



Country Information

Overview:

Lebanon is a country immersed in history. Lying on the Mediterranean Sea, at the junction of Asia, Africa and Europe, Lebanon's cities and harbours were once major outposts in Phoenician and Roman times. The Békaa Valley, known in the 1st century BC as the 'granary of Rome', is still the country's main agricultural region - and one of the leading wine-producing areas in the world.

One of the highlights of visiting Lebanon and its cosmopolitan capital city Beirut is the constant reminder of the country's long-standing role in the history of the world. Evidence of Phoenician and Roman occupancy is best seen at the pre-Roman historic site of Baalbek, known as the largest and best-preserved Roman ruins in the world; and in the coastal cities of Saida (Sidon) and Jbail (Byblos), where tourists have the rare opportunity to snorkel amongst submerged Phoenician ruins.

Lebanon has a remarkable natural landscape, especially when one considers how much desert surrounds it. There are four main geographical regions in Lebanon, that can easily be identified on a map. From west to east, there is the coastal plain; the Mount Lebanon Range; the Békaa Valley; and the Anti-Lebanon Range. Each region varies in topography and climate, and in what it can offer a visitor. However, because Lebanon is a small country (about the size of Cyprus), day trips to historic coastal towns and lovely mountain villages can easily be made from Beirut.

From 1975 until the early 1990s Lebanon endured a bloody civil war, which deeply scarred the country and its inhabitants, but which has resulted in some reconciliatory efforts towards rebuilding the nation, and a burgeoning atmosphere of open-mindedness and tolerance. These days, although it still features on consular warning lists, Lebanon remains a popular travel destination - and as long as travellers remain vigilant and aware of the socio-political situation at any given time, they should enjoy a safe and pleasant passage through the 'Land of the Cedars'.

The ancient cities, ski resorts, impressive architecture and striking landscapes of Lebanon are, however, just the tip of the iceberg. The country is also known for its wonderful food, internationally-renowned wineries, incredible shopping districts, red-hot nightlife and skilled artisans. Beirut, sometimes called the 'Paris of the Middle East', is a trendy and highly cosmopolitan city, where a variety of languages, nationalities and religions come together in perfect harmony. This melting pot of cultures is apparent in the colourful contrasts of the Mediterranean city, where modern life plays out in the midst of ancient buildings, where churches and mosques sit adjacent to one another, and where foreigners and locals mix easily in the dusky streets.

Lebanon Basics:

Electricity Electrical current is 110/220 volts, 50HZ. The European round two-pin plug is standard, as is the two-pin flat blade plug, two-pin flat blade plug with 3rd round pin, two-pin round plug with male receptacle pin and the 'Schuko' plug.

Money The official currency is the Lebanese Pound (LBP), which is divided into 100 Piastres. The Lebanese Pound is locally known as the 'Lira'. ATM machines are widely available in Lebanon except in



isolated towns and cash can be withdrawn from banks during business hours. Credits cards are widely used and travellers checks in US dollars are accepted at major exchange offices.

Currency Exchange Rates

LBP100.00 = US\$ 0.06 £ 0.04 C\$ 0.07 A\$ 0.06 R 0.55 € 0.05 NZ\$ 0.08

Note These rates are not updated daily and should be used as a guideline only.

Language Arabic is the official language. French and English are also spoken.

Entry requirements for Americans US citizens must have a passport that is valid for at least three months beyond their estimated duration of stay in Lebanon. A visa is required, and can be obtained on arrival at Beirut International Airport (see note, below). Tour groups of no less than eight people can obtain a six-month visa on arrival at Beirut International Airport provided that they are sponsored by a registered Lebanese tour operator.

Entry requirements for UK nationals British citizens must have a passport that is valid for at least three months beyond their estimated duration of stay in Lebanon. A visa is required, and can be obtained on arrival at Beirut International Airport (see note, below).

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Entry requirements for South Africans South African citizens must have a passport that is valid for at least three months beyond their estimated duration of stay in Lebanon. Note that South African passport holders also require a prearranged entry visa, to be issued by a Lebanese consulate abroad, and which must show the approval numbers of the Immigration Directorate (Surete Generale), or a copy of the approval authority issued by Lebanese Immigration. It is possible to obtain a six-month visa on arrival in Beirut provided the traveller is part of a registered tour group or holds pre-arranged approval by Lebanese Immigration.

Entry requirements for New Zealanders New Zealand citizens must have a passport that is valid for at least three months beyond their estimated duration of stay in Lebanon. A visa is required, and can be



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Entry requirements for Irish nationals Irish citizens must have a passport that is valid for at least three months beyond their estimated duration of stay in Lebanon. A visa is required, and can be obtained on arrival at Beirut International Airport (see note, below). Tour groups of no less than eight people can obtain a six-month visa on arrival at Beirut International Airport provided that they are sponsored by a registered Lebanese tour operator.

Passport/Visa Note Most foreign nationals can obtain a visa on arrival in Lebanon, provided that: (i) they are holding confirmed return/onward tickets, and the necessary travel documentation for their next destination; and (ii) they can supply a valid address and telephone number for themselves while in Lebanon. These tourist visas are either free (for stays of up to one month), or cost between LBP 50,000 and LBP 100,000 (for stays of up to three months). Note that holders of passports containing a visa for Israel (whether valid or expired, used or unused), or containing any Israeli stamps or endorsements, will not be allowed to enter Lebanon. A yellow fever vaccination certificate is required to enter Lebanon, if arriving within six days of leaving or transiting through an infected area.

Note It is highly recommended that your passport has at least six months validity remaining after your intended date of departure from your travel destination. Immigration officials often apply different rules to those stated by travel agents and official sources.

Travel Health Health risks for travellers to Lebanon are not excessive. A yellow fever vaccination certificate is required for travellers arriving from an infected country in Africa or the Americas. Typhoid vaccinations are recommended to all travellers with the exception of those who intend to stay in Lebanon for only a short period and take their meals in major restaurants and hotels. Typhoid cases are reported in Lebanon every year around rainy season as water levels rise and contaminated water from the sewers come to ground level. Medical facilities and healthcare in Lebanon are good. Doctors and hospitals usually expect immediate cash payment and treatment can be very expensive.

Tipping Tipping is customary in Lebanon. Porters, waiters, hotel staff, guides and doormen usually receive a 10-15% tip.

Safety Informatio Although Lebanon still features on consular warning lists, it also remains a popular and largely safe travel destination. Situated in a volatile region of the world, travellers are strongly advised to remain vigilant at all times in Lebanon, and to avoid the areas surrounding the Israeli border. Any travel south of the Litani River is discouraged. Crimes such as burglary, petty theft, vehicle theft and break-ins are present in Lebanon, but are low by international standards. Visitors should be streetwise and exercise normal precautions.

Local Customs A large proportion of the population in Lebanon is Muslim so modest standards of dress and behaviour should be exercised. In certain areas, public displays of affection may cause offence and during



Ramadan eating, drinking or smoking in public places between the hours of sunrise and sunset are frowned upon as it is forbidden by the Muslim culture. Possession, use and trafficking of controlled drugs are all serious offences in Lebanon and carry custodial sentences, and homosexuality is considered a criminal offence. Overstaying without the proper authority is also considered to be a serious offence. Photographing military personnel or installations and government buildings may lead to confiscation of photographic equipment, and possibly even imprisonment.

Business Business attire in Lebanon is formal, usually a jacket and tie. Business cards are widely distributed and English is spoken by many local business people. General office hours are Monday to Saturday, but some Muslim businesses may be closed on Fridays.

Communications The international dialling code for Lebanon is +961. The outgoing code is 00 (except for Syria, which is 02), followed by the relevant country code (e.g. 0044 for the UK). City codes are in use, e.g. (0)1 for Beirut area, (0)6 for North Lebanon and (0)7 for South Lebanon. Internet cafés are widespread in Lebanon, particularly in Beirut and major cities. Internet services are also provided outside traditional Internet cafes, e.g. Star Bucks in Beirut provides a wireless Internet connection. There is good mobile phone coverage and many networks have international roaming agreements.

Duty Free Duty free allowances for travellers to Lebanon are 200 cigarettes, 20 cigars or 200g of tobacco, 2 bottles of liquor, and perfume for personal use. All currency should be declared on arrival, and a valid import licence is required for any arms or ammunition.

Contacts:

Useful Contacts: The National Council of Tourism, Beirut: +961 (0)1 340 940 or www.lebanon-tourism.gov.lb

Lebanon Embassies

Lebanon Embassy, Washington DC, United States: +1 202 939 6300.

Lebanon Embassy, London, United Kingdom (also responsible for Ireland): +44 (0)20 7229 7265.

Lebanon Embassy, Ottawa, Canada: +1 613 236 5825.

Lebanon Embassy, ACT, Australia (also responsible for New Zealand): +61 (0)2 6295 7378.

Lebanon Embassy, Pretoria, South Africa: +27 (0)12 346 7020/1.

Foreign Embassies in Lebanon

United States Embassy, Beirut: +961 (0)4 542 600.

British Embassy, Beirut: +961 (0)1 960 800.

Canadian Embassy, Beirut: +961 4 713 900.

Australian Embassy, Beirut: +961 (0)1 960 600.

South African Honorary Consulate, Beirut: +961 (0)1 804 100.

Lebanon Emergency Numbers

140 (ambulance), 175 (fire) and 112 (police)



Lebanon Airports:

Beirut Rafic Hariri International Airport (BEY)

Location The airport is situated five miles (8km) south of the city.

Time GMT +2 (GMT +3 from the last Sunday in March to the last Sunday in October).

Contacts Tel: +961 (0)1 628 195.

Transfer between terminals Not applicable, as there is only one terminal.

Getting to the city Taxis are available outside the arrivals hall. Be sure to agree on a price before getting into the taxi - the fare shouldn't be more than LBP 30,000 for a trip into downtown Beirut. A helpful tip: catching a taxi from outside the departures section of the airport can be significantly cheaper. Bus: No official buses run between downtown Beirut and the airport. However, there are buses which travel to Charles Helou Bus Station, that can sometimes be found outside the departures section of the terminal building. Bus fares into town are generally LBP 750 (less than \$1). Passengers arriving during the day can also walk from the airport to the nearest roundabout, and catch a minibus into town from there for LBP 2000 (less than \$2).

Car rental Car rental companies located at the airport include Hala, Budget, Catrans, City Car, National, Avis, Europcar, Hertz and LenaCar. The car rental operators' desks can be found in the arrivals hall.

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Facilities Money and communications: ATMs, currency exchange offices and a bank can be found within the terminal. Pay phones, a post office, and 15 internet kiosks are also available. Luggage: A luggage wrapping service is available on the departures level. Lost baggage complaints are handled by the individual airlines. Conference and business: Airline business lounges have telephone, internet and faxing facilities. The airport does not have conference facilities, but there are a number of hotels (such as the Movenpick Hotel and Resort and the Habtoor Grand Hotel) with adequate facilities, located within six miles (10km) of the airport. Other facilities: Prayer rooms; first aid and emergency medical services; full access and facilities for disabled passengers. Wi-Fi: There is definitely Wi-Fi internet access available at Beirut International Airport; however, whether or not you'll need to pay for this service is hard to tell. The airport's website - which hasn't been updated in a couple of years - gives conflicting information, stating on the same page that (i) Wi-Fi internet access is free for one hour out of 24 each day, and (ii) that in order to access the airport's Wi-Fi service, you'll first need to buy an Internet Card from one of the airport's duty-free shops. We're not sure what the current situation is, but if you do have to pay, it should cost US\$5 for 30 minutes, and US\$10 for 75 minutes. Information: Passengers arriving at Beirut International Airport can find the Information Centre in the arrivals hall. Staff members are multilingual (generally speaking Arabic, French and English), but they can be a little terse at times. Shopping: The main duty-free shopping area is located on the second floor of the terminal building, after check-in and passport control. Passengers will not need much time to make their way through all the airport's shops. There is a Virgin Megastore, a small shop selling Lebanese souvenirs, a newsstand, and a small duty-free shop selling tobacco, alcohol, cosmetics and perfume. Food and Drink: Like the shopping options, dining choices at Beirut International Airport are quite limited. Passengers eager for a pre-flight snack should try to eat before checking-in. There are a number of cafés and restaurants open to the public, which are located on the ground floor of the terminal building. The departures level has a couple of snack bars, and there is a Lebanese restaurant on the third floor of the terminal



building.

Parking Parking for 2,350 cars is available at the airport. The parking area is connected to the terminal by an underground walkway. Parking rates start at LBP 3,500 for an hour, and go up to LBP 18,000 per day.

Departure Tax Since 2008, all departure taxes levied at Beirut International Airport have been included in ticket prices.

Website www.beirutairport.gov.lb

Lebanon Climate and Weather:

Beirut has a typically Mediterranean climate, characterised by hot, dry summers and cool, wet winters. The hottest month is August, with temperatures reaching 84F (32C), and the coldest months are January and February, with temperatures hovering around 50F (10C). The best time to visit Beirut is in spring (May) or autumn (September), when the weather is perfectly mild and there is plenty of tourist accommodation available.

Lebanon Currency:

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Note Passport and visa requirements are liable to change at short notice. Travellers are advised to check their entry requirements with their embassy or consulate.