

# Beirut

This is a city that means so much more than the sum of its wobbly parts. It's a Mediterranean destination driven by adrenaline and optimism – and it fulfils its status as capital with an urban panache that's unmistakably Lebanese. *The Monocle Travel Guide to Beirut* delves into this metropolis to explore the vivacious thrum of life and unpick its many quirks. Dive into the pace of life (and the Med while you're at it) and discover all that this Middle Eastern beacon has to offer.

## Need to know

Get to grips with the basics

- 01 **Navigating the city:** Landmarks are key to getting around here and there's an informal hierarchical system used to navigate you first to the general area and then to the exact spot.
- 02 **Spelling bee:** When translating Arabic names be aware that there are English and French approaches to spelling: Ashrafieh and Achrafieh, or Zokak el Blat and Zuqaq al Blat, for example.
- 03 **Getting around town:** Flag down a *servees* – you'll know it by its red number plate – and shout your destination (or the closest landmark) to the driver. Once approved, negotiate your price – basic journeys should cost no more than LBP3,000 per person.
- 04 **Money matters:** Everywhere accepts both the Lebanese lira (also referred to as the Lebanese pound) and US dollars; when paying by card or withdrawing cash, you can choose which currency to use.
- 05 **Superior hospitality:** People here share what they have without expecting anything in return. As such, don't be alarmed when a shopkeeper offers you a cup of coffee.

## Hotels

Make yourself at home

- 1 Villa Clara, Mar Mikhael  
*Works a charm*

Husband-and-wife owners Olivier Gougeon and Marie-Hélène Moawad run a relaxed guesthouse that, when it comes to the warmth of Lebanese hospitality, is hard to beat.

*Rue Khenchara*  
+961 70 995 739  
[villaclara.fr](http://villaclara.fr)

- 2 Dar al Achrafieh, Furn el Hayek  
*Personal touch*

Lovers of Lebanese nostalgia should head to the two-bedroom Dar al Achrafieh, which Jamil Azar runs on the third floor of a 1920s building.  
*Salim Bustros*  
+961 (0)1 217 006  
[hotelibanais.com](http://hotelibanais.com)

- 3 Le Gray, Downtown  
*Boutique but luxurious*

This luxury hotel operates as a boutique offering and its 103 rooms overlook sights such as the Roman ruins and the Beirut Souks.  
*Martyrs' Square*  
+961 (0)1 971 111  
[campbellgrayhotels.com/le-gray-beirut](http://campbellgrayhotels.com/le-gray-beirut)

## Food and drink

A Middle Eastern feast

- 1 Kalei Coffee Co, Mar Mikhael  
*Micro-roastery*

The first thing that will win your affection at Beirut's original micro-roastery is the garden; the second is the smell of coffee freshly roasting on site. Co-owners Dalia Jaffal and Andre Fadel maintain a bean-to-cup business model that ensures optimum quality and traceability.  
*Street 54, Impasse 18*  
+961 (0)3 780 342  
[kaleicoffee.com](http://kaleicoffee.com)

- 2 Tawlet, Mar Mikhael  
*Regional tour de force*

Tawlet ("table") embodies the best of Lebanese food culture: real hospitality, a relaxed atmosphere and delicious food. The lunch-only menu changes daily according to the guest chef's hometown, with Syrian, Armenian and Palestinian dishes appearing regularly.  
*12 Naher Street, off Armenia Street*  
+961 (0)1 448 129  
[soukeltayeb.com/tawlet](http://soukeltayeb.com/tawlet)

- 3 Em Sherif, Monot  
*The full monty*

From the crowd to the live Arabic music, this is Lebanon at its flamboyant best, with an onslaught (33 dishes to be exact) of truly exceptional food for you to enjoy.  
*Victor Hugo Street*  
+961 (0)1 206 206  
[Emsherif.com](http://Emsherif.com)

- 4 Abou Hassan, Bourj Hammoud  
*No-frills perfection*

Open day and night, this is the place to savour Arabic staples (using your fingers and hot, fresh bread): fatteh, chickpeas and fried bread in garlicky yoghurt and, of course, hummus and its chickpea-heavy relatives balila and msabaha.  
*Mar Youssef Street*  
+961 (0)1 266 888

- 5 Salon Beyrouth, Clemenceau  
*All that jazz*

Inspired by 1920s jazz bars, Salon Beyrouth is peppered with art deco touches. The bartenders specialise in whiskey cocktails but can make almost any tippie you like.  
*Mohammed Abdelbaki Street*  
+961 79 185 790  
[salonbeyrouth.com](http://salonbeyrouth.com)

## Retail

Shop 'til you drop

- 1 Zawal, Mar Mikhael  
*Artisan acquisitions*

The team at Zawal is also behind the series of Beyt guesthouses, restaurant Makan and shop Plan Bey. This wide-reaching network is reflected in the shop's goods, which range from hand-stamped sheets by Zena Sabbagh to traditional mouth-blown recycled glass by Baal.  
*Geara Building, Armenia Street*  
+961 (0)1 444 110

- 2 Ideo Parfumeurs, Gemmayzeh  
*Heaven scent*

In 2006, French-Algerian Ludmila Bitar quit her job at L'Oréal and moved to Beirut with her Lebanese husband Antoine. With her marketing know-how and training from Japanese perfume house Takasago, the duo founded Ideo Parfumeurs in 2013 – a bold step in a city known for favouring big international cosmetic brands.  
*Gouraud Street*  
[ideoparfumeurs.com](http://ideoparfumeurs.com)

- 3 IF Boutique, Port District  
*Legendary leather*

Leather designer and IF owner Johnny Farah started out helping a leather worker for pocket money while studying mechanical engineering in Denmark in the 1960s. Today he's still designing handsome and practical bags and shoes.  
*Fayad Building, Darwich Haddad Street*  
+961 (0)1 570 244  
[ifsohoneyork.com](http://ifsohoneyork.com)

- 4 Maison Rabih Kayrouz, Port District  
*High-fashion hero*

Rabih Kayrouz has played a key role in the development of Lebanon's haute couture scene. Since founding his label in 1997 he has crafted season after season of minimal yet sculptural dresses.  
*Fayad Building, Darwish Haddad Street*  
+961 (0)1 444 221  
[maisonrabihkayrouz.com](http://maisonrabihkayrouz.com)

## Vocabulary

Talking the talk

- 01 **Kifak (m)/kifik (f):** How are you?
- 02 **Shou fi ma fi?** What's up?
- 03 **Yeslamo:** Thank you (literally "may your hands be protected")
- 04 **Tekram ainak (m)/ainik (f):** You're welcome
- 05 **Yalla:** Come on/let's go
- 06 **Khalas:** Stop it/don't worry about it



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