

THE NEIGHBORHOODS WE CALL HOME

Sodeco: Home to The Living

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When bullets began ruthlessly piercing through the walls of the sandstone, the city divided along that very street. It was the "Green Line" separating east from west, leaving the building an empty shell of its once venerated past. Rifle-toting Christian militias replaced the cultured, literary residents and transformed the building into a sandbagged sniper's nest.

Today, almost twenty years after the end of the civil war, the Barakat Building is now known as Beit Beirut (Beirut's home). So aptly named and emblematic of Sodeco's rich history, the city bought the property from its owners in 2002 following a campaign fiercely fought and won by local heritage activists and architects for its preservation.

Beit Beirut, a not-so-hidden gem still standing tall and proud in the center of Sodeco, is now being converted into a museum dedicated to narrating the neighborhood's story and chronicling the city's history in an honest and passionate way. With its interior arches as a nod to the Ottoman Empire, modern touches, and Western features; the building is a beautiful blend of architectural influences and therefore characteristically Beirut.

Though it has yet to open its doors, you won't need to visit Beit Beirut to catch a glimpse of the neighborhood's varied past. Just take a stroll down any Sodeco street of your choice; marvel at the great, and sometimes ostentatious, modern reconstruction efforts, sneak into old decaying buildings, poke your fingers into old bullet holes, and salute our harmless army men hoisted on military tanks at various street corners. Go ahead, don't be shy. Al beit beidak.

Badaro: Home to The Modern

In the mid-1960s, the residential neighborhood of Badaro served as a safe haven for many wealthy Christian families from Aleppo and Damascus who fled from Syria when the strict nationalization laws were passed. A quiet and safe neighborhood built on the eastern border of Horsh Beirut (Beirut's Pine Forest), Badaro has always been a place people go to for refuge.

A friendly part of town with stuccoed colored buildings that hark back to the late modernist architectural periods of 1960s and 1970s, the Lebanese National Museum, and the Notre Dame des Anges Roman Catholic Parish, Badaro is a curious blend of old and new. Restaurants straight out of the 1960s with menus ever unchanged populate the same street as McDonald's, rickety vegetable stands and small grocery shops share the same corner as big corporate office buildings, and our very own The Modern houses families and guests for a few days or weeks while old apartment buildings have housed families and residents for the last few decades.

Be it for the businessman, the 78-year-old vegetable seller, the new family of three, or our guests at The Modern, Badaro is home. It is a calm neighborhood, just out of the hustle and bustle of the city, but close enough not to feel detached from any of the action, energy, and fun.

Badaro has always been a quiet retreat from the chaotic and hectic lifestyle of our nation's capital. Every city needs a neighborhood like this one; a private quarter separated from the rest by an unlikely and uncharacteristically well-preserved pine forest. While Badaro may not be the place Beirutis go for a party, a 5-star meal, or an appletini, it is where they can be themselves, put their feet up, and enjoy a nice homey plate of mouloukhiyah.

Hamra: Home to The Standard I and II

When you think of Beirut in its pre-war heyday, you think of Hamra. If Beirut was known as the Paris of the Middle East, then Hamra was its Champs Elysées. Crawling with students, artists, bankers, poets, philosophers, musicians, and writers listening to Fayruz in bars, reading Gibran Khalil Gibran in cafés, smoking Marlboros in restaurants, and watching the Rahbani Brothers in the Piccadilly Theatre, Hamra was the cultural, economic, and commercial hub of Beirut.

The first act of bold resistance against the Israeli occupation in 1982 was staged at the ironically and comically named Wimpy Café right in the heart of Hamra. Not surprising because the country's most impassioned activists congregated in cafés and underground lairs there. This street became the center of the conflict and unfortunately bore the brunt of the violence.

Hamra suffered a slow and painful downfall during the civil war and when the fighting waned, as did Hamra's allure. Hamra's fall from grace was symbolic; after the war Beirut needed a change, it moved on to newer, brighter, and flashier things. While Hamra remained an intellectual epicenter due to nearby universities, it lost its pre-war cachet to other up-and-coming neighborhoods in East Beirut like Ashrafieh, Gemmayze, and Downtown.

Recently, Hamra has experienced a revival of sorts. Home to both the Standard I and II, a number of new trendy bars, restaurants, and cafés have opened in the area and brought about quite a sudden surge in footfall. You won't find many Jimmy Choo stilettos, Chanel bags, and Cartier "Love" bracelets populating the small alleyways of this street, but what you will find is an eclectic mix of Chuck Taylors, uncoiffed bed heads, good music, and a few decent burgers.

While the vocal stylings of Fayruz may have been replaced with those of Radiohead and Rahbani Brothers' plays with indie movies projected on walls, the same authentic Beirut vibe remains. The good news is that now, Hamra dwellers have plenty of great places to choose from, none of which bearing the name "Wimpy".

The Living Neighborhood Gems:

Jewish Cemetery: Today, it is said that a mere 30 Jews still live in Beirut, and only two sites are testament to past Jewish presence here: The Magen Abraham Synagogue and the Jewish Cemetery. Located just off of Sodeco Square, much like its surroundings, the cemetery wasn't exempt from violence throughout the civil war. Nevertheless, though graves were damaged by rockets and bombs, the cemetery itself has never been desecrated and is definitely worth a look-see.

Ghaziri Bakery: Tucked furtively away in an alley just beyond the Bechara El Khoury and Independence Street intersection of the neighborhood, Ghaziri Bakery is a local favorite, baking fresh breads and pastries throughout the day. Try the classic ka'ek with zaatar and Picon cheese or the piping hot coconut brioche if you have a sweet tooth.

Al Falamanki: Al Falamanki, a casual Lebanese restaurant and shisha parlor, is a nod to local traditions. Serving up homey renditions of typical Lebanese mezze like baked halloum cheese and bayd ou awarma (eggs with dried beef), Al Falamanki is the place where Beirutis come to indulge in local pastimes like playing cards, backgammon, and watching football matches.

Bashkir: Facing Sodeco Square on Abed El Wahab El Englizi Street, Bashkir is a little store that packs a heavy punch. The shopkeeper, ever devoted to his store, sells artisanal crafts, embroidered silk linens, monogrammed towels, and other local bric-a-brac. The slippers are our favorite.

The Modern Neighborhood Gems:

The National Museum: The foremost museum of archaeology in Lebanon with collections dating back to prehistoric times, through the Bronze and Iron Ages, and into the Hellenistic, Roman, Byzantine, and Mamluk periods, lends the Badaro neighborhood a potent sense of culture, education, and history.

Horsh Beirut: Planted in the 17th century by Emir Fakhreddine to stop the currents of southern sands into the city, this 40,000m² pine forest newly opened to the public is a cool and refreshingly green respite from the chaos of the city.

Horse Racetrack: In 1991, a record turnout of more than 25,000 cheering fans packed the bullet-scarred stands as Arabian steeds raced again after a decade long hiatus. The resumption of racing was trumpeted by the Lebanese media at the time as a milestone in government efforts to reunite the capital. The racetrack is now populated by all walks of Lebanese life, whether you have a penchant for gambling, or not, it's just fun to watch.

The Standard I - II Neighborhood Gems:

Abo Hassan: The most unpretentious spot in an unpretentious neighborhood, this local treasure serves up traditional Lebanese mezze at unrivalled prices. The food is delicious, the service is friendly, almost grateful, and the homemade arak will give you a warm buzz for the rest of the day.

Amal Bohsali: With the best Lebanese sweets under one roof, you can't go wrong with a trip to Amal Bohsali. Sold by the kilo, have the baklawa-monger choose a varied selection of sweet, syrupy, and nutty goodness. Buy an extra box (or two) and pack them in your suitcase, they make for great gifts for loved ones back home. Realistically however, temptation will make them great snacks on the plane.

AUB Archaeological Museum: One of the oldest museums in the Middle East, this museum displays some of Lebanon's most prized possessions. It gives an overview of the development of man in the Middle East from the Early Stone Age to the Islamic Period. After your visit, take a leisurely stroll through the AUB campus.

Cupcakery: Located on the famous Jeanne D'Arc Street in Hamra, this pastel colored cupcake shop is a butter cream lover's dream. With 20 different flavors to choose from, you'll have a hard time picking just one. Guilty conscious be damned! Buy a box of 6 and save some for later. Our favorites are the Island Girl, the Heart of Gold, and if you're in the mood for an Arabian twist on an American classic, the Sultan is a must.

The Artwork Shop: This open space is a rare gem in Beirut. Offering an extensive choice of learning opportunities for adults and children alike, The Artwork Shop is a place of artistic inspiration and expression. The shop also houses a library and a café, where you can peruse through an art book while drinking a hot cup of green tea and a gallery with regular exhibitions for both established and up-and-coming local artists.

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Beirut Homes definitive Guide to Beirut

New York may be the city that never sleeps, but Beirut is the city that never dies. Our 100km2 capital has got more life and stamina than one 85 years young Sabah, and a much better wardrobe. But Beirut wasn’t built (and rebuilt) in a day, and you’ll need more than aimless curiosity to peel back all the intricate layers the city has to offer.

With a spirited enthusiasm for urban living and the way we think life, travel, culture, art, fashion, history, and cuisine collide; we’ve created this definitive guide to help you wander the crowded streets like a Beirutí would. We’re introducing these hidden gems and local institutions to you because Beirut just wouldn’t be the same without them. All our suggestions are places we go to ourselves; places we dine in, places we wine in, and places we think make this city quirky and exciting. We love our city and the places we recommend, and we want our guests to always come back for more; most do.

Feast

Beirutis live in excess. We have an intoxicating and contagious *joie de vivre*; fuelled by copious amounts of hummus and tabbouleh, and glassfuls of local wine. Whether you’re a cuff-linked fine diner, a junk food junkie, a brave street food try-er, or a wide-eyed veggie option eater. A chocolate lover, a constant Dieter, or a glorified glutton. Or if you just need a home cooked meal like mama used to make, you’ve come to the right place.

- Al Sultan Brahim**, Bab Idriss, Downtown, +961 1 989989, +961 3 090809 Restaurant, Lunch and Dinner, \$\$\$

In most cases, they say you can judge a restaurant by its breadbasket. In Beirut, you judge a Lebanese restaurant by its hummus. While it would be ambitious to say that Al Sultan Brahim serves Beirut’s best hummus, this Lebanese seafood restaurant offers some of the freshest and most delicately prepared fish in town. Don’t expect a pedantically filleted piece of lemon sole or Dorade; choose fish from the glass casing like the restaurant’s namesake sultan brahim or lo’oss, and they’ll bring it to you (deep fried or baked) whole and debone it in front of you. Also try a bowlful of crunchy bizri and octopus a la Provençal.

- Albergo**, Abdel Wahab El Ingilzi Street, Ashrafieh, +961 1 339797 Restaurant, Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner and Drinks, \$\$\$

Albergo is a beautiful restaurant with exquisite French and Italian cuisine. Perfect for romantic candlelit dates, luscious gray couches, low lamped lighting, and impeccable service make for a wonderful culinary experience. The indoor restaurant pays tasteful homage to our rich history; artifacts, books, and antiques from across Lebanon decorate the beautifully wallpapered walls. The rooftop is the quintessential place for a quite open-air dinner or a glass of pink lemonade at sunset. The crab salad, club sandwich, and black truffled scrambled eggs are lovely.

- brgr co.**, Abdel Wahab El Ingilzi Street, Ashrafien, +961 1 3335111 Restaurant, Lunch and Dinner, \$\$\$

When you’re in the mood for a lip smacking, grease running, ketchup oozing “brgr” made with all-natural ingredients, brgr co. is the White Castle to your Kumar. Whether you’re a little peckish or seriously starved, brgr co. has just the brgr for you; at 4oz, 6oz, or 8oz, you can feast on an Angus beef brgr cooked to your liking. Don’t miss out on the crispy buttermilk onion stack and if you’re feeling retro, go for the chocolate shake with two straws, and share!

- Casablanca**, Minet el Hosn, Ain El Mreisseh, +961 1 369334, +961 3 865111 Restaurant, Brunch, Lunch, and Dinner, \$\$\$

You may have to sell your soul for a last minute table at Casablanca on a lazy Sunday, but it’s worth the wait. This white villa offers views of the Mediterranean seafroth through its Arabesque arched windows and has the post-Saturday night brunchers in a feeding frenzy. All ingredients are sourced from the owner’s own organic farm in Chouf and the food, perhaps aptly inspired by his Asian wife, is east-west fusion. A solid choice for any meal, but if you had to pick one, the brunch is a must.

- Falafel M. Sahyoun**, Damascus Street, Achrafieh Fast Food, All day every day, \$

No need for reservations here. Just order your falafel sandwich with tahini, pickles, and tomatoes to go. Arguably the best falafels in town, this Beirut landmark is buzzing with hungry passersby at all times of the day and night. The Sahyoun brothers owned the establishment until they ended their partnership in a bitter battle of falafel proportions. The brothers now have 2 shops, side by side, differentiated only by the uninspired colors of their fluorescent signs. Every Beirutí is stubbornly loyal to one brother or the other, our suggestion is to try a sandwich from both and judge for yourself.

- La Parilla**, 66 Saint Maron Street, Gemmayze, +961 1 585885, =961 3 919119 Restaurant, Lunch and Dinner, \$\$\$

This Argentinian steak house delights its guests with the best steak in town and a serenade by its resident pianist.

- Le Chef**, Gouraud Street, Gemmayze, +961 1 445373, +961 1 446769 Restaurant, Lunch and Dinner, \$
- This quaint little restaurant, harking back to Beirut’s glory days circa 1969, serves up traditional Lebanese home cuisine. Meals like mouloukhiéh, moughrabieh, and kibbeh bi sanniyeh are made in their tiny little kitchen, each on a different day. Their dish-of-the-day concept makes you feel like you’re back in your Grandma’s kitchen, impatiently banging your fork and knife on the table until the plate is set before you and you take your first satisfying whiff. There’s not a lot of variety, but the food is made with love. The atmosphere is relaxed with regulars from all walks of city life: the businessmen, the artists, the hippies, the writers, all come together to enjoy a great meal for 10,000 L.L. (less than \$7).

- Mayrig**, Pasteur Street, Gemmayze, +961 1 572121, +961 3 228227 Restaurant, Lunch and Dinner, \$\$

Mayrig in Armenian means “little mother” and those 2 words sum up the place perfectly. A humble restaurant on a crowded street, Armenian delicacies are offered in a very homey and relaxed setting. Similar to traditional Lebanese mezze but with a spiced and fruity twist, Armenian cuisine has become a staple in a Beirutí’s repertoire. Ask your waiter for recommendations, but don’t miss out on the flaky Sou Beureg and sweet black cherry katta.

- Momo at the Souks**, Beirut Souks, Downtown, +961 1 999767 Restaurant and Bar, Dinner and Drinks, \$\$
- When a new restaurant opens in town, Beirutis flock en masse and fight to the death for a coveted table. This time, it’s worth the scars of war to those victorious few. Artful and alluring, the décor transports you to a modern, Moroccan-inspired boudoir draped in rich fabrics and warm wallpaper. The menu doesn’t disappoint; from hearty, succulent lamb to light, refreshing ceviches, there’s something for the finickiest of palates. Try the pigeon pastila.

Flooded with lounge music and trendy night owls, Momo’s bar is a great choice for having a drink with friends. Stand on the balcony and take in the contrast that is Beirut; a vista peppered with sleek office buildings, designer store window fronts, and an abandoned mosque. Nothing can be more enjoyable on a warm Beirut night.

- Nimr al Wadi**, Tareeq al Jdideh

Hands down the best knefeh (a Lebanese dessert made with cheese, pastry dough, and simple syrup) in town, this hole in the wall, modestly decorated with plastic outdoor chairs and fluorescent lights, in a shoddy neighborhood may not be a Relais et Chateau pick but is a favorite amongst the locals.

- Tawlet**, Naher Street, Jisr El Hadid, +961 1 448129 Restaurant, Lunch, \$\$

Grab a plate of quality Lebanese food with a modern twist from this buffet-style casual eatery. A restaurant born out of the Souk El Tayeb farmer’s market concept, all their ingredients are sourced from local organic farmers and prepared daily by their home chef. Jars of goat’s milk labneh balls, glistening green olive oil, tangy pickled beetroot, almond apricot jam, and sweet golden honey are up for sale along with bags of zaatar, rosemary-scented flatbread, and sticky, syrupy ba’lewa.

- Yabani**, Damascus Street, Ashrafieh, +961 1 211113 /4, +961 3 503222 Restaurant, Lunch and Dinner, \$\$\$

Designed by local architect Bernard Khoury, the only way to get in this Japanese restaurant is in a round glass elevator that transports you underground into the red and white lair of the sushi senséis. One of the first Japanese restaurants to open in Beirut, Yabani still stands as one of the city’s best choices for great sushi. The menu is varied and impressive. The sushi is always cold and fresh and the peanut noodles tickle your tummy in all the right places.

Celebrate

- B-018**, Dora Highway, Qarantina, +961 3 800018 Nightclub, Party, \$\$\$

Beirut’s darkest underground club decorated with a crypt-like feel and coffin-inspired tables, lures insomniac and debauched Beirutis by the hundreds. Not the most fragrant of names, the club’s famous retractable roof gives clubbers a nighttime view of city lights and well-deserved whiff of fresh air. The music ranges from electro to house to funk, and once you’ve had enough timely sips of alcohol, you’ll forget that only 30 years ago this was the site of a violence-stricken refugee camp on a battlefield of civil war. Don’t ever bother going before 2:30am.

- Centrale**, Saint Maron Street, Gemmayze, +961 1 575 858, +961 3 915925 Restaurant Bar, Drinks, \$\$

A period stone house with a bar on top, caged in a steel cylinder, the windows revolve upwards and reveal a starlit sky over head. Drowned out by the sound of a DJ mixing at the end of the bar, laughter and conversations abound as people enjoy their drinks and the view.

- De Prague**, 166 Makdissi Street, Hamra, +961 1 744864, +961 3 575282 Bar, Drinks, \$-\$\$

Hamra has experienced a revival in the last couple of years. Previously known to house universities, fast food restaurants, decrepit boutiques, and not much else, Hamra now boasts a burgeoning indie scene that rivals Gemmayze and Mar Mikhael. De Prague pioneered this paradigm shift; the ambiance is comfortable and the music is appropriate. Indie films are projected without sound on the wall every night starting 9pm, subtitled in English, French, or Arabic.

- Ferdinand**, Mahatma Gandhi Street, Hamra, +961 1 355955 Bar, Drinks, \$-\$\$

This small, red-walled bar in Hamra oozes character. The DJ mixes all genres of music under one roof in one sitting and the crowd is much appreciative. The Mojitos are sweet and refreshing and the burger is one of the best in town. Go for the music, the crowd, and the food.

- Music Hall**, Starco, Omar Daouk Street, Downtown, +961 1 361236, +961 3 807555 Nightclub, \$\$\$

Twelve artists and bands ranging from jazz and ethnic to pop and belcanto rattle off a red-velvety hot performance each night for a fever pitched audience at Beirut’s Music Hall. Music Hall is not your typical nightclub, set in a converted old cinema; this cabaret-style theatre provides a live music venue for the uncharacteristic clubber.

- mybar**, Park Avenue, Downtown, +961 1 999608, +961 70 608999 Restaurant Bar, Drinks, \$\$-\$\$\$

Designed by PSLAB, mybar is a bar/restaurant that offers a welcome alternative to nightclubs in Beirut. The night starts off with conversation-conducive lounge music and by midnight, the resident DJ and musical guru transforms the atmosphere from relaxed to rowdy with one quick turn of his table. The crowd is cool and fun, the music ranges from indie

rock and house to mainstream hip-hop and pop, and best of all, the ventilation allows for relatively clear lungs by the end of the night.

- Pacifico**, Monot Main Alley, Ashrafieh, +961 1 204446 Restaurant Bar, Drinks, \$\$

This Mexican-themed bar was the first bar to open on Monot Street after the civil war and remains a staple amongst trendy 30-somethings in Beirut. The friendly atmosphere channels warm Latin American hips and salsa, 1930s Cubano music, and outdoor seating area make this bar the perfect spot for a relaxed drink with close friends.

- Skybar**, BIEL, Downtown, +961 3 939191 Nightclub, Party, \$\$\$

Consistently voted as one of the best clubs in the world, Skybar has become a legend on the Beirut party circuit. The ultimate in see and be seen, Skybar attracts the young and the old, the rich and the uber rich, the suits and the avant-gardes, the bored and the wide-eyed, the socialites and the wannabes, the bachelors and the married, the affair-havers and the alcoholics, the willfully unemployed and the trust fund babies. A summer in Beirut is no summer at all without a night, or two, or three (a week) at Skybar.

Laze

- La Plage**, Minet El Hosn, Ain El Mreisseh, +961 1 366222 Beach, \$\$-\$\$\$

Reminiscent of one of Vinnie Chase’s infamous backyard pool parties in the Hollywood Hills, La Plage offers the venue and the permission to laze around an intimate pool, listen to music, have a drink on a poolside bar, and stare at some of the most beautiful young vacationers and weekenders in town. La Plage also has a nice pier area where you can sit on red canvas couches, drink an ice-cold Almazá, snack on peanuts and salted hummus beans, smoke shisha, and watch a pink sun set on the Mediterranean.

- Riviera Beach Lounge**, Avenue de Paris, Manara, +961 1 3732109-Beach, \$\$-\$\$\$

Riviera beach club satisfies most beach lover tastes and types, all but those who are looking for a quiet, relaxed, and unpretentious experience. The “Regular” admission area generally turns into a rowdy beach party for those relentless summertime addicts whose nightly dose of alcohol and music is just not enough. The VIP area is quieter, secluded and tailored to the more sophisticated, rosé-sipping bunch. Finally, you have the exclusive “Private” area where up to 10 people can rent their own private Jacuzzi and a bed that rotates according to the direction of the sun to maximize UV exposure. Penny-pinchers beware! Pricy weekend rates suspiciously apply Thursday to Sunday.

- \$=0-15 \$\$=15-50 \$\$\$=50-100 \$\$\$\$=100+



Splurge

- Beirut Souks**, Downtown

Don’t be fooled by the name, the Beirut Souks are not the typical oriental marketplace you’ve seen in Disney’s Aladdin or the unfortunate sequel to Sex and the City. The name evokes mounts of fragrant spices and hawkers selling old ceramic crockery, woolen rugs, unpaired silver cutlery, questionable gold jewelry, and silk abayahs. But what the Beirut Souks have to offer is a veritable allegory to the entire Lebanese experience. A fashion Mecca in the heart of the city, this high-end, open-air mall houses every coveted label you can think of: Hermes, Burberry, Louis Vuitton, Chloe, Etro, Carolina Herrera, YSL, Christian Louboutin, as well as high street fashion houses like Zara, H&M, Massimo Dutti, Seven for all Mankind, and Aizone. The restaurants and cafes dotted around the mall offer a well-deserved respite from a long day shopping. Don’t forget to ask for your Global Tax-Free refund!

- Enoteca**, Tabaris, Achrafieh

“Very few things measure up to drinking a crisp glass of white on a midsummer’s night or a warming glass of red in front a crackling fire”, said a friend who strictly vacations in countries that produce wine because it almost guarantees great food and a great time. That same friend recommends Enoteca as a must visit for the wine connoisseur and amateur alike. With an impressive selection of vintage local and imported wines and a knowledgeable sales clerk who lets you sample the featured wine of the month, you’re sure to stumble clumsily out of the store with bagfuls of award-winning Lebanese wines to take back home.

- milía m**, Saifi Village, Downtown

This boutique is for the wistful shopper, the sensual dresser, the spirited exhibitionist, and the feminine seductress. Lebanese designer Milia M creates her collections as a nod to Middle Eastern style and mystery. Her flagship store in Saifi village showcases her seasonal collections that wrap around the body tightly and offer glimpses of flesh that playfully suggest more than they deliberately reveal.

- Papercup Bookstore**, Pharaoh Street, Mar Mikhael

Papercup is a charming little bookstore nestled deep in the bohemian neighborhood of Mar Mikhael. The walls in this reader’s haven are lined with stacks of speciality art, design, photography, and architecture books imported from various cities around the world. Enjoy a cup of coffee and a slice of homemade cake while flipping through your favorite book on street art.

- Souk el Tayeb**, off of Hamra Main Road (on Tuesdays), Saifi Village (on Saturdays)

Souk el Tayeb single handedly launched the budding organic food movement in Lebanon. Bringing together organic farmers and producers from all over the country, Souk el Tayeb is a hodgepodge of toothless farmers in flannel, wrinkle-faced ladies crouched over a saï, strapping crate-lugging truckers, and aspiring bakers selling organic homemade cakes and cookies. Even if you’re not in the market for peppery arugula or bitter radishes, it’s worth the trip just to sample organic jams, honey, and local wine.

Roam

The savvy culture maven will start the day with a brisk walk in the new **Waterfront District** centrally located just before the BIEL exhibition center. With separate lanes for bikers and joggers, this area finally provides a promenade in Beirut for those who want to escape the reckless Vespas, the intoxicating exhaust fumes, and the ever-present shisha smokers on the Corniche.

After a filling breakfast, head to the oft overlooked **Crypt Museum** in the St. George Cathedral in Downtown where a cross section of the underground excavation site of the Byzantine Anastasis Church is found. Take the tour of 12 different stops that are individually lit in sequence from start to finish. The stops are lit for one minute each, along with a separately lit panel describing the remains in view for each period before moving onto the next. A short 5 minute walk to Capuchin Street will bring you to the **Roman Baths**, extensive Roman ruins very well preserved. Never failing to recreate the comfort of home even when thousands of miles away, the Romans left their mark in our otherwise bulldozed and reconstructed city.

Tucked away north of the Grand Serail, between Rue France and Wadi Abou Jmil, the remains of the once grand **Maghen Abraham synagogue**, which in the early 20th century served a thriving Jewish Beirut community are a must see. Recently restored, the stars of David and Hebrew inscriptions adorning the synagogue’s surviving walls stand out conspicuously once again, humbling souvenirs of a more tolerant past.

As you begin your artistic pilgrimage east of downtown, make your first stop in Saifi Village for a quiet wander on the cobble stone streets and a well-deserved espresso break at **Balima Café**. Pop into the many art galleries and experience showrooms like Piece Unique, Bokja and Nada Debs. You won’t be disappointed.

Further and deeper eastward, pay a visit the **Beirut Art Center** near Jisr al Wati. In an industrial and eclectic neighborhood, the converted factory and large non-profit space is now home to the works of several artists, both struggling and established. If you leave wanting more, head to **Agial Art Gallery** near the American University of Beirut. The two-story gallery devoted to contemporary local artists will surely give you insight into the present and future big names in Arab art. After ruminating on brush strokes and color combinations, take a stroll through the **American University of Beirut**, and use the Mediterranean as your compass. The campus is beautiful and smoke-free; so you can enjoy the view and breathe in the fresh, floral-scented air. And if you’re a cat lover, you’re in for a treat!

Exit AUB through the Sea Gate and walk along the **Corniche** at sunset, until you hit the **Pigeon Rocks**. The natural offshore rock arches of Pigeon Rocks are the most famous, and probably one of the only, natural features of Beirut. The stretch of the Corniche directly in front of the rocks is an excellent vantage point, but far more interesting is to take one of the tracks down to the lower cliffs.

In the evening, catch a local or international play, dance performance, concert, reading, or even film festival at the **Monot Theatre** on Saint Joseph University Street. Packed with young hipsters and nostalgic theatergoers of an erstwhile generation, Monot Theatre injects a much-needed dose of performance art back into Beirut’s art scene. After the show, take a street-savvy taxi that will navigate you around the late night **Gemmayze** traffic and into Sursock right on the famous **St. Nicolas Steps**. Walk down the steps and peek into the tiny art galleries on your way down to **Gouraud Street**. Full of bars, restaurants, thirsty young night crawlers, and loud music, this street is a must if you’re in the mood for a fun drink and quick bite.

If you’re feeling particularly adventurous and nautical, take a taxi to the **Dbayeh Marina** and rent a small fishing boat at dawn (www.dbayefishing.com). For a mere \$400, you can rent an 11-meter fishing boat accommodating 8 people, fishing gear, and a captain to boot. Bring your own food, drinks, music and sunscreen on this 5-hour trip.

Venture

Although many a Beirutí may dare to claim otherwise, there is life outside of Beirut. Day trips are worth planning, here are a few options:

Day 1: Jeita-Harissa-Byblos

Grotto Jeita should be your first stop on this trip to the north. The caverns of Jeita are interconnected limestone caves where drops of water patiently created cathedral-like vaults over hundreds of years. Weeping Willow formations made of limestone make this new 7 wonders of the world finalist a not-be-missed photo-op.

Take a ride on the “Téléferique” up to Harissa where the **Basilica of our Lady of Lebanon** and a huge **statue of The Virgin Mary** piously watches over her devotees. All are welcome; watching veiled women climb up the winding staircase recounting the story of the Virgin Mary to their children is a heartwarming spiritual experience. If you’re not usually a fan of religious sites, come just for the breathtaking view.

The last and northern-most stop on this day trip is **Byblos**. An ancient and majestic city once ruled by the Phoenicians, Byblos is an archeologist’s dream. A trip to Byblos won’t be complete without visiting the **Great Temple**, the **Temple of the Obelisks**, the **Temple of Balaat Gebal**, the **Byblos Castle**, and the **wax museum**.

Day 2: The Bekaa Valley and Baalbek

East of the ever disputed over Litany River, in **Baalbek**, within a sprawling complex of debris and stone, are a profusion of temples and platforms filled with a stunning collection of fallen columns and sculptures. The structures at the ruins are the **Great Court**, the **Temple of Baal/Jupiter** situated upon the massive pre-Roman stone blocks known as the **Trilithon**, the **Temple of Bacchus**, and a circular temple with an enigmatic and romantic past built for Venus, the Goddess of Love.

Warnings

No need to panic! Beirut is a very safe city. But there are a few things you need to know:

A busy street in Beirut, Lebanon

- Beirut is saturated with visitors from June to August and again from mid-December to mid-January. If you’re the see and be seen jet setter, the dance-on-tables partier, or the annual family reuniter, then these times are the best times. But if you’re the quiet adventurer, the serious business owner, or the off-the-beaten path explorer, keep in mind that by mid-September, the weather is still wonderful, the tourists flee en masse, and the locals proudly take their city back.

- Driving in Lebanon is not for the faint of heart. Rent a car only if you’re an experienced rally car driver, and even then you may run into problems.

- Take taxis everywhere. Where else can you ride in a Mercedes Benz for less than \$2? This proud breed of taxi is called a *service* (pronounced serveess) and weaves through traffic like a dream. Where can you find it, you ask? Don’t worry, it’ll find you.

- For a more comfortable, though less typical driving experience, pre-order a taxi by calling any of the following registered cab companies: Allo Taxi (1213), Trust Taxi (01613398-), or Charlie Taxi (01285710-).

- The local currency is the Lebanese Lira (L.L.) and is pegged to the dollar: \$1=1,500L.L. Don’t let anyone tell you different.

- Shops are generally open Monday-Saturday from 10am-8pm, and do not take a notoriously European siesta. Though you are more than welcome to come back to your room and enjoy a satisfying nap, shopkeepers will warmly greet you anytime throughout the day. For Sunday shopping, head towards Beirut Souks.

- Beirut is a foodie’s Mecca. Beirutis love their bellies; they don’t plan much, but they do plan to eat. Always book well ahead for the city’s best tables to avoid sheer, tummy-wrenching disappointment.

- Service is most likely included. But always add a polite 10%, or more. You’ll be coming back and you’re going to want to be treated well.

- Beirut remains a smoker’s paradise. While some restaurants feature non-smoking areas, they are generally in the back or near the kitchen. Regardless, don’t be shy to ask a smoker to turn out a cigarette if it bothers you.

- Drinking bottled water is no luxury in Beirut, but rather a necessity. Local bottled water is safe and refreshing, our favorite is Sohát.

- The international dialing code for Lebanon is +961, Beirut’s city code is 01, and mobile code is 03, 70, or 71.

- For general emergencies dial 112.

You will only need the following Arabic phrases to brave the streets of Beirut:

Hello my love, how are you?: Hi habibi, keefak?
Good morning/Good evening: Bonjour/Bonsoir
Goodbye/See ya: Yalla bye, min shoofkon!
Thank you very much: Merci kteer