

Lebanon Directory

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This directory contains information specific to Lebanon; for more general information refer to the Syria Directory (p226).

ACCOMMODATION

All the accommodation options listed for Lebanon have been divided into budget, midrange and top-end categories; budget accommodation comes in at under US\$40 per double room, midrange between US\$40 and US\$90, and top end at \$90 and above. Prices are quoted for a room in high season, from around June to September, except for ski resort regions, where the prices represent rooms in ski season, between December and

March. Prices are listed in US dollars or in Lebanese lira (LL), depending on which is used by the establishment itself.

During festival and holiday periods such as Christmas, Easter and Eid al-Fitr, and throughout school summer holidays, room prices can rise by 50% or more, as Lebanon is swamped with returning expats and partying Gulf Arabs. It's worthwhile booking well in advance during these times, especially for Beirut's budget options, as they tend to fill up fast. See Holidays section for Syria (p231) and Lebanon (p385) for more details. During the low season – roughly October to May – prices can fall by 40%, and similarly in high season if the security situation is shaky. Even in high season, it's always worth asking about discounts on stays of more than two nights – competition between hotels in Beirut, particularly in the midrange and top-end categories, is fierce, meaning that you're often in a strong position to bargain.

It's important to remember that outside summer, many of Lebanon's summer hotspots shut up shop. On one hand, this can mean that only limited accommodation is available; on the other, that you'll likely get terrific service and good prices, since hotels won't be rushed off their feet. If in doubt, call in advance to check whether the place you're heading for is open.

Camping

The concept of camping in Lebanon is very slowly starting to grow in popularity. Still, there are very few camping options outside summer camps for children, or camping trips laid on for organised groups. For independent camping, there are just two choices: Camping Amchit Les Colombes (p311), a few miles north of Byblos, with pretty basic facilities but a good position overlooking the sea; and La Reserve (p316), a resort with its own relatively luxurious tents in a gorgeous location high up above the Adonis Valley, close to the Afqa Grotto.

Hostels

A great alternative to budget hotels, worth exploring especially if you're heading off the beaten track, is Lebanon's network of hos-

tels. The **Lebanese Youth Hostel Federation** (www.lyhf.org) lists nine hostels serving the country from north to south, though there is no hostel in Beirut itself. Most are situated in small rural villages, which you might otherwise miss out on your travels, and have beds for US\$10 to US\$15 per person, per night.

Hotels

BUDGET

In general, Lebanon isn't big on budget hotel accommodation; even in Beirut, there are few budget places and most have only a handful of rooms. Budget lodgings have also suffered the brunt of Lebanon's recent upheavals – which kept large numbers of tourists and travellers away – and several old, established places have sadly closed down.

This means that budget stays require a little extra planning and it might be necessary to take day trips to destinations where budget accommodation is scarce. Luckily, given Lebanon's diminutive size, this is easily done: few places are more than two or three hours drive from Beirut, traffic and mode of transport permitting.

When choosing a budget hotel, keep in mind the season in which you're travelling. If it's summer, check the room has a fan or air-conditioning, especially on the coast where humidity can be extremely high and temperatures unrelenting. Likewise, check that your room has some form of heating if you're travelling in winter, when even the lower regions are chilly in the mornings and evenings.

MIDRANGE

Beirut, in particular, has lots of midrange hotels, most situated in the Hamra area, which offer good value, a central location, and sometimes even a small swimming pool on the roof. Outside Beirut, midrange hotels can vary quite wildly in terms of facilities, so check exactly what you're being offered – in terms of air-con, satellite TV, heating or bathroom facilities – before accepting a room.

The very best midrange option in Lebanon can be arranged through L'Hote Libanais (p281), a Beirut-based organisation supplying quality B&B accommodation in real Lebanese family homes and tiny, characterful inns.

TOP END

Generic top-end hotel chains swamp Beirut, with all the bells and whistles you'd expect from international luxury brands. In other parts of the country, what you'd wish for from a top-end hotel might not be exactly what you get and you may find yourself disappointed with what's on offer. Most notably, swimming pools – even indoor ones – may be closed in low season or if there aren't many guests in residence, and hotel breakfasts might not be up to much. Two fabulous exceptions are Hotel Albergo (p283) in Beirut and Hotel Via Mina (p334) in Tripoli, two world-class boutique hotels guaranteed to wow you with dozens of winning touches.

Rental Accommodation

Long-term rental apartments are available in Beirut. You may see ads posted around the American University of Beirut (AUB) area (p271), often in English. Otherwise, grab a copy of the Ministry of Tourism's *Hotels in Lebanon* guide, which has furnished-apartment listings, or check the classified section of the *Daily Star* newspaper. Many more reasonably priced places fill up quickly at the beginning of university semesters (February and October) and are usually rented for their duration. Apartments are also available in coastal towns north of Beirut, but are usually booked out well in advance of every summer; similarly, long-term ski resort rentals are usually booked out for the winter season, particularly in places such as The Cedars (p342) and Faraya Mzaar (p299).

ACTIVITIES

If you decide to go it alone on any land-based activity, remember that there is a very real danger of land mines in parts of Lebanon, particularly in the south (for more information see *Staying Safe*, p244). Always seek local advice on the safety of your intended route.

Caving

Lebanon has a number of spectacular caving opportunities. The Jeita Grotto (p303) and Afqa Grotto (p314) may be Lebanon's most famous caverns but there are more than 400 other explored cavities throughout the country, including some holes with depths of up

to 602m – among the deepest in the Middle East. From small chambers in the rock to huge caverns, Lebanon's rugged mountains have enough crags and holes to keep most spelunkers happy for a very long time.

There are a few spelunking clubs in Lebanon, which organise trips throughout the country:

Association Libanaise d'Etudes Speleologique

(ALES; www.alesliban.org, ales@alesliban.org; ☎ 03-666 469) Offers group trips into Lebanon's subterranean world, from beginners to advanced.

Groupe d'Etudes et de Recherches Souterraines

au Liban (GERSL Caving Club in Lebanon; ☎ 03-275 353, 03-240 013) The group organises weekend expeditions from May to October.

Cycling

Though risking life and limb on two wheels in Beirut traffic might not be such a tempting thought, there are a few places in the country where cycling can be a pleasure, rather than an extreme activity. The Horsh Ehden Forest Nature Reserve (p339), Chouf Cedar Reserve (p323) and the Cedars (p342) are just some of the areas that are ideal for mountain biking.

Beirut by Bike (☎ 03-435 534) arranges bike tours around Beirut and elsewhere, as well as renting out bikes by the hour, day or week (p280). It's a good starting point for finding out more about cycling in Lebanon.

Ladies on Bikes (☎ 03-825 823) arranges night-time tours of the city, usually on Tuesday and Thursday evenings.

Blue Carrot Adventure Club (☎ 03-552 007; www.blue-carrot.com) organises mountain biking expeditions, along with hiking, snowshoeing, and a host of other adventurous activities.

If you decide to hit the road alone, remember that even outside the big cities Lebanese drivers aren't expecting cyclists around those hairpin mountain bends. Be highly vigilant, and don't cycle at night.

Paragliding

With its dramatic mountain scenery, Lebanon is prime paragliding territory and the sport is gradually being established here. The season is usually from May to October, depending on the weather, and the prime areas are The Cedars (p342) and Faraya Mzaar (p299).

Club Thermique (☎ 03-288 193/237; www.clubthermique.com.lb), based in Ajaltoun, offers paragliding courses ranging from one to seven

days, as well as equipment rental, ballooning, snowboarding and 'eco' activities.

Skiing

Most of Lebanon's resorts are accessible on a day trip from Beirut and the ever fun-loving Lebanese ensure the après-ski scene is worth sampling. The season lasts from early December to April, depending on the snow. The mountains are relatively close to the sea, so the air around the slopes is humid. In the morning, when the air is coldest, this can mean icy conditions; by the afternoon, with the rise in temperature, the snow becomes wetter. If you're looking for good powder skiing, head straight for the Cedars (p342); otherwise, Faraya Mzaar (p299) is your best bet.

Cross-country skiing and snow-shoeing are growing in popularity and equipment can be rented at resorts. Most of Lebanon's trekking clubs also organise snow-shoeing day trips in winter. See Trekking (below) for more information.

Ski Lebanon (www.skileb.com) operates an absolutely fantastic website for all things ski-related in the country. You can book hotels, check out ski schools and get important tips, as well as information on snow conditions and snow-cams. For more details on ski resorts in Lebanon, see the individual boxed texts for Ski Facts: Qanat Bakiche & Zaarour (p298); Faraya Mzaar (p299); Laklouk (p316); and the Cedars (p342).

Trekking

Lebanon has fabulous trekking opportunities scattered through its mountains and gorges. There are well-maintained trails in Horsh Ehden Forest Nature Reserve (p339), the Chouf Cedar Reserve (p323), and along the Qadisha Valley floor (p344). The website for the **Lebanon Mountain Trail** (www.lebanontrail.org) has a great page of links to trekking organisations offering responsible trekking across the country; the three following listings are all excellent groups, operating with an 'eco' slant.

Esprit-Nomade (☎ 70-813 001; www.esprit-nomade.com) Arranges weekly hikes, treks and snow-shoeing, and promotes responsible ecotourism.

Lebanese Adventure (☎ 03-360 027, 03-213 300; www.lebanese-adventure.com) Runs outdoor activities throughout the country each weekend. Its moonlight hikes, with overnight camping, are especially memorable.

Liban Trek (☎ 01-329 975; www.libantrek.com) A well-established trekking club that arranges day and weekend treks throughout Lebanon. It also organises other mountain sports.

Water Sports

Much of Lebanon's swimming is from rocks or artificial platforms built out on jetties, since its sandy public beaches aren't currently well-maintained enough to recommend them.

The rocks, nevertheless, make for good snorkelling and there are often water-sports facilities at the private beach resorts. Water-skiing, jet-skiing and sailing are popular during summer and equipment can be rented from most resorts.

The Riviera Beach Club in Beirut offer water-skiing in summer for the hefty sum of US\$120 per hour.

There are good swimming pools at almost all the larger top-end hotels and resorts, and fantastic beach clubs dotted along the coastline. Expect to pay between US\$10 and US\$25 per person per day (unless you're staying at the resort), depending on the level of luxury. The best are in-and-around Beirut (p279), Byblos (p311) and Sidon (p369).

For surfers, Batroun (p313) is where you'll find the closest thing to a community of like-minded individuals. Surfers should check out www.wannasurf.com/spot/Middle_East/Lebanon/ for more information on surfing spots around the country, and windsurfers can log on to www.batroun windsurfers.cjb.net for details.

BUSINESS HOURS

Shops and private businesses in Lebanon are generally open from 9am to 6pm Monday to Friday, and 9am to mid-afternoon on Saturdays. Banks are open 8.30am to 2pm Monday to Friday, and 8.30am to noon on Saturdays. Post offices and government offices are open 8am to 5pm Monday to Friday, and 8am to 1.30pm on Saturdays.

Restaurants have no standard opening hours; in Beirut, many stay open all night. We've indicated opening hours, where possible, throughout the book.

CHILDREN

For general tips on travelling with children, see Children (p228) in the Syria Directory.

Sights & Activities

There are plenty of activities for children of all ages in Beirut and the surrounding area; see Beirut for Children (p280) for details. If you're planning on travelling country-wide with children, it's worth investing in *Family Fun in Lebanon* by Charlott Hamaoui, Sylvia Palamoudian and Dunia Gardner, which is available at most Beirut bookshops.

Ancient sites such as Baalbek (p357) and Aanjar (p351) are, to their detriment and children's delight, fairly bereft of railings, guards and 'keep off' signs, so children should have fun scrambling over ancient remains. Older kids, meanwhile, will probably enjoy wandering the souqs of Tripoli (p329) and Sidon (p367) just as much as their parents. Most of the country's nature reserves have easy marked trails, which little legs can manage.

For seasonal activities, many summer coastal beach clubs are well set up for children, with kids' pools, playgrounds and sometimes even dedicated kids' clubs available for visitors.

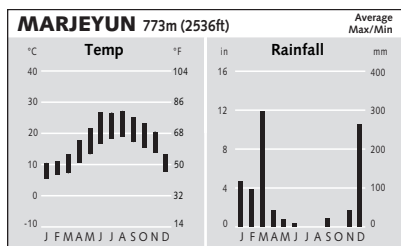
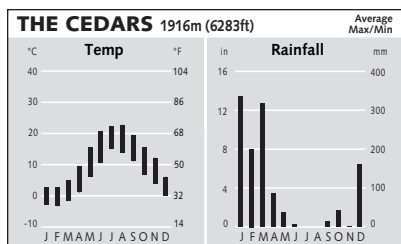
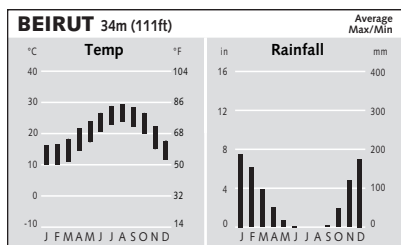
In winter, Ski Lebanon (see Skiing, opposite) offers ski day-trips from Beirut to Faraya Mzaar, including lunch and a full day of ski school, for seven- to 16-year olds.

CLIMATE

Given the diverse topography, it's not surprising that the weather here varies quite considerably from region to region. Broadly speaking, Lebanon has three different climate zones – the coastal strip, the mountains and the Bekaa Valley.

The coastal strip has cool, rainy winters (mid-December to February) and hot Mediterranean summers (June to September). The Mt Lebanon Range, stretching roughly the length of the country and including the climbable Jebel Sannine and Lebanon's highest peak, Qornet as-Sawda in the north, can concentrate the summer heat and humidity on the coast to a stifling degree. During the spring (March to May) and autumn (October until mid-December), the weather on the coast is warm and dry with occasional showers. October and April can see very heavy rainfall.

The mountains have a typical alpine climate; fresh breezes keep the summer heat at bay, which is why many people head to the mountains to escape the oppressive heat



during the summer months. There is heavy winter snow, which lasts from December to May on the higher peaks. At certain times of year you can stand on the warm coast and look inland at snow-covered peaks.

The brochure clichés are true: it is indeed possible to go skiing in the morning and swimming in the afternoon, although few people actually do it. The Bekaa Valley has hot, dry summers and cold, dry winters with snow and frost. The valley is set between two parallel mountain ranges and the wind can blow fiercely, especially in winter.

COURSES

Except for language courses in Beirut (p279) and ski lessons in the ski resorts (see Skiing, p382), there are few courses designed for those not resident in Lebanon long-term.

CUSTOMS

There is no problem bringing most items into Lebanon, such as cameras, videos or computers, and no censorship of books and magazines – though it's a sensible precaution not to bring with you any maps or material relating to Israel and the Palestinian Territories. Duty-free allowances are 400 cigarettes and one bottle of spirits or 200 cigarettes and two bottles of spirits.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

See Staying Safe (p244) for detailed information on safety concerns in Lebanon.

DISCOUNT CARDS

There are no discount cards for seniors in Lebanon. Student cards are of little use at archaeological sites and museums, unless you're Lebanese or under 12. If you do want to pursue a student discount at an archaeological site, it may be possible by applying direct to the Ministry of Tourism, who will grant you a special permit for entrance at a reduced price. Unless you're planning several successive visits to the same site, however, it's not worth the leg- and paper-work.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

See Embassies & Consulates (p230) in the Syria Directory for general information on what your embassy or consulate can – and can't – do for you.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES IN LEBANON

Nationals of New Zealand should contact the UK embassy. Embassies and consulates in Lebanon include the following:

Australia (Map p275; ☎ 01-974 030; fax 974 029; Embassy Complex, Serail Hill, City Centre)

Canada (☎ 04-710 591, 713 900; Coolrite Bldg, Jal al-Dib)

Egypt (Map p265; ☎ 867 917; Rue Thomas Edison, Ramlet al-Bayda, Beirut)

France (Map p265; ☎ 01-420 000; Rue de Damas, Achrafiyeh, Beirut)

Germany (☎ 04-914 444; near Jesus & Mary School, Mataileb, Rabieh)

Italy (Map p275; ☎ 01-985 200/300; Place d'Etoile, Beirut)

Jordan (☎ 05-922 501/2; Rue Elias Helou, Baabda)

Netherlands (Map p277; ☎ 01-204 663; Netherlands Tower, Achrafiyeh, Beirut)

Spain (☎ 05-464 120/5; fax 05-464 030; Palace Chehab, Hadath)

Turkey (☎ 04-520 929, 412 080; Tobi Bldg, Rue 3, Zone II, Rabieh)

UK (Map p275; ☎ 01-990 400; fax 990 420; Serail Hill, Downtown, Beirut)

USA (☎ 04-543 600, 542 600; fax 544 604; Rue Amin Gemayel, Awkar)

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

These days it seems that no large town in Lebanon is worth its salt without some sort of festival in one of its floodlit ancient sites. Many towns and villages also have their own small festivals, which can be anything from local fairs to folkloric performances, and are usually held during the summer months. See p246 for information on Lebanon's major festivals.

GAY & LESBIAN TRAVELLERS

There's a thriving, if clandestine, gay and lesbian scene in Lebanon, concentrated in Beirut. For more information see Gay & Lesbian Beirut, p288. Remember, however, that homosexuality is illegal under Lebanese law so discretion is advised, both in public and when checking into a double hotel room.

HOLIDAYS

Public Holidays

See p231 for details and dates of Islamic religious holidays. Following is a list of other holidays celebrated in Lebanon.

New Year's Day (1 January)

Feast of Saint Maroun (9 February)

Easter (March/April) The most important event on the Christian calendar, with Western and Orthodox Christians celebrating on different dates, which vary from year to year.

Labour Day (1 May)

Martyrs' Day (6 May)

Assumption (15 August)

All Saints' Day (1 November)

Independence Day (22 November)

Christmas Day (25 December)

INSURANCE

See the Syria Directory (p232) for tips on insurance matters.

INTERNET ACCESS

There are internet cafés in all Lebanese cities and in most smaller towns. Most charge between LL2000 and LL4000 per hour. Many regular cafés, restaurants and hotels now have wi-fi access, which is rarely free and mostly accessed through prepaid cards. See Internet Access (p268) in the Beirut chapter for more details.

If you're staying long-term, the country now has more than a dozen ISPs; here are three reputable ones:

Cyberia (☎ 01-744 101; www.cyberia.net.lb)

Inconet Data Management (IDM) (☎ 01-512 513; www.idm.net.lb)

Terranet (☎ 01-577 511; www.terra.net.lb)

LEGAL MATTERS

Drug smuggling, long a problem in Lebanon, has been heavily clamped down on and carrying any kind of narcotics (including marijuana/hash) is a foolish undertaking with a heavy jail sentence attached. Remember that if you do fall foul of the law, your embassy can do little to help other than contacting your relatives and recommending local lawyers.

MAPS

For details of city maps, see the Information sections in individual destination chapters.

There are few good road maps of Lebanon, a problem compounded by the fact that Lebanon's roads – both major and minor – aren't numbered, and there are few road signs, even on motorways. One of the better countrywide maps is the *Lebanon Tourist Map* published by Paravision. It has a scale of 1:200,000, costs around LL12,000 and is available from most Beirut bookshops.

To minimise guesswork along the way, employ the services of friendly locals at regular intervals, and take comfort in the fact that Lebanon's a small country – so you can never really go too far wrong.

MONEY

The currency in Lebanon is the Lebanese lira (LL), which has remained relatively stable over the last few years, with an exchange rate hovering at US\$1 = LL1500.

Banknotes are of the following denominations: 1000, 5000, 10,000, 20,000, 50,000 and 100,000 and there are also LL250 and LL500 coins.

US dollars are widely accepted throughout the country, and higher-end establishments rarely quote prices in anything else.

For details of exchange rates see the inside front cover of this guide.

ATMs

There are ATMs throughout the country and all dispense cash in either US dollars

or Lebanese lira. As always, though, keep some extra cash with you as insurance.

Cash

If you're travelling with US dollars you only need to exchange a small amount into lira for tipping, service taxis etc. Try to stick to US\$50 and US\$20 notes, which are more readily accepted than larger denominations. A stock of US\$1 bills is useful to have for tipping and small items. Note that change will usually be given in lira.

Most banks will exchange cash if it is in British pounds or US dollars. There are many banks in the capital and all but the smallest village has at least one bank.

There is no black market in Lebanon.

Credit Cards

Credit cards are accepted by almost all hotels of midrange and above, midrange restaurants, petrol stations and many shops. They may not be accepted by budget hotels and restaurants. Cash advances are easily available in most banks, although transactions are far quicker at ATMs. If you are planning on hiring a car remember that almost all reputable companies will insist on a credit card deposit.

International Transfers

There are Western Union offices that can arrange international transfers in almost all major towns in Lebanon. For more information, contact them at their headquarters in Beirut (☎ 01-391 000).

Moneychangers

There are many private exchanges on and around Rue Hamra in Beirut, and all the smaller towns have at least one exchange shop. You may find it a problem changing money in some of the smallest villages.

Before using moneychangers try to find out what the current exchange rates are. Either ask at a bank or check the previous day's closing exchange rates in the local newspapers. The rate you'll be offered will never be the same as the published rate, as it includes the moneychanger's commission, but you can always try to bargain with them to bring the rate closer to the published rate. If you're not happy with the rate offered by one moneychanger, try another. The commission varies from 3% to 5% for changing currency.

Tipping

It's usual practice to tip waiters, hotel porters, guides and Beirut's numerous parking valets: something around LL2000 or over, depending on the service, will always be appreciated. Waiters in restaurants generally receive an optional 10% tip – again, depending on the quality and quantity of their attention – but won't chase after you with rebukes if you leave less. Remember to check your restaurant bill before tipping, though, since some places add a 15% service charge automatically to the bill.

Travellers Cheques

Travellers cheques may be a smart way to change money, but they can be time-consuming, depending on the bank or currency exchange shop you find yourself in. Fees are usually around US\$1 per US\$50 of cheques.

PHOTOGRAPHY & VIDEO

For general photography tips, see the Photography & Video section (p233) in the Syria Directory.

Camera Equipment

There are plenty of shops selling memory cards and batteries for digital cameras all around Beirut, particularly along Rue Hamra. Outside Beirut and the larger cities you may have problems finding memory cards, though batteries (rarely rechargeable) are widely on sale everywhere. 1GB memory cards go for around US\$25, while a pack of four AA batteries will cost roughly US\$5.

Restrictions

You shouldn't have any problems taking photographs in Lebanon, with the exception of military areas. As always, when people are going to be featured in your photo, it's polite to ask first; when it comes to women and residents of conservative Muslim areas this is particularly important. If you happen to be near an army checkpoint, go up to the soldiers first and explain to them what it is you want to photograph – they usually won't object. Do not, however, try to take photos of the soldiers themselves, or military installations unless you've been given permission. If you offend they will not hesitate to ensure you wipe the images from your digital camera.

POST

Lebanon's postal service, **LibanPost** (www.libanpost.com), is nowadays quite dependable. Letters less than 20g in weight cost LL500 within Lebanon, LL1250 to the Middle East and Cyprus, and LL1750 to everywhere else. Delivery time to Europe or North America is usually within seven to 10 days. You can post them from the yellow tin boxes you'll see on the street, often attached to buildings, but it's more reliable to send them direct from the post office.

Packages weighing up to 30kg can be sent from LibanPost offices: you'll just need to sign a declaration form that gives the General Security forces the authority to open and check the parcel. Many post offices also offer a variety of other services, including Western Union money transfers, sale of prepaid cards for mobile and public telephones, faxing and photocopying.

Most Lebanese use courier services for sending parcels: **DHL** (☎ 01/03-629 700; www.dhl.com) has several offices in Beirut. A second option is **Federal Express** (Map p275; ☎ 01-987 000; www.fedex.com/lb; Chaker Oueni Bldg, Riad al-Solh Sq, Downtown, Beirut).

Receiving mail from around the world generally takes several weeks, but Beirut's **LibanPost** (Map p272; ☎ 01-344 706; 2nd fl, Matta Bldg, Rue Makdissi, Hamra, Beirut) branch in Hamra has a poste restante facility. If you know the hotel in which you'll be staying and let the desk staff know, most will keep hold of your incoming mail for you.

SHOPPING

See Shopping (p289) in Beirut for information on the city's best shopping districts. Outside Beirut, the best places for souvenirs are the souqs of Tripoli (p329) and Sidon (p367), and the shops in the old centre of Byblos (p310).

SMOKING

Smoking is a lifestyle in Lebanon, and non-smoking areas in restaurants, if they're designated at all, still tend to experience wafting smoke from the much larger smoking areas. Added to this, nargileh smoking is incredibly popular – especially among teenagers. If you find the often thick smoke hanging over cafés and restaurants hard to handle, it's best to eat before 9pm, when most places will still be quiet and smoke-

free, and avoid the lunchtime rush between around noon and 2pm.

SOLO TRAVELLERS

See the Syria Directory section on solo travellers (p235) for details.

TELEPHONE & FAX

The countrywide telephone codes are as follows:

Beirut ☎ 01

Jounieh, Byblos and Kesrouan ☎ 09

Mount Lebanon (north) ☎ 04

Mount Lebanon (south) ☎ 05

North Lebanon ☎ 06

South Lebanon ☎ 07

Bekaa Valley ☎ 08

Mobile phones ☎ 03 or 70

If you're taking your mobile phone from home along, many nowadays work on a local Lebanese network, though you'll of course pay heavily for the privilege of making and receiving calls, and sending text messages.

Otherwise, it's a good idea to invest in a prepaid calling card for both local and international calls.

Cards come in two types: the Telecard costs LL10,000 or LL30,000 and can be used in the many card-operated telephone booths on the city's streets. The alternative is a prepaid Kalam card that costs LL15,000 or LL45,000 and allows you to make calls from any phone, public or private, by using a code. Cards can be bought from newsagents, post offices, newspaper kiosks, or

CHANGING TELEPHONE NUMBERS

At the time of research, some telephone numbers in various areas of Lebanon were in the process of being changed. There appears to be no discernable pattern to the changes: some numbers in some areas had already changed, while their neighbours' numbers remained the same.

We have included the newest phone numbers available where possible and have excluded the numbers of some establishments whose numbers were likely to change in the near future. If you find that you are unable to get through, dial 120 from within Lebanon to speak to a local operator.

anywhere an 'OGERO' sign is displayed. Local calls cost LL100 to a land line and LL300 to a mobile phone.

Unless you're planning on staying in Lebanon for a while, it's probably not worthwhile investing in a local pay-as-you-go mobile phone. There's quite a bit of bureaucracy involved and they can end up being pretty pricey, often between US\$250 and US\$300. If you're hiring a car, however, you can frequently rent mobile phones through the larger car-rental agencies. Phones usually cost about US\$6 per day, plus a deposit and call charges.

Many LibanPost offices – as well as stationers and some internet cafés – offer fax services, as do all but the most budget hotels.

TIME

See the Time section (p236) in the Syrian Directory for details.

TOILETS

See the Toilets section (p236) in the Syria Directory for what to expect.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Beirut's main tourist office is a great starting point for countrywide information; see p269 for details.

Outside Beirut, the larger towns all have decent local tourist offices and can advise on festivals, events and security issues in the vicinity.

The Ministry of Tourism has an excellent website with a travel planner (www.destinationlebanon.gov.lb), while Getting Started in Lebanon (p247) lists other useful websites.

TRAVELLERS WITH DISABILITIES

Considering the number of people who were disabled during the civil war, it is curious that Lebanon is not more disabled-friendly.

People with disabilities are rarely seen on the street, which is not surprising given the difficulties of navigating the potholes, rubble and anarchic traffic. Buildings and archaeological sites do not have wheelchair ramps and bathrooms are generally not modified for access. The exception is the newly constructed inner city, which has Braille in lifts (elevators) and wide-access doors.

VISAS

All nationalities need a visa to enter Lebanon, though visa costs and requirements are frequently changing. For the most up-to-date information, go to the website of **Lebanon's General Security Office** (www.general-security.gov.lb). In an effort to encourage tourists back to Lebanon, tourist visas are currently free of charge.

Citizens of Jordan and Gulf Cooperation Council Countries (Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain and Oman) are entitled to a free three-month visa at the airport.

Citizens of the countries below are entitled to a free one-month tourist visa, extendable to three months, issued at Beirut airport: Andorra, Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, The Bahamas, Barbados, Belarus, Belgium, Belize, Bhutan, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, Chile, China, Costa Rica, Croatia, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Great Britain, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hong Kong, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Macedonia, Macau, Malaysia, Malta, Mexico, Moldova, Monaco, The Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Palau, Panama, Peru, Poland, Portugal, Russia, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Samoa, San Marino, Singapore, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Tajikistan, Trinidad and Tobago, Turkmenistan, Venezuela and Yugoslavia.

The same visa policy applies in principle at all Syrian-Lebanese border crossings, though visas may not always be issued free of charge (previous fees of LL50,000 may sometimes apply).

For other nationalities, visas can be obtained in advance at any Lebanese embassy or consulate; you'll need two passport-sized photographs and probably a letter of recommendation from your employer to say that you are returning to your job. Visas are usually issued the next day but can take longer.

If you're planning onward travel into Syria, it's crucial to note that you cannot get a visa to enter Syria from Lebanon. Only passport-holders from countries that have no Syrian consulate may obtain visas at the Syrian border, so if you want to travel overland, make sure you have a valid Syrian visa before you go to Lebanon.

If you have an Israeli stamp in your passport, or have stamps from Egyptian or Jordanian crossing points into Israel, you will be refused entry into Lebanon. For more information on entering Lebanon, see p390.

Visa Extensions

To extend your one-month visa to a three-month visa, you must go to the **General Security office** (Map p265; ☎ 1717, 01-429 060/061; Rue de Damas, Beirut; 🕒 8am-1pm Mon-Thu, 8-10am Fri, 8am-noon Sat, closed Sun) in Beirut at least a few days before your first month ends. Take with you a passport-sized photo, your passport, and photocopies of your passport ID page and the page where your entry visa was stamped.

WOMEN TRAVELLERS

Women travelling in Lebanon will notice a huge difference in attitudes towards them compared with most other parts of the Middle East, with the exception of Israel and the Palestinian Territories. In Beirut, less is definitely more in clothing terms, and it's common to see women in the most startlingly low-cut, figure-hugging combinations, even when loading up on supermarket groceries in the middle of the day. In make-up terms, though, more is usually not enough: Lebanese women enjoy being primped, preened and powdered to the hilt.

However, if you are travelling alone, you may want to be a little more restrained than your Lebanese sisters, even though you'll mostly find Lebanese men courteous and welcoming.

Generally, along the coast between Byblos and Sidon you can wear almost anything you like, and bikinis are standard issue at the beach. Outside the coastal strip – and especially in the more conservative or Muslim areas around Tripoli, Baalbek and Tyre – it's sensible to adopt a more conservative style of dress. If you are planning to visit a mosque, you'll need to make sure that your arms and legs are covered and that you take a headscarf with you. Some mosques provide women visitors with a black cloak at the door.

In the midrange and top-end hotels, security is usually very good and women need not be concerned about being hassled. In

budget hotels it might be more of a problem, and it pays to remain vigilant – though there's no reason to be worried. As a rule, keep the door locked when you're alone inside your hotel or hostel room and take local advice on where, and where not, to walk alone in the evening.

In order to feel more secure, you can also consider only taking shared taxis in which another, local, woman passenger is already present.

For additional advice, see Tips for Women Travellers (p239).

WORK

Though Lebanon is a great place to live, with the economy in poor shape this is not the best time to look for work. Lebanese are highly educated and most speak at least two or three languages fluently, so competition is stiff: unless you're fluent in both French and Arabic, you're at a distinct disadvantage. English-language publications do sometimes need writers and copy editors: you should enquire with them directly (see p269 for details).

One option for those men and women of Letters is the **American University of Beirut** (AUB; Map p272; ☎ 01-340 460; fax 351 706; www.aub.edu; Rue Bliss, Beirut), as the language of instruction is English. For most faculty positions you need a PhD.

If you do have a job, work permits are not difficult to get, although your employer must prove that there is no Lebanese person capable of doing the job.

You need a health insurance policy that guarantees repatriation of your corpse should you die in Lebanon (presumably a war-time hangover), a letter from your employer (either in Lebanon or abroad) and roughly US\$667 per year for both the work and residency permit.

Other options include coming in on a tourist visa and renewing it every three months, up to a maximum of four times. However, there are periodic crackdowns during which renewals are no longer issued, and customs and passport control check the number of stamps in your passport carefully upon arrival in the country.

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