Baabdat and delves into his story



Sujuk: the finished product

**Tell me about yourself in three statements.**

I have a background in hotel management. I am Armenian. I have a passion for cooking

**What got you into curing meat?**

When I started cooking in Lebanon, I realized how hard it was to get quality ingredients at fair prices. The Lebanese market is way behind in the business of meat curing; we only have a few products and a few artisans who specialize in that. I love meat and I couldn't find the quality I sought on the market. So I raised a pig, fed him peanuts and the result was quality meat. I decided to make sausages with the intestines and this is how it started.

**What technique do you use for curing and why?**

I respect my meat and I treat it as it deserves to be treated. This is why I use the air-drying technique, while monitoring temperature and humidity. Air-drying requires a lot of time but the effect on texture and flavor is noticeable.

**What was your first product and how many types do you currently produce?**

I started making *basturma* [air-dried cured beef] and the end result was very good. Now I make *sujuk* [dried spicy beef sausage], *makanek* [spicy sausage], and wood-smoked sausages using hickory wood. I am still in the experimentation phase and the recipes are evolving. My *basturma* and *makanek* mix is final and I'm very satisfied with the result.

**What kind of meat do you use and where do you source it from?**

I struggle to find local ingredients of the quality standard I look for but I don't mind going to the four corners of the country if I can get that. At the moment, I use imported black Angus meat from Australia to make my *basturma*.

**What spices do you use for the different products you make?**

For *basturma*, I use fenugreek seeds, paprika, cumin and garlic. For smoked sausages, I use Cajun spices and black pepper. For *sujuk*, I use cumin, black pepper and garlic and for *makanek* I use coriander seeds, cinnamon and white wine.

**I respect my meat and I treat it as it deserves to be treated. This is why I use the air-drying technique**



**Any tips for cooking the different types of sausages?**

For sausages and *sujuk*, remove the casing and cook over low heat for about five minutes. For the brave hearts, eat them raw. This is what I do.

**To order, contact Leon Semerjian on 71 924414; food-heritage.org**



Leon Semerjian preparing sujuk



Sujuk being air-dried



Slices of basturma



Photos: Manal Naji

# HEY! DABKE: MORE THAN JUST A DANCE



Photo: Caracalla

Spanning a long tradition, dabke is considered more of a cultural cornerstone than a mere folk dance. Practiced everywhere from Lebanon to Palestine, Syria, Jordan and Iraq, **LT** explores the roots of its heritage and unique interpretations

In Lebanon, dabke is closely intertwined with the country's cultural heritage. The legendary Lebanese composer-songwriter duo the Rahbani Brothers created a whole cultural movement with their musical plays, from the late '50s to the late '70s. With their memorable songs, colorful costumes, witty dialogues and lively dabke dance routines, their iconic musicals carved out a fundamental part of the dance's legacy. Starring Lebanese singer Fairouz, Assi and Mansour Rahbani made musicals that were deeply rooted in a village setting and, as they continued into the '70s, they are said to have provided an empowering cultural alternative that inspired national pride in a time of political unrest.

## HOW DABKE STARTED

Unity is at the core of dabke and its origins

are uniquely linked with the design of village houses from the past. Their roofs were constructed from wood, straw and mud, meaning villagers had to press the mud together to prevent cracking or leakage. The task required more than one person and so the owner of the house would enlist the help of their neighbors. Together they would stand side by side in a synchronized manner and begin to forcefully stomp. This step was referred to as the al-awneh, meaning help. "The main events in the villages were the weddings or the birth of someone, and dabke was the main joyful part of a celebration or an event like that," explains Youla Noujaim, the organizer of Jabalna, a mountain festival that dedicated their 2015 program to dabke.

## VARIATIONS OF THE DANCE

Dabke has been modified in some regions

of Lebanon, though it still retains the same roots and atmosphere. Different forms of the dance also exist in the Levant and its influence has spread to the Arab world. Dabke has remained a common cultural thread practiced by different communities.

Danced across Mount Lebanon, Dalouna is one of the more popular types of dabke. Consisting of a six beat measure, it's often accompanied by a tabla drum, a mizmar copper flute, and a signature of clapping sounds. In Baalbeck, Ra'sit al Aarja (the limping dance), runs at a slower pace. The movement is divided into 12 beats and features a bowed string instrument called a rebab, a minjera flute and tabla drum.

## THE DABKE TEACHER

Born in the Lebanese village of Abadiyeh, Malek Andary is a choreographer and dancer

with a passion for dabke. In addition to offering workshops in Germany, Spain, France and Serbia, he is an official member of the International Dance Council (CID) based in the UNESCO headquarters in Paris. "When I was a little kid I loved the music in plays so much and wanted to dance. In my village they [used] to replicate the Rahbani plays and we used to sneak around as kids, watch them and memorize what they were doing. At the age of 14, I started to train the dabke with them [and] in 1996 the director, Wassim Hassan, encouraged me to start teaching dabke," Andary explains.

Although Andary graduated with a BA in archaeology he followed his passion and decided to start teaching dabke. "I loved theater more. I worked for many Lebanese directors. I worked for Mansour Rahbani and the Baalbeck International Festival." He founded the Marhabtain Organization which aims to continue the customs of Lebanese folklore and spread the knowledge of dabke's heritage and practices across Lebanon and around the world. The organization currently offers a series of workshops and continues to collect archival footage and music to

build its database of knowledge surrounding dabke. But, as Andary asserts, "we are still growing and need further support."

Andary explains that there is a difference between the roles that men and woman play in a performance. "The woman puts her hands over her eyes, [while] the man puts his hand on the back of his head as he holds the tarboush [fez] and kafeeyeh [scarf]," elaborating further that female dancers don't jump with two feet, but softly, because costumes didn't allow much mobility.

With a workshop in Senegal on the horizon, Andary aims to continue to shed light on this unique custom. "I would like to share this with the rest of the world to let other cultures know about us."

### REVIVING DABKE

The most recent edition of the Jabalna Festival also contributed to further visibility of dabke. Emerging nearly a decade ago, the ecotourism project invites the different villages from around the Shouf mountains to be a part of the festival. Their 2015 edition, which centered around the theme "Dabkeh Must Go On," saw more than 6,000

participants flock to the Shouf Mountains.

At the festival, dancing troupes gathered in Maasser al Shouf to showcase more than 20 different types of dabke. "Each troupe taught their audiences the different steps and it was amazing. You had people dancing from 11am till 11pm," Noujaim says.

Noujaim acknowledges that the summer's trash crisis was a sort of catalyst for the theme. "I think because that summer a lot of people were lost between the politics, the garbage, and all the other problems it was something to grab onto. We had the idea of dabke, because dabke for us is [a way of] preserving the culture." The festival's concept resonated well with younger festival goers. "In Jabalna you always have this magical kind of mix that goes from the mountains to the Beirutis," Noujaim says.

Dabke endures as an important tradition practiced throughout Lebanon and a vibrant custom that unites people from all walks of life; from the older generation who are more familiar with its customs to a new wave of youthful audiences.

*Words by Jimmy Dabbagh*



Photo: Caracalla



Photo: Caracalla



Photo: Ministry of Tourism

## Experience dabke

### Caracalla Dance School

This dance school maintains a reputation at the forefront of dance education in Lebanon. Affiliated with Caracalla Dance Theater, this space offers an enriching variety of dance styles from folklore dance, jazz, hip-hop, classical ballet, contemporary modern as well as international workshops and much more. 01 499905, [caracalladance.com](http://caracalladance.com)

### Marhabtein

Charged with a vision to preserve Lebanese folklore customs, this organization also offers a series of unique dabke related workshops, which aim to educate, engage and expose audiences to the many facets of this historic dance form. [f Marhabtein.org](https://www.facebook.com/Marhabtein.org)

### Jabalna Festival

Taking place annually, this eclectic festival brings together different dabke troupes from all over Lebanon for a vibrant display of dance education, festivities and food in the Shouf. 05 350250, [f Jabalna](https://www.facebook.com/Jabalna)

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# DESTINATION: HASROUN

The village of **Hasroun** is located in the Bsharreh district of north Lebanon. Its name derives from the Phoenician word for fortress, possibly a result of its location 1,400m above sea level. Perched atop the Qadisha Valley, Hasroun offers visitors unparalleled views, beautiful natural trails, religious sites and a much-needed break from city life



*Photo: Ramzi Semrani*

## ① Escape the concrete jungle

Hasroun is often called “the Rose of the Mountain” which can be attributed to the many red-tiled roofs that color the green foliage surrounding it. A beautiful village in Lebanon’s northern region, Hasroun reminds visitors of a different time, with traditional stone houses and low-rise buildings. The most common home you’ll find in Hasroun is the typical Lebanese “central-hall” style house, a two-story building with arched windows and high ceilings, seamlessly combining the natural views outside with the structure. Take your camera for a tour to discover the village’s beautiful architecture.



## ② Embark on a spiritual journey

The village of Hasroun is predominantly Maronite, known for its many historic religious sites that draw crowds of pilgrims each year. One of the earliest texts mentioning the village dates back to the late 13<sup>th</sup> century in Bishop Abraham Al-Hadathy’s writings. It documents the invasion of Hasroun and the persecution of its people, suggesting that the village was populated even prior to that time. The church of St. Jude is one of the most important archaeological landmarks to visit and some sources trace its construction back to Crusader times. St. Jude, one of the 12 Apostles of Jesus, is also the Patron Saint of Hasroun, thus the church holds great symbolic value. It is characterized by a short bell tower and a low, arched entrance, carved out of the stone wall that surrounds it. Next to St. Jude is Al Saydeh church. Built in the 19<sup>th</sup> century it was renovated in 1918, its clock and arcade added in 1924. The bell rings on the hour, five minutes past and half past. Another mechanism marks the day of the month. The clock has to be wound manually twice a week. A short walk from Hasroun is the Patriarchate of the Maronite church, located at the top of the mountain in Dimane. The building was constructed in 1938 and offers spectacular views of the Qadisha Valley.

## ③ Dive into Lebanese history

The village has a number of notable visitors and figures among its population. The French writer, poet and politician Lamartine wrote about the Hasroun’s red-tiled roofs, likening them to a bouquet of roses and French military general and statesman Général de Gaulle stayed at Hotel Awad, today a private residence. The Maronite bishop and librarian Giuseppe Simone Assebani hails from Hasroun and the village gave the Maronite Church two patriarchs: Jacob and Simon Awad. The famous Cinema Dunia in Beirut had its homonymous sister in the village and though the movie theater is no longer operational, its location endures as a testament to a former era. The first pharmacy in the Bshareh district was established in Hasroun, owned by the late Joseph Boustany, known as the “doctor of the region.” Though the establishment shut down after his death, its memory remains a source of pride for locals.



## 4 Get lost

Hasroun is known for its cool climate and fresh mountain air, which beckon visitors to explore the village. Follow in the footsteps of travelers and painters from all over the world who were inspired and charmed by the village. Emily Anne Beaufort lauded Hasroun as “the most luxuriant spot...in Lebanon” in her book “Egyptian sepulchers and Syrian shrines” (1862), noting that “every inch of soil is cultivated and the place is buried in thickets and forests of thorns.” The Egyptian artist Marguerite Yazbek painted landscapes of the village, juxtaposing its fiery red roofs with the green of the cedars surrounding it. Get inspired and take a walk around the old souk to discover what memorabilia, souvenirs, and fresh local produce are on offer. Visitors can enjoy seasonal fruits like plums, apricots, and apples or shop for handmade jewelry and religious memorabilia. Be sure to enjoy a stroll by one of Hasroun’s many quaint fountains found all over the village and afterwards while away the hours in one of the village’s many traditional cafes, where visitors can enjoy narguileh and a game of backgammon, such as Ras Al Nabeh (06 590118).

## 5 Hike along the LMT

One of the best ways to explore the village’s natural heritage is to hike the valley and mountain trails surrounding it. Hasroun is a starting point on the Lebanese Mountain Trail, a 470km-long hiking trail extending from Aandqet in the north to Marjaayoun in the south. The trail continues through the neighboring villages of Bazaoun, Bqorqacha and Bqaa Kafra, passing cedar trees, ending in the historic town of Bsharreh. The trek includes a stop at Nabaa Ghrakiya, a well-known fresh water spring in Hasroun that is said to cure kidney disease. Immerse yourself in the area and trek with a local guide such as Georges Zougheib (70 105546), Joe Rahme (03 832060) or Pierre Germanos (03 378403). For more information, visit the Lebanon Mountain Trail Association website ([lebanontrail.org](http://lebanontrail.org)).

Words by Reem Joudi for L’Hôte Libanais

### Where to sleep

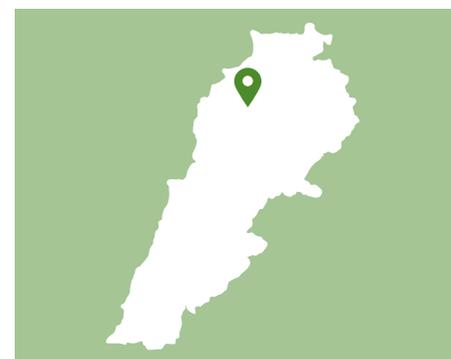
A member of L’Hôte Libanais’ guesthouses, **Dar Qadisha** gives its visitors remarkable views, cozy lodging and unparalleled hospitality. To book your room in this 112-years-old, traditional home visit their website ([hotelibanais.com](http://hotelibanais.com)).

### Where to eat

If you fancy a snack, there are plenty of bakeries in the village to choose from offering manoushe, saj and kaak such as **Leba El Amrieh’s bakery** (03 489904, opens from the end of May) and **Georgette Badra’s bakery** (71 190633). For delicious giant homemade pizzas, head to **Charbel Touma’s pizzeria** (71 006192). His brother Elie Touma’s snack **Yakka 3ol 3ol** (03 783438) is known for its grilled chicken sandwiches. On a sunny summer’s day there’s nothing like the ice-cream of **Surgel** (03 191539, [surgellb.com/branches](http://surgellb.com/branches), opens in May). Jacqueline Helwanji, your host at **Dar Qadisha** (same details as above), prepares local dishes and generous breakfast spreads for her guests. Those with a sweet tooth must try her homemade jams and preserves, which she makes using fruits and vegetables from her garden.



Dar Qadisha guesthouse. Photo: Natheer Halawani





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# THE ARTISAN DEVOTEES

Through her company Comptoir des Artisans, **Zeina Klat** is helping promote Lebanese craftsmanship and securing its place in the future



Sitting in seaside café Al-Rawda overlooking the Mediterranean, Zeina Klat takes in her surroundings with the same sort of wonder and appreciation you would expect from a first-time visitor to Beirut's shore. "I love this place," she says with characteristic brio. "It's empty now but in the past this café was filled with artists and writers who would come here to relax and talk about their work."

It seems quite fitting then, that this is the location where we sit down to discuss the vision behind her company, Comptoir des Artisans, which promotes traditional handmade products created by local craftspeople from all over Lebanon.

A connoisseur of eclectic taste, Klat is a cosmopolitan, forward-thinking businesswoman who is fiercely passionate about promoting Lebanon's rich cultural heritage. "We have so much expertise here, so many amazing artists from the older generation. It's a shame that most people don't even know about them," she says.

With Comptoir des Artisans she is trying to change that, and while she is passionate about preserving past traditions, her brand is not simply about nostalgia. On the contrary, the products she sells – a potpourri of offerings in steel, rattan, Sarafand glass and leather – are very of-the-moment; modern but informed by traditional craftsmanship.

Indeed, the company defies easy categorization and that suits Klat just fine. "I like to be involved in many different things; I don't like to be put in a box." Comptoir des Artisans sells everything from leather bags, hats and jewelry to cutlery, candles, and home accessories. "Everyone around me advised to focus on just one thing, but that bores me. I like to bring different things together, to introduce people to new products," she explains.

She says that finding expert craftspeople to work with her is often half the fun and that most of her discoveries often rely on a good dose of serendipity. "I just look at a map, pick a region, visit it and see who I can find," she explains, laughing. She prefers traveling solo in order to be open to unexpected possibilities.

She has a showroom in Ain Aar, which she opens on request, but the majority of her clients contact her through social media. Her popular Instagram page features photos and clips of Comptoir des Artisans products, the stories behind them and a glimpse into the lives of those who make them. "I especially love introducing the younger generation to these amazing artisans so that they can gain a greater appreciation," she says. "I have been receiving such positive feedback and it gives me an added boost to continue doing what I am doing."

An unforeseen consequence of her venture has been the organic growth of a network

of like-minded people who all believe in the importance of supporting local artisans. As her network grows, so does her ambition. "I want to ultimately export our Lebanese designs."

While she doesn't have extensive formal training, Klat has a natural eye and an innate understanding of design which she brings to the table in her collaborations with artisans. "We have built strong relationships and they are very open to trying new things. We brainstorm together and all the ideas are born in the moment," she explains.

The venture is not purely commercial for Klat. She considers Comptoir des Artisans to be, to a certain degree, a cultural catalyst, a platform where local expertise can be celebrated. Since opening a year-and-a-half ago, she has grown increasingly concerned that in the near future there won't be any artisans left in Lebanon.

"Many craftspeople have told me that after they pass [away] they don't want their children taking over the trade because the market just isn't there anymore," she explains, ruefully. "But, we can change that by exposing consumers and cultivating a certain taste for these products. This is the future. This is the new luxury."

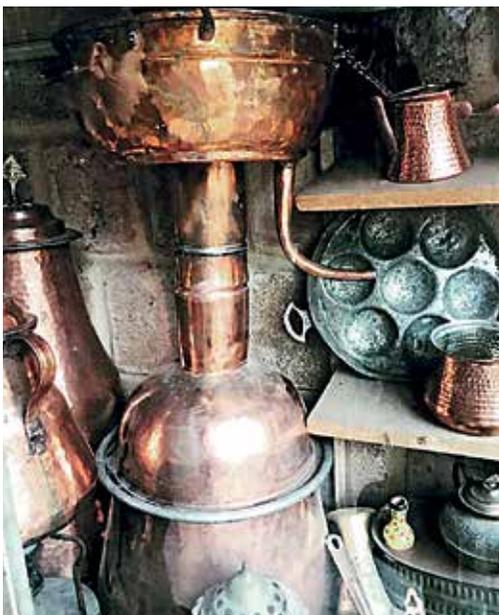
*Words by Mehrnoush Shafiei*

*Ain Aar showroom, open every Wed, 10am-2pm, 70 170636, [f](#) [i](#) [c](#) Comptoirdesartisans*



“

I just look at a map, pick a region, visit it and see who I can find



# BEIRUT DESIGN WEEK



Beirut Design Week, the country's biggest annual event dedicated to all forms of design in Lebanon, returns for its fifth edition with a focus on growing sustainably. Its founder, **Doreen Toutikian**, speaks to LT on its evolution and how the design community has grown

Now into its fifth year, Beirut Design Week (BDW) has become Lebanon's most important annual event for the design and architecture community. Taking place between 20-29 May, under the theme "Growing Sustainably," this year's edition features more than 180 local and international design studios over nine days of workshops, events and exhibitions. For the first time, BDW will be centralized in KED, a transformed factory in Beirut's industrial area, Quarantina, that's been empty for decades. Its basement features a sound and light installation that explores the history of Quarantina and it will host the festival's opening and closing parties, local exhibitions and a pop-up store with a focus on sustainable design. "Going with the whole idea of sustainability, we really wanted to use this area to create awareness about how people have been using this area as a dump, and throwing their trash here," says BDW Founder Doreen Toutikian. "We wanted a building that is ours, to renovate and revive it. We designed it from scratch with the owner, so it really had the identity that we wanted. We also really want people to see the beauty of this industrial area."

This year's theme was a natural outcome of the country's trash crisis, with the BDW team wanting to explore the more sustainable side of design and integrate it into everything they do. "[As designers]



we produce things and we know the value of resources. We have the power to create more awareness about sustainability and to change behavior," Toutikian says.

Highlights of BDW will take place at the festival's headquarters KED, including special guest Dutch designer Daan Roosegaarde for the opening night; installations, growing mushrooms inside the building's elevator shaft, along with a weekend conference on sustainability. In addition, BDW spreads across the city, focusing on a different district within Beirut each day, including the vibrant design scenes in Gemmayzeh, Saifi Village, Achrafieh, Hamra and Mar Mikhael, where a series of special exhibitions, open studios, workshops and networking events will bring the city to life.

Since Beirut Design Week was founded, Toutikian has witnessed the festival grow, alongside Lebanon's design community. What began as an event spotlighting 5-10 designers, has evolved into a huge platform. "Design has almost become something with more value than art," Toutikian says. "There is a lot more investment in it, more design magazines, boutiques, and hotels. We're also giving a bigger chance to young designers to prove themselves in the market."

01 249082, [beirutdesignweek.org](http://beirutdesignweek.org)



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Photo: Canvas Magazine

# LEBANON'S SILK LEGACY

The regal **Silk Museum** of Bsous sheds light on the importance of Lebanon's past silk industry and man's interaction with nature

Surrounded by olive groves and a large garden of mulberry trees, wild lavender and grape vines, is a beautiful old stone building that dates back to around 1890. Located in Bsous, the former silk factory is a remnant of another time, when silk production was one of Lebanon's major trades during the 19<sup>th</sup> century and silk factories were dotted all over the country. Today, it is a museum that sheds light on the significance of Lebanon's past silk trade and the process of creating silk.

## THE MUSEUM'S FOUNDATION

The museum was founded by husband and wife George and Alexandra Asseily. George's family company Domtex was one of the

largest textile businesses in Lebanon during the '60s, producing and selling sheets, blankets, towels and all bed and bathroom textiles and exporting around the world, so it was a natural interest in textiles that led to the museum's foundation.

During the 1970s, George and Alexandra spent time in Europe visiting silk museums, which sparked a discovery of the importance of Lebanon's former silk industry. "Silk used to constitute 45 percent of the GDP of Mount Lebanon, with 175 factories producing silk yarn in Lebanon, mostly for export. When I discovered that, I thought my God; we must have a museum where we can show how silk

is produced and how important the industry was in Lebanon," Asseily says from his office in Sanayeh. Upon returning to Lebanon they set up the NGO the Association of Memory and Development (aMED), with some friends, and began transforming the silk factory into a museum in which to organize exhibitions and educate on silk production.

## LEBANON'S IMPORTANT SILK INDUSTRY

The Silk Museum reveals the importance of the silk industry and trade on Lebanon's past economy to visitors, having its impact even on the city's urban planning and social development. "Because of silk, Beirut Port had to be extended to allow big ships to come into the ship yard. Then the first bank



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came to Lebanon because of silk export. Saint Joseph University was also founded because the French came here in the 1840s, long before the mandate. They were looking for alternative silk sources because of a virus that killed sericulture in France," says Asseily. He notes that when the French came to the mountains and discovered silk was already in production, they set up factories and started exporting silk to France. The Lebanese followed suit and a booming industry was born.

Silk production also had a role in shaping Lebanese society, particularly in Mount Lebanon, where the bulk of the country's silk factories brought industry and a demand for workers, unbiased to gender, to a land mainly home to peasants. "It changed the social structure in Lebanon. Suddenly women started working in factories and so you had young girls going to work and starting to earn money. It had a big effect," explains Asseily.

With the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, making trade lines from the Far East to Europe more accessible, the silk industry survived well until the early 1900s, when competition became tougher and factories slowly began to suffer in Lebanon, while trying to compete with the cheap prices and volume of silk coming from China and its surrounding countries. Factories started closing down at the beginning of the 20th century, and today there are no more factories producing silk. But the lasting impact of the silk industry remains in the

country; it has shaped the capital city's urban makeup and the country's society.

#### THE EXHIBITION

Every year, The Silk Museum opens in May, following the seasonal cycle of the silk worm. Their eco-museum shows visitors how silk is produced, detailing the process from silk worm to cocoon and how the fibers are extracted and weaved through an old loom into thread. It shows the ancient interaction between people and their environment to create the highly desired natural thread.

The museum also highlights the role of women in Lebanon in silk production, where they were responsible for receiving the eggs, gathering cocoons, feeding, observing and handling silkworms. Visitors can see the tradition of silk weaving, preserving an important part of the country's history. Many families from Mount Lebanon used to be part of the trade, with hundreds of silk weaving looms in existence during the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In addition, the Silk Museum holds an annual exhibition, showcasing silk culture from around the world. Past exhibitions have spotlighted the silk industry in China, India, Indo-China, Vietnam, Italy and France. This year, the exhibition "Souvenirs from the Silk Road" features a private collection of silk dresses belonging to Alexandra Asseily from China, India, Japan, Italy, France and Lebanon.

05 940767, [thesilkmuseum.com](http://thesilkmuseum.com)

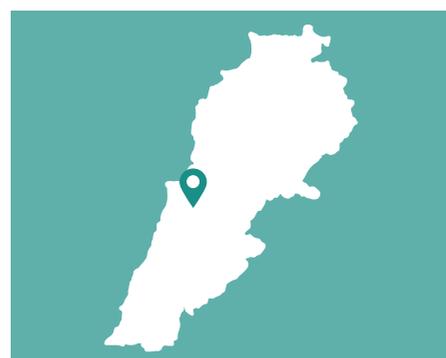
Open Tue-Sun, 10am-6pm

### Where to eat

After a tour of the Silk Museum, enjoy a tea on the terrace. For a hearty lunch, eat at the nearby **Al Sakhra Restaurant** also known as **Cliff House** (05 270368) in Shemlan. Located in an old house dating back to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the restaurant offers traditional Lebanese mezze with an incredible view of Beirut.

### What to see

Explore the small village of Bsous before continuing on the road to the towns and villages of Aley district, a popular summer holiday destination due to its charm and cool climate. Bdadoun has its own cultural legacy, the home town of legendary singer Sabah and poet Asaad el Feghali, known as "Blackbird of the Valley." His sculpture is at the village entrance. Aley still attracts tourists for its antique shops, boutiques and traditional restaurants.



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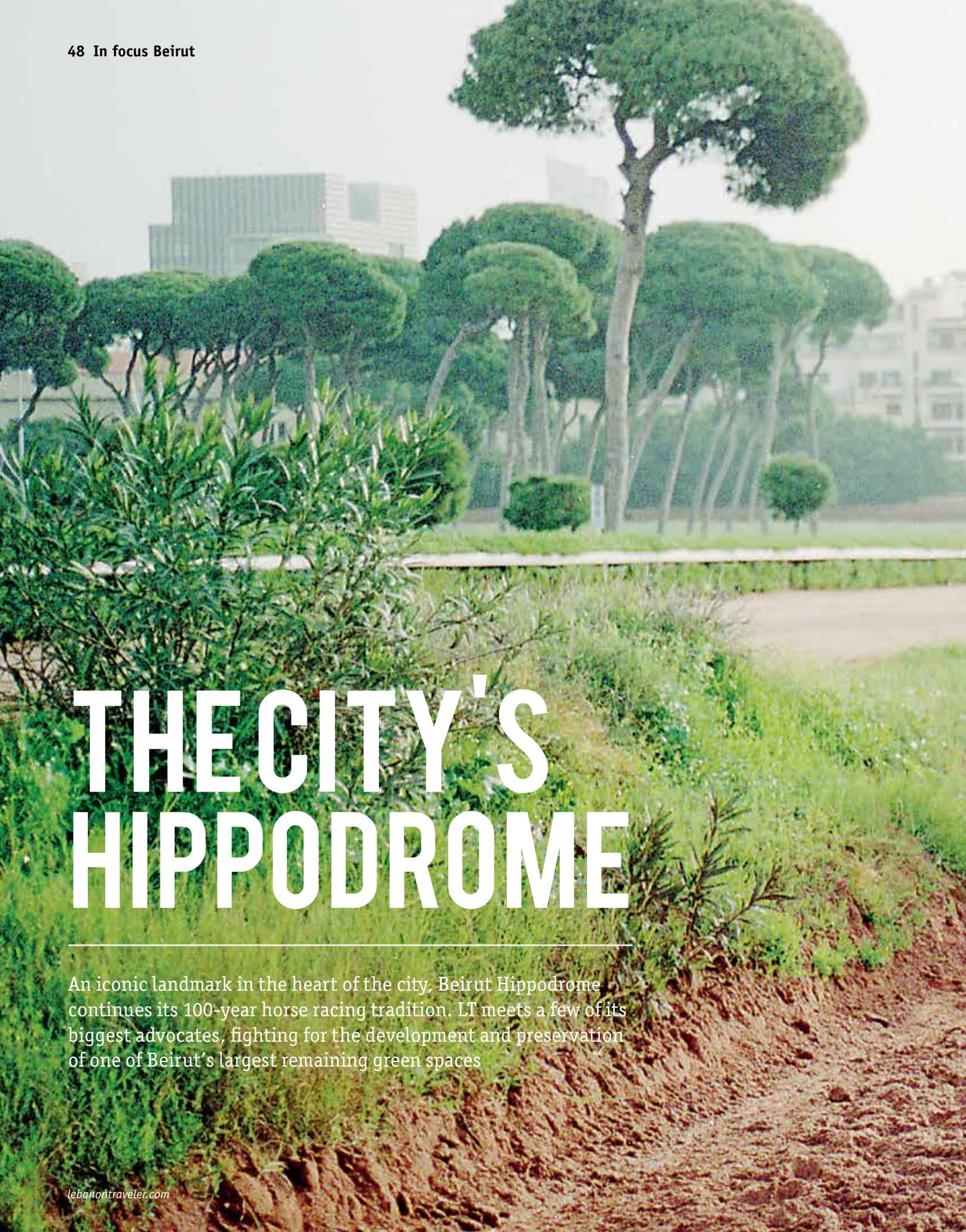


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# THE CITY'S HIPPODROME

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An iconic landmark in the heart of the city, Beirut Hippodrome continues its 100-year horse racing tradition. LT meets a few of its biggest advocates, fighting for the development and preservation of one of Beirut's largest remaining green spaces





Minister of Tourism,  
Michel Pharaon



President of Beirut Hippodrome, Minister of Administrative Reform and Member of Parliament,  
Nabil De Freige



General Manager, Beirut Hippodrome  
Nabil Nasrallah

It's the day before the Sunday races and at 7am, the Beirut Hippodrome is awash with activity. It's a standard Saturday morning training ahead of the weekly races, when horses compete on one of the Middle East's oldest tracks. Within a vast 200,000m<sup>2</sup> of unspoiled land, the historic hippodrome provides the perfect vantage point to see Beirut. One of the largest remaining green areas without construction, the chaotic skyline of high-rise buildings surrounds its parameter. Today's stormy sky makes a fitting backdrop to the hippodrome's iconic pine trees – a remnant of the 600,000m<sup>2</sup> forest that once covered the area.

#### A CHECKERED HISTORY

This year, Beirut Hippodrome celebrates its 100-year heritage with a series of events under the patronage of Judge Ziad Chbib, the Mohafez of Beirut. During the Ottoman rule of Lebanon, the wali (governor) of Beirut agreed to a plan by wealthy Beirutis to build a modern hippodrome, mirroring those of Europe, with a casino in the middle of the track. Lebanese aristocrat Alfred Sursock was given the contract and construction started in 1916. At the time the Ottomans lost the war, only the casino had been completed. In 1920, French General Henri Gouraud, declared the republic of Greater Lebanon

from the unopened casino. The building was taken as the seat of the French Mandate and remains the residence of the French ambassador.

The hippodrome became one of the busiest race tracks in the world in the '60s, with races twice a week. "It was a very nice hippodrome from the '30s until the '60s," says Nabil De Freige, the President of Beirut Hippodrome, Minister of Administrative Reform and Member of Parliament, who is a well-known advocate of horse racing, sitting outside his stables. "You had a lot of politicians and presidents who came for official visits and they used to ask for their meetings to be on the weekend because they wanted to come and see the races. The Shar of Iran and his wife came, King Paul of Greece. It has a really nice history."

Returning to Lebanon in 1971, electronic engineer Nabil Nasrallah was appointed general manager of the race track by Henri Pharaon, a Lebanese politician who had the biggest stables of Arabian horses during the '50s and '60s and was one of the hippodrome's biggest advocates. His statue now watches over the tracks. "It was very interesting for me because there was a lot of work to be done," Nasrallah says from his office, its walls lined with numerous photos of the hippodrome, past and present. From the renovation of its original arched façades, to installing one of the world's earliest electronic betting systems, Nasrallah took on the project to modernize the hippodrome. Remaining open throughout most of the Lebanese Civil War, its location in a no man's land between Christian and Muslim areas, meant the hippodrome remained relatively well-preserved, until an Israeli tank destroyed much of the site in 1982. "This is a picture I took just afterwards," Nasrallah says, holding a photograph showing the

old hippodrome reduced to rubble. "They bombed all the columns. The whole building collapsed. That's why we came to the realization of a new stadium built from concrete," he says.

Though the structure remains incomplete, the construction of concrete grandstands in 1990 ensured the continuity of competitions and horse racing in Lebanon. "It provided the Arabian horse's sustainability, not only through bets, but mainly through the financial contribution of those passionate about horses," says Minister of Tourism Michel Pharaon. He has continued the family heritage of horse racing, owning stables with about 60 horses at the racetrack. For him, the Beirut Hippodrome remains an important icon in Beirut and he is committed to its preservation. "It is a 100-year-old pure Lebanese heritage ensuring a very noble activity which is horse breeding and racing. It's a symbol of continuity, an old tradition dating back many centuries, which I have inherited with responsibility, pleasure and passion," he says, also noting that the track represents one of Beirut's "most important and attractive green breathing outlets."

#### CHALLENGES FACING BEIRUT HIPPODROME

Beirut Hippodrome is now run by the Society for the Protection and Improvement of the Arabian Horse in Lebanon (SPARCA) on behalf of the Beirut Municipality. The non-profit organization was formed by a group of passionate supporters of the Arabian horse. It's one of the world's oldest breeds and the horse has a long history in Lebanon. In 2015, the Beirut Hippodrome held the Lebanese Arabian Horse Championship to help preserve the heritage of the breed, its second edition took place in May this year.

Though races still take place weekly, the hippodrome is currently working as a shadow of its former self. "Starting in 1920 there was regular racing twice a week and it continued every Saturday and Sunday until the '70s. Now we have had to cut back to once a week and we have an average of six horses racing. We used to have 15," Nasrallah says. Though SPARCA takes a percentage of bets from weekly races, with less horses running and fewer bets being placed, there is currently no spare money to develop and improve the hippodrome. "We need a big investment from the owner, the Municipality of Beirut, in order to rebuild. We need to improve the hippodrome and

invest to attract new owners. Once you have new owners, we will have more horses and more races and the profits will be bigger," De Freige says. "It's a chain of economy, everyone will benefit."

**FUTURE VISION**

De Freige estimates the cost of renovating the hippodrome to be around USD10-15 million. It's an investment that he believes will not only be recovered but will also create many jobs. "We are the only hippodrome in the Middle East where betting is permitted. It's a big opportunity," De Freige comments. For Nasrallah, the best way to kick start horse racing in Lebanon is to introduce more stables, which will "encourage new owners to bring their horses." There are plans to build another 400 stables at the Hippodrome and open a public green space within the park. "We have worked a lot to defend the green area here. It's one of the few peaceful spaces within turbulent Beirut," Nasrallah adds.

According to Pharaon, many horse racing experts believe the Beirut Hippodrome is "enviable, with its long history and potential for development." And though financial constraints are a challenge, he is positive about the future after a proposal from the Minister of Finance and De Freige to recognize the hippodrome as a protected heritage site: "Based on the late decision of the Council of Ministers in considering the racecourse an important component of Lebanese heritage, I am confident that funding will be secured towards the realization of an International Hippodrome and a recreational park in Beirut." With a new wave of interest in showing, racing and breeding Arabian horses, there is hope for its sustainability. "There is a big interest among the new generation. Today there are a lot of newcomers for Arabian horse racing and showing," says Nasrallah. His hopes are that returning Beirut Hippodrome to its former glory will give a boost to the field in Lebanon.

Beirut Hippodrome currently offers an atmospheric day trip for visitors, with races taking place every Sunday and holidays. Special events take place throughout the year such as Ladies Day, which continues an international tradition of dressing up for the races, and floodlit night races.

Races every Sunday, 01 632515



*Beirut Hippodrome's original facade before it was destroyed by an Israeli bomb in 1982*



*Photos: Kuba Ryniewicz*



*Photo: Myriam Shuman*





## ISLAND LIFE, OFF THE BATROUN COAST

*"I took this photo in April at White Beach in Batroun. When I was flying my drone in winter I noticed the rock is shaped like a fish. I'm always looking to take creative photos and since there is a small pond that looks like the eye of a fish, I had the idea to float on the water. I took the photo of myself using a timer. I flew the drone above the rock, chose the frame and ran into the water."*

Photo by Dany Faddoul, [dany.faddoul@gmail.com](mailto:dany.faddoul@gmail.com),  [@dany\\_111](https://www.instagram.com/dany_111)

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# *Your hands-on* guide to Lebanon



Photo: Ramzi Simrani



# 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 touring Lebanon's coastline during the summer season

## 1. ISLAND ESCAPE

El Mina, Tripoli has nine islands. The closest is Abdul Wahab Island, which can be visited by crossing a bridge over the sea. In 1992, a nature reserve was established for three of the islands under the name Palm Islands Nature Reserve. It includes El Nakhl (Palms Island), commonly known as Jazirat El Aranib (Rabbit Island), because of the rabbits bred here during Lebanon's French Mandate period; Sanani Island, the furthest island from Tripoli mainland, where sea turtles lay their eggs; and Ramkine,

also known as El Fanar, which has an old lighthouse that now functions on solar energy. The largest island, El Billan, is named after a type of plant that grows on it and contains a small cavern on the west side. The smaller island, El Rmayleh has sandy beaches. El Ashak (the Lovers), is also known as El Tenieh (the second). El Telteh (the Third) is a flat, rocky island midway between the coast and the most distant island. El Rabha (the Fourth), also known as El Maatih (the Cut-Off), is the smallest island and is used as a docking place by fishermen, while out at sea.

**SLEEP** Take a weekend to island hop, and head back to mainland in the evenings to spend a night at the charming guesthouse **Beit El Nessim** (03 308156, [beitelnessim.com](http://beitelnessim.com)) or boutique hotel **Via Mina** (06 222227, [Via Mina Hotel](https://www.facebook.com/ViaMinaHotel)).

**EAT** Bring a picnic with you to enjoy on the islands. Be a responsible visitor and take your trash home with you.

**SEE** Visit the second largest of the islands, El Nakhl, where remains of a church from the Crusader era can be seen, along with pools from the 13<sup>th</sup> century, in addition to the ruins of ancient traditional salinas (salt basins) where salt was once collected.

**GO WITH A GUIDE** Book a full package with **Tour Leb** (70 484545) for their Rabbit Thursday, every week from May to September, or take local fisherman guide **Fadi Chabtini** (03 796082) and experience traditional fishing or an island tour.



Photo: Nada Raphael



Photo: Clement Tannouri

## 2. JIYEH UNVEILED

Only 23km south of Beirut, Jiyeh is known for its unique 7km-long-stretch of sandy beach, along Lebanon's mainly rocky coastline. The prophet Jonah was said to have landed on its shores when he was spat out by the whale, as described in the Bible. Locals built an oratory dedicated to him, known as Maqâm of Nabi Younes (Prophet Jonas), which still stands until today. Many invaders have passed through Jiyeh, known as

Porphyreon during Phoenician times. Tohomtmos the Egyptian and Alexander the Great prepared for the attack on Tyre from Jiyeh's shore. St. Peter and St. Paul are also said to have walked through Jiyeh several times. Nowadays Jiyeh is known for its beach resorts and night life.

**SLEEP** Though Jiyeh is close enough to Beirut for a day trip, stay overnight at **Jiyeh Marina Resort** (07 996196), **Warwick**

**Pangea Resort** (07 995580) or **Golden Tulip Jiyeh Marina** (07 996736) for a relaxing weekend on its sandy shores.

**EAT** Enjoy an outstanding Mediterranean sea view from any of the restaurants of Jiyeh's many resorts such as **Jonas** (07 995000) **Lazy B** (70 950010), **Orchid** (03 040420) and **Bamboo Bay** (07 995042).

**SEE** The shrine of Maqâm of Nabi Younes is worth exploration; in particular a tomb inside a small chamber, dedicated to the Prophet Jonas. The medieval shrine is also used as a mosque and details from the late Roman or Byzantine period can be seen. Nearby, the Maqâm is the site of the Byzantine settlement of Porphyreon, which probably reached its height during the 6<sup>th</sup> Century AD. The excavations at the site unearthed evidence that the town was known as early as between the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> century BC. A stroll through the old ruins in front of the sea reveals houses with paved mosaic floors, along with narrow streets equipped with ancient drainage systems leading to the sea. A number of mosaic floors from early Christian and Byzantine basilicas were found in Jiyeh and are on display at the Beiteddine Palace Museum.



## 3. INSPIRING NAQOURA

Naqoura is a small city in Southern Lebanon and the last swimming point in Lebanon. Take the coastal road and enjoy the beautiful scenery along the way. Once at Naqoura, head to the coast and relax on the beach or turn east and visit Shamaa and its surroundings. Shamaa Fort is located on the top of a hill overlooking the coast with an impressive panoramic view. It is one of 20 citadels dating from the Crusader and Mamlouk period in Lebanon. The fort is not yet restored but you can reach it while visiting the sacred Maqâm (Mausoleum) of Shamoun El Safa.

**SLEEP** Enjoy an overnight stop at the luxurious **Turquoise Beach Resort** (78 822866, 78 822877, [turquoise-lb.com](http://turquoise-lb.com)) or at hotel and restaurant **Rêve de la Mer** (07 460468).

**EAT** Both resorts offer food, right in front of the sea, or head back towards Sour to one of the restaurants in the old city or by the coast such as **Fanar restaurant** (07 741111, 03 665016, [alfanarresort.com](http://alfanarresort.com)) or **Le Phenicien** (07 740564).

**SEE** Drive back north about 17km from Naqoura to discover the Natural Reserve of Sour Coast that contains the largest sandy beach in Lebanon. It is known for its marine ecosystem and an important nesting site for migratory birds and endangered sea turtles.





# Best Beds

With the trend of boutique hotels and guesthouses sweeping the country, LT profiles four of our favorites for a weekend escape during the summer season



## Bouyouti

*Maasser Beiteddine, Shouf*

Bouyouti is a hidden gem of a guesthouse nestled in the heart of the Shouf Mountains. Spread over a vast hillside estate that includes blossoming gardens, a 19<sup>th</sup> century chapel and a swimming pool, Bouyouti has all the elements for a tranquil weekend. Breakfast can be enjoyed on the outdoor terrace with a stunning view of the valley.

**Rooms start from: LL300,000 inc. breakfast**  
03 310200, [f Bouyouti](#)



## Dar Alma

*Sour*

The sea couldn't be more present than in Sour's boutique hotel Dar Alma; with most rooms looking out over the sea and access to a private beach. This renovated 19<sup>th</sup> century traditional Lebanese house is located in a charming old neighborhood, home to the city's fishing community, where cobbled streets and winding alleyways reveal a slower pace of life.

**Rooms start from: LL120,000 inc. breakfast**  
07 740082, [f Dar Alma](#)



## Beit Douma

*Douma*

One of the "Beit" guesthouses, Beit Douma, is an idyllic mountain retreat that's perfect for the summer. Located in the picturesque village of Douma, this guesthouse will make you feel right at home. Help yourself to coffee, tea and homemade treats in the kitchen. Recline with a book from the library or relax on one of the two patios to enjoy the surrounding nature.

**Rooms start from: LL225,000 inc. breakfast**  
06 520702, [beitdouma.com](#)

## Beit al Batroun

*Thoum*

Located in north Lebanon, overlooking the sea, Beit al Batroun is a relaxing retreat from Beirut. Influenced by the traditional Lebanese rural home, with rooms and sitting spaces centred around a spacious central liwan, this bed and breakfast offers a glimpse into another era. With only three double bedrooms, a weekend at Beit al Batroun is a personal experience, and you'll be spoiled with their breakfast from local produce, dinners and evening cocktails on the terrace.

**Rooms start from: LL285,000 inc. breakfast**  
03 270049, 03 739573, [beitalbatroun.com](#)



## LOG ON

**Hotelibanaise.com**

All of the boutique hotels mentioned are part of the L'hôte Libanais network and can be booked online, along with many more handpicked guesthouses around the country.

**Diyafa.org**

DIYAFYA arranges training for guesthouses as part of the Lebanon Industry Value Chain Development (LIVCD) Project, implemented by DAI and funded by USAID. Visit their website for more choices of alternative lodging and rural packages.



# On the road

With festival season setting in and Beirutis flocking outdoors, the city's best restaurants will come to you. **Taste & Flavors** magazine rounds up Beirut's best food trucks



## Roadster

**Concept:** Burgers, starters and sandwiches  
**Signature dish:** Mighty Chicken; Cheese and Cheese  
**Price range:** LL10,000-20,000  
**Wheeled in:** February 2016  
 1585, [roadsterdiner.com](http://roadsterdiner.com)  
 @Roadsterdiner  
 Different events



## Kababji Food Truck

**Concept:** Authentic Lebanese food, traditional grills (kababs, grilled veal fillet, taouk)  
**Signature dish:** The Kabab Halabi and the Taouk  
**Price range:** LL6,500-8,500  
**Wheeled in:** 2014  
[kababji.com](http://kababji.com), Different events



## The Junkyard

**Concept:** Food truck stations serving street food by rotating chefs  
**Signature dish:** BBQ meat and Spiced Zombie Sangria  
**Price range:** Average plate LL45,000  
**Wheeled in:** 2012  
 03 945961, [Facebook Junkyard Beirut](https://www.facebook.com/JunkyardBeirut), [Mar Mikhael](https://www.instagram.com/Mikhael)

For more food trucks around the city, log on to [lebanontraveler.com](http://lebanontraveler.com)



## Wrap'n'Roll

**Concept:** Fresh gourmet wraps filled with Asian, American, Lebanese and Indian flavors  
**Signature dish:** Indian Chicken Wrap  
**Price range:** LL5,000-10,000  
**Wheeled in:** 24 February, 2015  
 70 919919, [Facebook Wrapnrollbeirut](https://www.facebook.com/Wrapnrollbeirut), [@wrap.n.roll](https://www.instagram.com/wrap.n.roll)  
 LAU Jbeil and Kaslik



## Classic Burger Joint

**Concept:** Burgers  
**Signature dish:** Classic Cheese  
**Price range:** LL15,000-22,000  
**Wheeled in:** Summer 2014  
 04 722826, [cbj.me](http://cbj.me), [@ClassicBrgr](https://www.instagram.com/ClassicBrgr)  
 Various Locations



# A waltz around Badaro

Over the last few years, the sleepy residential neighborhood of Badaro has blossomed into one of the hippest Beirut districts. Lebanese guide company **Zawarib** explores the more chilled part of town, where cafes and restaurants sprawl out onto its wide, tree-lined sidewalks

Once part of Ottoman Beirut's pine forest, Badaro still oozes the spirit of an urban garden. Developed in the 1950s, this neighborhood's broad sidewalks dotted with trees and Art Deco architecture, remains true to its lively yet serene ambience from day to night. Surrounded by the Beirut Hippodrome and Horsh Beirut, the Actor's Syndicate, the Lebanese University's Fine Arts department and the Smallville Hotel, Badaro attracts an interesting combination of both local creative residents and trendy travelers. On any given day, one can expect to see art students sketching away at their surroundings as well as the odd foreigner fumbling around with a professional camera. Each location in Badaro has a unique identity, making it one of today's favorite hangout spots.

Start your walk at the **National Museum** (1 – 01 426703, [beirutnationalmuseum.com](http://beirutnationalmuseum.com)), where Lebanon's ancient history is on display. Be sure to also visit the museum boutique to find an equally impressive array of some of the country's leading designers' latest pieces.

Very close by is the magnificent **Syrian Catholic Patriarchate** (2) set within tranquil and well-manicured gardens. For lunch, **Villa Badaro** (3 – 01 385155, [Villa Badaro](http://VillaBadaro.com)) offers a truly beautiful and charming encounter. Try their signature steak and fries while seated in their perfect (and still secret) garden. Across the street is **Troika**

(4 – 01 384517, [f Troika Badaro](https://www.facebook.com/TroikaBadaro)), a café-bar offering refreshing and alcoholic beverages, Lebanese mezze and outdoor seating.

The outdoor atmosphere can also be enjoyed at one of Badaro's favorites, **Wall Street** (5 – 76 997992, [f WallStLB](https://www.facebook.com/WallStLB)), ideal for both lunch and dinner, where a superb menu and cocktail list awaits. For a lazy morning or busy afternoon, catch up with a friend at the bubbly **Roy's Public House** (6 – 01 390308), one of the very first institutions to open in the area. Another excellent all-day place is **27** (7 – 01 382202, [27cafepub.com](http://27cafepub.com)), a sophisticated café/bar serving delicious salads and pizza with a jazzy flair. Try not to miss out on their all-day happy hour on Mondays.

Nearby, **Lunatic** (8 – 01 393443, [lunatic.com](http://lunatic.com)), a design concept store filled with witty Lebanese prints, is the place to shop for unique gifts for all occasions. Across the road, imagine the former life of one of Lebanon's most well-known authors, Amin Maalouf, at his former humble apartment.

If you're looking for a quick and healthy bite, visit **Crumb** (9 – 01 383183, [f Crumb Badaro](https://www.facebook.com/CrumbBadaro)) just off the main road and try one of their nutritious sandwiches. The spot works equally well when craving a midnight snack.

For a splash of art and culture, take a look at **The Sunflower Theater's** (10 – 01 381290) summer schedule, where both performances and workshops can be enjoyed all season long. Many of the theater's regular actors and directors live close by and are frequently spotted around the neighborhood.

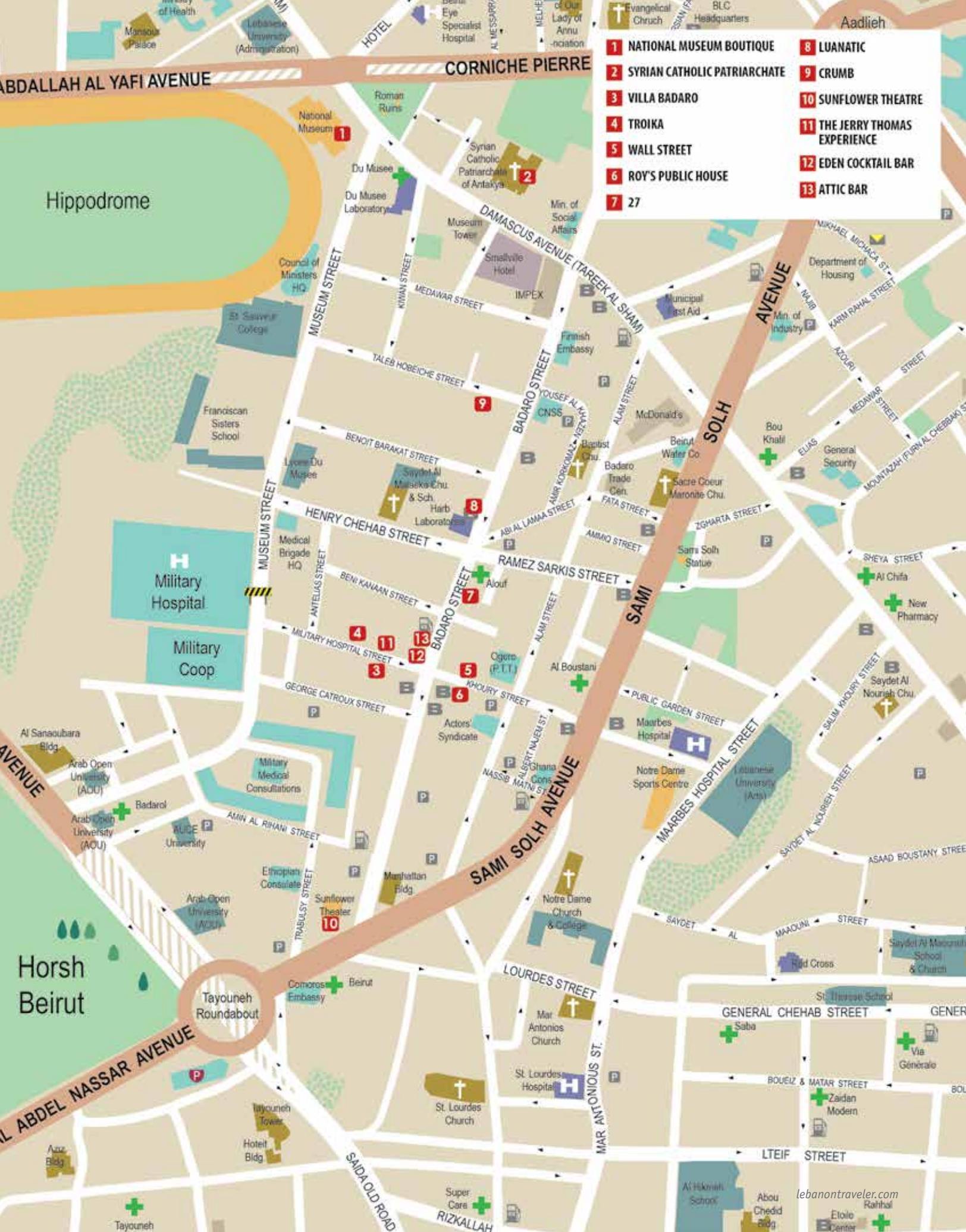
At nightfall, a variety of concept bars are worth a visit. Named after the father of American mixology, **The Jerry Thomas Experience** (11 – 70 151328, [f The Jerry Thomas Experience](https://www.facebook.com/TheJerryThomasExperience)) offers an array of creative cocktails in a warm lively interior. Next door at **Eden** (12 – 01 380599, [f Eden Badaro](https://www.facebook.com/EdenBadaro)), get intimate with a loved one over an exquisitely-presented fresh fruit cocktail. Concealed around the corner is **The Attic Bar** (13 – 01 382073, [f The Attic Bar Badaro](https://www.facebook.com/TheAtticBarBadaro)), a room covered with antiquated accessories where a DJ spins music out of an old closet on Fridays and Saturdays.

For more on Beirut's hidden treasures, pick up a free copy of Zawarib's "Best of Beirut" found at most hotels, galleries and local hangouts.

Alternatively, download the Zawarib Beirut app or visit their FB page



A collaboration between Lebanon Traveler and Zawarib – guiding you around Beirut



- 1 NATIONAL MUSEUM BOUTIQUE**
- 2 SYRIAN CATHOLIC PATRIARCHATE**
- 3 VILLA BADARO**
- 4 TROIKA**
- 5 WALL STREET**
- 6 ROY'S PUBLIC HOUSE**
- 7 27**
- 8 LUANATIC**
- 9 CRUMB**
- 10 SUNFLOWER THEATRE**
- 11 THE JERRY THOMAS EXPERIENCE**
- 12 EDEN COCKTAIL BAR**
- 13 ATTIC BAR**

Hippodrome

Horsh Beirut

ABDEL NASSAR AVENUE

CORNICHE PIERRE

DAMASCUS AVENUE (TAREEK AL SHAM)

SOLH AVENUE

SAMI AVENUE

SAMI SOLH AVENUE

Tayouneh Roundabout

SAIDA OLD ROAD

# FESTIVALS



The atmosphere Roman amphitheater where Zouk Mikael festival is held

## ZOUK MIKAEL INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL

12-21 July

Located a short ride from Beirut, Zouk Mikael Festival focuses on classical music, bringing **Joseph Calleja and Bryn Terfel, with Monica Yunis (12 July)**, along with violin virtuoso **Jihad Akl (21 July)** to the ancient Roman amphitheater in Keserwan.

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

## EHDENIYAT INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL

22 July-13 August

Growing year by year, Ehdeniyat takes place in mountain-top town, Ehden. This year includes Lebanese soprano **Magida El Roumi (22 July)**, classical music in the form of **Concerto Delle Stelle (30 July)**, conducted by Toufic Maatouk with the Antoine University Choir, French nostalgia from **Herve Vilard and Michele Torr (5 August)**, British chart-topping singer **Rita Ora (6 August)** and the majestic voice of Iraqi singer, **Kadhim Al-Sahir (12-13 August)**.

06 664466, [ehdeniyat.com](http://ehdeniyat.com),  [Ehdeniyat](#)

## BAALBECK INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL

22 July-28 August

Lebanon's Baalbeck International Festival celebrates its 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year with a program that doesn't disappoint. See **Caracalla Dance Theater (22-23 July)** who continue Lebanon's heritage of musicals with the traditional dance dabke, colourful costumes and stunning stage sets. Heavyweight French electronic producer **Jean Michel Jarre (30 July)** is surely one of their biggest highlights, along with **Lisa Simone (21 August)**, Nina Simone's only child who has embarked on her own path as a recording artist.

01 373150/1/2, [baalbeck.org.lb](http://baalbeck.org.lb),  [Baalbeck International Festival](#)

## GARDEN SHOW & SPRING FESTIVAL

24-28 May

This annual open-air extravaganza brings a hive of activity to Beirut's Hippodrome, attracting thousands of visitors from home gardeners and nature lovers, to outdoor sports enthusiasts. Happening simultaneously with the Garden Show & Spring Festival is Travel Lebanon, an event which brings exhibitors from around Lebanon to share destinations and rural traditions.

[The-gardenshow.com](http://The-gardenshow.com)

## SUMMER MISK FESTIVAL

30 June-3 July

Held in the exclusive private neighborhood of Beit Misk, Summer Misk is back after two successful years, with another all-star line-up. The four-day festival includes winner of The Voice 2016, **Laylet Tarab (30 June)**, Latin jazz master **Arturo Sandoval (1 July)**, British pop sensation **John Newman (2 July)** and the **Beirut International Comedy Showcase (3 July)**.

71 211121,  [Misk Entertainment](#)

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

## BEITEDDINE ART FESTIVAL

8 July-9 August

Taking place within the impressive Beiteddine Palace in the Shouf Mountains, Beiteddine Art Festival opens the 2016 season with legendary British pop and soul singer, **Seal (14 July)**. **Yamal el Sham (23 July)** is another highlight, where Arab artists come together to call for hope, peace and tolerance. Oud masters **Naseer Shamma** and **Charbel Rouhanna** will perform alongside Syrian-Armenian singer **Lena Chamamyan**.

01 373430, [beiteddine.org](http://beiteddine.org),  [Beiteddine Festival](#)

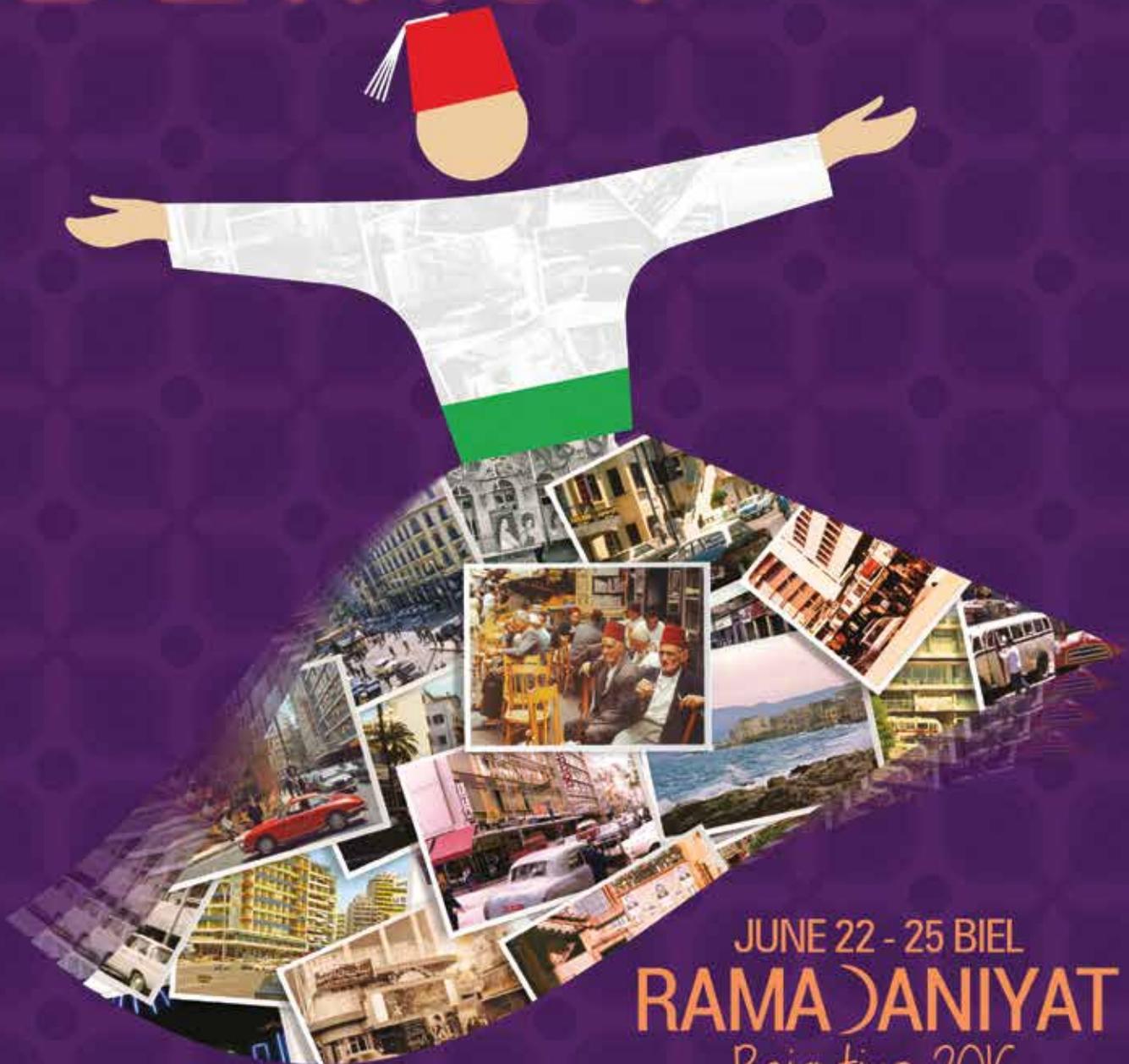
## BATROUN FESTIVAL

8-23 July

Alongside a whole host of activities and events in the fishing town of Batroun at their annual festival are big name performances from Lebanese oudist **Marcel Khalife (23 July)** and Australian soft-rock duo **Air Supply (8 July)**, along with a special evening curated by Beirut's premier cabaret destination **Music Hall (9 July)**.

06 642262, [Batrounfestival.org](http://Batrounfestival.org)

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www.ramadaniyat.org

## BYBLOS INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL

July-August

Byblos International Festival is one of the most highly anticipated of Lebanon's music festivals, each year delivering an exciting and relevant program. Though at the time of going to press, the festival is yet to announce their full program, there's sure to be something for every taste. They've so far revealed that **Mashrou Leila** (5 August) will perform. The alternative Arabic rock band has become the voice of a younger generation.

09 542020, [byblosfestival.org](http://byblosfestival.org),  *Byblos International Festival*

## SOURAT FESTIVAL

30 July

This 15-year-old festival in Batroun is a one-day affair that takes place in Sourat Village. It's brings together quality music, a dinner under oak trees and an art exhibition. This year, classical music comes from talented

cello soloist **Bruno Philippe**, accompanied by the Lebanese Symphony Orchestra and jazz from **Walid Tawil and his group**, who presents a unique program for the festival.

*Amisdesourat.com, sourat.org*

## KOBAYAT INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL

5-13 August

This yearly festival brings scores of visitors to north Lebanon's Akkar every August to shed light on the area's heritage. Its 2016 edition features a number of big Arabic stars including **Najwa Karam** (5 August) and **Wael Kfoury** (6 August), legendary disco-pop group, **Boney M.** (12 August) and icon **Elias Rahbani** (13 August).

09 934921, [Kobayatfestivals.org](http://Kobayatfestivals.org)

For daily event updates visit  
[lebanontraveler.com](http://lebanontraveler.com)



21 August – Lisa Simone performs Baalbeck Festival

### ADVERTORIAL

## UNDER THE MILKY WAY



**EU Milky Way** is an information and promotion campaign aimed at increasing the knowledge and consumption of selected quality European dairy products made in the Czech Republic. The focus of the program are a selected basket of products comprised of:

**Drinking milk and cream** referred to as fresh and long life, according to the heat treatment and the durability of the finished product. Long life products are better suited for countries with warmer climates.

**Condensed milk and cream** are made by the partial evaporation of water from fresh whole milk or cream; this program offers two basic products. The unsweetened condensed milk, two to two-and-a-half times concentrated, with a shelf life of several months, achieved by sterilization. The second is sweetened condensed milk, also two to two-and-a-half times condensed concentrate, where long life

is achieved by adding sugar syrup.

**Yogurt and sour cream** represent a broad product category. They are fermented dairy products, where part of the milk sugar lactose converts to lactic acid, including Greek-style yogurt (fat free and 5 percent fat), drinking yogurt and sour creams.

**Curd and cream desserts** are produced like cheese by the precipitation of milk proteins using cultural microorganisms and rennet enzymes. Today, it is produced according to the content of fat in several types: soft, fine, fat or hard. They have a low calorie content, the low fat version is almost fat-free!

**Cheese and dairy spreads** represent a

large and diverse group of dairy products, promoting two kinds of cheese: fresh and semi-hard steamed cheese. Consumers are informed on the high quality products, which best represent European quality production, encouraging target groups to try new varieties and flavours which can easily be combined in local food habits.

The **EU Milky Way** program is initiated by the Czech and Moravian Dairy Association (CMSM) and co-funded by the Czech Republic and the European Union.

The program lasts from 2016-2019 and targets the markets of United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia and Lebanon.



For further information on products promoted and campaign development, please visit: [eumilkyway.eu](http://eumilkyway.eu)

# الصحة بتليق لسُفرتنا





# LATIFA LAKKIS

The Byblos International Festival has become one of Lebanon's most anticipated music events of the year, bringing some of the biggest international and regional acts to the north Lebanon coast. LT sits down with **Latifa Lakkis**, head of the festival committee, to find out what happens behind the scenes and how she unwinds post festival

## What's the secret to Byblos Festival's success?

Hard work, all year round. Variety of the program to best satisfy the needs of many segments in the Lebanese market and abroad. Good organization in terms of management, logistics, hosting and team work. The location of the venue and that the Byblos Festival is integrated in its city... Byblos.

## What's been the most ridiculous backstage demand of an artist performing at Byblos festival?

Outrageously expensive wines and champagnes.

## Where is your favorite post-festival dinner or drinks spot in Byblos?

Most of the restaurants and pubs in Byblos... each one has its own identity.

## Mashrou' Leila will be returning to the Byblos Festival this year. Do you expect their concert to be bigger than before?

We certainly expect a sell out for Mashrou' Leila at Byblos. We're really proud of what they [have] achieved.

## Where do you go to unwind following festival fever?

A week on the beach at Eddé Sands (70 247555) or Le Phenix de Byblos (09 541400). In addition the Byblos

region has many attractions for activities of all kinds for relaxation, tourism, culture, history, pilgrimage and eco tourism.

## Where would you take a band with 24 hours to kill in Lebanon before their concert?

Due to the lack of time, a good Lebanese meal at Bab el Mina (09 540475, [babelmina.com](http://babelmina.com)), Feniqia (70 542135) or Adonai Le Petit Libanais (70 236778); Beirut or Byblos sightseeing and some thrilling nightlife in the old Byblos Souks or Publicity area, are the winning formula for artists.

## Give us an idea of how the artist backstage area looks at Byblos International Festival.

Like a bee hive in peak season.

## Where is your favorite place to go for a rural getaway beyond Byblos and why?

The north or south of Lebanon. They both offer beautiful landscapes, hospitality of the local community, handicrafts and agro-food production. I like Tripoli for its cultural wealth, historical background and delicious pastry; Ehden for its great climate, restaurants and coffee shops; and Sour for its culture and great beach.

## Tell us about your hidden gem in Lebanon... one secret destination awaiting discovery.

In West Bekaa you can find one or two places that have activities, sports and horseback riding in a great landscape, such as at the Villa Badih Charani ranch in Mansoura.

## Where is your favorite place for Sunday brunch?

Byblos Sur Mer hotel (09 548000, [byblossurmer.com](http://byblossurmer.com)).

## Where do you hit for a summer fish lunch?

Any of Byblos' restaurants located at the harbor such as Pepe Fishing Club (09 540213, [f](https://www.facebook.com/ByblosFishingClub) Byblos Fishing Club – Pepe Abed).

## Where is the olive oil in your kitchen from?

From Rihaneh Press [Mount Lebanon] made by Ramzi Mouawad (09 790210, 03 667855).

## Outside of the Byblos Festival, where do you go for your music and culture fix?

Beirut's theater scenes at St. Joseph Theater (01 202422) and Metro Al Madina (76 309363, [metromadina.com](http://metromadina.com)), classical concerts at St. Joseph Church and to Pierre Y. Aboukhater Amphitheater located in Saint Joseph University.

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



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