



Lebanon

Snowy mountains above a warm sea, cedar forests, Phoenician harbours and Roman temples, in a small country famous for its mezze and its hospitality.

AT A GLANCE

Facts to know

CAPITAL

Beirut

POPULATION

About 5.4 million (2024 estimate)

OFFICIAL LANGUAGE

Arabic (the constitution also allows French in cases set by law)

CURRENCY

Lebanese pound (also called the Lebanese lira); US dollars are widely used

AREA

About 10,450 km²

GOVERNMENT

Parliamentary republic, with power shared among religious communities

HIGHEST MOUNTAIN

Qurnat as Sawda', about 3,088 m

LONGEST RIVER

The Litani, over 140 km, the longest river entirely within Lebanon

NEIGHBOURS

Syria to the north and east and Israel to the south. Across the sea lies Cyprus

DRIVES ON THE

Right

CALLING CODE

+961

A 45-minute trip to Lebanon

Everything you need is in this pack. No preparation beyond printing. Adapt the timing to your group.

- | | |
|---------------------|---|
| 0 to 5 min | Welcome. Show the map page and find Lebanon together. Ask: who has been there, or knows someone from there? |
| 5 to 15 min | Read the facts at a glance, then three moments from the story: 5000 BC: Early settlement at Byblos; 1920: Greater Lebanon is declared; 2020: The Beirut port explosion. |
| 15 to 25 min | At the table: talk about Hummus and Tabbouleh. Idea: bring a small taste (bread, cheese, fruit, tea) if your kitchen can help. |
| 25 to 30 min | Say it like a local: practise "Marhaba" (Hello), "Sabah el-kheir" (Good morning), "Masa el-kheir" (Good evening). Everyone says them together. |
| 30 to 40 min | Quiz: read the questions aloud, or play the big-screen version at https://worldstroll.com/countries/lebanon/group . No scores needed. |
| 40 to 45 min | Talk about it (questions page), then stamp or sign everyone's passport page. |

You will need

- This printed pack (one per table, or one each)
- Pens for the quiz
- Optional: a world map or globe, a small tasting, music from the country

Lebanon and its cities



- Beirut (Beirut): The Corniche seafront promenade, The National Museum, Pigeons' Rock at Raouché
- Tripoli (North): The Crusader Citadel of Raymond de Saint-Gilles, Old covered souks, Sweet shops and knafeh
- Jounieh (Keserwan-Jbeil): The cable car to Harissa, Its bay and old stone souk
- Byblos (Keserwan-Jbeil): Its Crusader castle and ancient ruins, The old harbour, A UNESCO World Heritage Site
- Batroun (North): Fresh lemonade, Old Maronite and Greek Orthodox churches, Beaches and cafés
- Bsharri (North): The Gibran Museum, The Cedars of God forest nearby, Skiing at the Cedars

- Zahlé (Beqaa): Riverside restaurants, Arak and Beqaa wine
- Baalbek (Baalbek-Hermel): The Roman temples of Jupiter and Bacchus, The Baalbeck International Festival
- Deir el Qamar (Mount Lebanon): The Fakhreddine Mosque, Old palaces around the main square
- Sidon (South): The Crusader Sea Castle, Its old souk and soap museum
- Tyre (South): Roman ruins and a huge hippodrome, Its old fishing harbour

A short history of Lebanon

Few places pack so much history into so little land. The Lebanese coast was home to Phoenician city-states thousands of years ago, while the modern state only took shape in 1920 and became independent in 1943.

5000 BC Early settlement at Byblos

By about 5000 BC fishing families were living in huts on the shore at Byblos. The town has been lived in ever since, and it is often listed among the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world.

1000 BC The Phoenician alphabet at Byblos

A king of Byblos named Ahiiram was buried in a carved stone coffin. Its inscription, usually dated to around 1000 BC, is considered the earliest known example of the fully developed Phoenician alphabet, the ancestor of the Greek and Latin letters.

814 BC Tyre founds Carthage

According to tradition, settlers from Tyre led by Queen Elissa, also called Dido, founded Carthage in what is now Tunisia in 814 BC. It grew into the capital of a great trading empire.

332 BC Alexander besieges Tyre

Tyre stood on an island about 1 km off the coast. Alexander the Great besieged it for seven months and built a causeway to reach it. Sand later built up along the causeway, and Tyre has been joined to the mainland ever since.

64 BC Rome takes over

The Roman general Pompey added the region to the Roman world. Under Rome, Baalbek received its giant temples.

1109 Crusaders take Tripoli

After a long siege, Crusaders from southern France took Tripoli in 1109 and made it the capital of the County of Tripoli, one of the Crusader states. The Mamluks took the city in 1289.

1516 Ottoman rule begins

Lebanon became part of the Ottoman Empire. For centuries local emirs, such as Fakhr al-Din II and later Bashir II, ruled Mount Lebanon on

behalf of the sultan.

1861 Mount Lebanon becomes autonomous

After fighting between Druze and Maronite communities in 1860, European powers pressed the Ottomans to make Mount Lebanon a self-governing province with a Christian governor. It lasted until 1918.

1920 Greater Lebanon is declared

On 1 September 1920 France declared the State of Greater Lebanon, with Beirut as its capital. It joined Mount Lebanon with the coast, the north, the south and the Beqaa, close to the borders of today.

1926 The first constitution

Lebanon adopted a constitution in 1926 and became the Lebanese Republic, though France still held real power under its League of Nations mandate.

1943 Independence

In November 1943 Lebanon's parliament removed the French mandate from the constitution. France arrested the leaders, but released them on 22 November after protests, and Lebanon still celebrates 22 November as Independence Day.

1945 A founding member of the Arab League

On 22 March 1945 Lebanon was one of the seven founding members of the Arab League in Cairo. The same year it also became a founding member of the United Nations.

1975 The civil war begins

Tensions between political and religious groups, and the presence of armed Palestinian groups, turned into a civil war. Syria and Israel both sent troops during the war.

1990 The civil war ends

The Taif Agreement of 1989 laid the basis for peace, and the fighting ended in 1990 after 15 years. Estimates of the dead are around 120,000 to 150,000, and nearly a million people were displaced.

2000 Israeli troops leave the south

In May 2000 Israeli forces withdrew from southern Lebanon, which they had held for years. The Lebanese mark 25 May as Liberation Day.

2020

The Beirut port explosion

On 4 August 2020 a large store of ammonium nitrate, about 2,750 tonnes when it was unloaded and kept unsafely at the port of Beirut for six years, exploded after a fire. More than 200 people died, thousands were injured and large parts of the city were damaged.

What people eat in Lebanon

Lebanese food is built on olive oil, lemon, garlic, fresh herbs, chickpeas, bulgur wheat and flatbread. A meal usually starts with mezze, many small dishes shared from the middle of the table, such as hummus, tabbouleh and stuffed vine leaves. Then come grilled meats or a baked dish, and the meal ends with fresh fruit and a small cup of coffee. A plate of raw vegetables, olives and pickles is almost always on the table.

Hummus)

All of Lebanon and the wider Levant

A smooth purée of cooked chickpeas, tahini (sesame paste), lemon juice and garlic, spread on a plate, drizzled with olive oil and eaten by scooping it up with flatbread.

Tabbouleh)

Mountain villages of Lebanon and Syria

A bright green salad that is mostly finely chopped parsley, with a little mint, tomato, onion and fine bulgur wheat, dressed with lemon juice and olive oil.

Fattoush)

All of Lebanon

A crunchy village salad of lettuce, tomato, cucumber, radish, peppers and herbs, tossed with toasted or fried pieces of flatbread and a dressing sharp with lemon and sumac.

Smoky aubergine dip)

All of Lebanon and the wider Levant

Aubergines are charred over a flame until the flesh is soft and smoky, then mashed with tahini, lemon, garlic and olive oil. It is a favourite on the mezze table.

Labneh)

All of Lebanon

Yogurt strained in a cloth until it is as thick as soft cheese, spread on a plate and drizzled with olive oil. It is a breakfast favourite with olives, mint, cucumber and bread.

Za'atar flatbread)

All of Lebanon

Round flatbread spread with za'atar, a mix of wild thyme, sumac and sesame seeds in olive oil, and baked until crisp at the edges. Cheese and minced meat are other toppings. It is the classic Lebanese breakfast.

Spinach pies)

All of Lebanon

Small triangles of soft dough filled with spinach, onion, lemon juice and sumac, baked until golden. Other fatayer are filled with cheese or meat.

Sfiha)

Baalbek and the Beqaa Valley

Small open pies of thin dough topped with minced lamb or beef, onion, tomato and spices. The Baalbek version, sfiha baalbakiya, is famous across Lebanon.

Baked kibbeh)

All of Lebanon

A paste of fine bulgur wheat pounded with lean minced lamb or beef and onion, layered in a tray around a filling of fried meat, onion and pine nuts, then cut into diamonds and baked.

Chicken skewers)

All of Lebanon

Chunks of chicken marinated in yogurt, lemon, garlic and tomato paste, grilled on skewers and served with a strong garlic sauce called toum, pickles and bread.

Lentils and rice with crispy onions)

All of Lebanon

A humble, filling dish of brown lentils cooked with rice or bulgur and topped with a heap of deeply browned onions, often eaten with yogurt or a salad.

Knafeh)

All of Lebanon and the wider Levant

Soft white cheese under a layer of semolina or shredded pastry, baked and soaked in sugar syrup scented with orange blossom. It is also eaten as street food inside a sesame bread.

Ma'amoul)

All of Lebanon

Buttery semolina cookies filled with dates, walnuts or pistachios and pressed into carved wooden moulds, then dusted with icing sugar.

Turmeric cake)

All of Lebanon

A golden-yellow cake of semolina and flour coloured with turmeric, flavoured with aniseed and topped with pine nuts or almonds. It is not soaked in syrup, so it is light and not too sweet.

Lebanese coffee)

All of Lebanon

Very finely ground coffee, often with cardamom, boiled in a small long-handled pot and poured into tiny cups without filtering. Offering coffee is the first sign of welcome in a Lebanese home.

Arak)

Zahlé and the Beqaa Valley

A strong clear spirit made from grapes and aniseed. Mixed with water and ice it turns milky white, and it is sipped slowly with a long mezze meal.

GOOD MANNERS

At the table

- Before eating, people say 'Sahtein', to your health, and the answer is 'Ala albak', to your heart.
- Mezze is shared: tear off a piece of flatbread and use it to scoop up food from the plates in the middle of the table.
- Hosts keep offering more food. Saying no once is often taken as politeness, so leave a little on your plate when you have really had enough.
- Lunch on Sundays is often a long family meal that lasts much of the afternoon.
- When raising a glass, people say 'Bisahtak', to your health (to a woman, 'bisahtik').

Hummus

A smooth purée of cooked chickpeas, tahini (sesame paste), lemon juice and garlic, spread on a plate, drizzled with olive oil and eaten by scooping it up with flatbread.

Ingredients

- 2 cans (400 g each) chickpeas, drained, or 250 g dried chickpeas soaked and cooked until very soft
- 4 tablespoons tahini
- Juice of 1 to 2 lemons
- 1 to 2 garlic cloves, crushed with a pinch of salt
- 3 to 4 tablespoons ice-cold water
- Olive oil, paprika or sumac, and parsley to serve

Method

1. Keep a few whole chickpeas aside for the top.
2. Blend the rest of the chickpeas with the garlic and lemon juice until crumbly.
3. Add the tahini and blend again, pouring in the cold water a spoonful at a time until the hummus is smooth and pale.
4. Taste and add salt or more lemon.
5. Spread it on a plate with the back of a spoon, make a hollow in the middle, pour in olive oil and top with the whole chickpeas, a pinch of paprika or sumac and chopped parsley.

Tabbouleh

A bright green salad that is mostly finely chopped parsley, with a little mint, tomato, onion and fine bulgur wheat, dressed with lemon juice and olive oil.

Ingredients

- 3 large bunches of flat-leaf parsley
- 1 small bunch of mint
- 3 firm tomatoes
- 3 spring onions
- 2 tablespoons fine bulgur
- Juice of 2 lemons
- 5 tablespoons olive oil
- Salt, and a pinch of allspice or seven-spice if you like

Method

1. Rinse the bulgur, cover it with a little lemon juice and leave it to soften for 10 minutes.
2. Wash the parsley and mint and dry them very well. Pick off the leaves and chop them finely with a sharp knife, so they stay fresh, not bruised.
3. Dice the tomatoes small and slice the spring onions thinly.
4. Just before serving, mix everything with the lemon juice, olive oil and salt. Serve at once, with lettuce leaves on the side.

Fattoush

A crunchy village salad of lettuce, tomato, cucumber, radish, peppers and herbs, tossed with toasted or fried pieces of flatbread and a dressing sharp with lemon and sumac.

Ingredients

- 2 round flatbreads (pita)
- 1 small cos lettuce
- 2 tomatoes, 1 cucumber and 4 radishes
- 1 green pepper and 3 spring onions
- A handful each of parsley and mint, and purslane if you can find it
- For the dressing: juice of 1 lemon, 1 tablespoon pomegranate molasses, 1 small garlic clove crushed, 5 tablespoons olive oil, 2 teaspoons sumac, salt

Method

1. Split the flatbreads, brush them with olive oil and bake at 200°C for 8 to 10 minutes until golden and crisp. Break them into pieces.
2. Chop the lettuce, tomatoes, cucumber, radishes, pepper and spring onions into bite-sized pieces and put them in a large bowl with the herbs.
3. Whisk together the dressing.
4. Just before serving, add the bread, pour over the dressing and toss. Sprinkle with more sumac.

Za'atar flatbread

Round flatbread spread with za'atar, a mix of wild thyme, sumac and sesame seeds in olive oil, and baked until crisp at the edges. Cheese and minced meat are other toppings. It is the classic Lebanese breakfast.

Ingredients

- 500 g plain flour
- 1 teaspoon dried yeast and 1 teaspoon sugar
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 300 ml warm water
- 3 tablespoons olive oil for the dough
- For the topping: 6 tablespoons za'atar mix and about 100 ml olive oil

Method

1. Mix the flour, yeast, sugar and salt, add the warm water and oil and knead for 8 to 10 minutes until smooth. Cover and leave to rise for about 1 hour.
2. Heat the oven as hot as it goes, about 250°C, with a baking tray inside.
3. Stir the za'atar and olive oil into a loose paste.
4. Divide the dough into 6 balls and press each into a round about 20 cm across, leaving a thin rim. Press dimples into the dough with your fingertips.
5. Spread each round with the za'atar paste and bake on the hot tray for 6 to 8 minutes, until golden underneath. Eat warm, folded with tomato, cucumber and mint.

Lentils and rice with crispy onions

A humble, filling dish of brown lentils cooked with rice or bulgur and topped with a heap of deeply browned onions, often eaten with yogurt or a salad.

Ingredients

- 250 g brown or green lentils
- 150 g long-grain rice, rinsed
- 3 large onions, thinly sliced
- 6 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 teaspoon ground cumin
- Salt and black pepper
- Plain yogurt and a green salad to serve

Method

1. Cook the lentils in plenty of water for about 15 minutes, until almost tender. Drain, keeping the water.
2. Meanwhile fry the onions slowly in the olive oil for 25 to 30 minutes, stirring often, until deep brown. Lift out half of them for the top.
3. Add the rice, lentils, cumin, salt and pepper to the pan with the remaining onions, then pour in 500 ml of the lentil water.
4. Bring to the boil, cover and cook on a very low heat for about 20 minutes, until the rice is soft. Rest for 5 minutes.
5. Serve topped with the crispy onions, with yogurt and salad on the side.

Turmeric cake

A golden-yellow cake of semolina and flour coloured with turmeric, flavoured with aniseed and topped with pine nuts or almonds. It is not soaked in syrup, so it is light and not too sweet.

Ingredients

- 250 g fine semolina
- 125 g plain flour
- 200 g sugar
- 1 tablespoon ground turmeric
- 1 teaspoon ground aniseed
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- 350 ml milk
- 150 ml vegetable oil
- 1 tablespoon tahini to grease the tin
- 2 tablespoons pine nuts or flaked almonds

Method

1. Heat the oven to 180°C. Spread the tahini over the base and sides of a 25 cm square tin.
2. Mix the semolina, flour, sugar, turmeric, aniseed and baking powder in a bowl.
3. Stir in the milk and oil to make a smooth batter.
4. Pour into the tin, smooth the top and scatter over the pine nuts or almonds.
5. Bake for 35 to 40 minutes, until golden and a skewer comes out clean. Leave to cool before cutting into squares or diamonds.

Useful phrases

Marhaba

MAR-ha-ba · Hello

Sabah el-kheir

sa-BAH el-KHAYR · Good morning

Masa el-kheir

MA-sa el-KHAYR · Good evening

Kifak? / Kifik?

KEE-fak / KEE-fik · How are you? (to a man / to a woman)

Mnih, I-hamdella

m-NEEH, el-HAM-del-la · Fine, thank God

Ahla w sahla

AH-la wa SAH-la · Welcome

Shukran / Yislamo

SHOOK-ran / yis-LA-mo · Thank you

Tikram

TIK-ram · You are welcome

Law samaht

law sa-MAHT · Please, excuse me

Addeish hayda?

ad-DAYSH HAY-da · How much is this?

L-hsab, iza bitrid

el-HSAB, IZ-za bit-REED · The bill, please

Sahtein

sah-TAYN · Enjoy your meal (to your health)

Ma baheke arabe mnih

ma BAH-ki A-ra-bi m-NEEH · I don't speak Arabic well

Btehke inglize?

bteh-KEE ing-LEE-zi · Do you speak English?

Ma fhemet

ma FHEM-et · I didn't understand

Wein el-hammam?

WAYN el-ham-MAM · Where is the toilet?

Inshallah

in-SHAL-lah · God willing, hopefully

Ma'a salameh

MA-a sa-LA-meh · Goodbye (go in peace)

Things you might not know

1. The name Lebanon comes from an old Semitic root, 'lbn', meaning white, probably because of the snow on its mountains.
2. The green cedar on the Lebanese flag is the cedar of Lebanon. The flag was first raised in November 1943, during the struggle for independence, and was written into the constitution on 7 December 1943.
3. The Greeks called the town of Byblos after the papyrus that passed through its port, and 'byblos' came to mean papyrus in Greek. The English word Bible comes from the same name.
4. The stone coffin of King Ahiiram of Byblos, now in the National Museum of Beirut, carries what is considered the earliest known example of the fully developed Phoenician alphabet.
5. Lebanon officially recognises 18 religious communities, Christian, Muslim, Druze and Jewish. By the unwritten National Pact of 1943, the president is a Maronite Christian, the prime minister a Sunni Muslim and the speaker of parliament a Shia Muslim.
6. As of September 2026, Lebanon has seven sites on UNESCO's World Heritage List. The newest, the Mount Amel Castles, was added in 2026.
7. Kahlil Gibran, born in Bsharri in 1883, wrote 'The Prophet', published in 1923. It has been translated into more than 100 languages.
8. The singer Fairuz, often called 'the Voice of Lebanon', first sang at the Baalbeck International Festival in 1957.
9. The upper cave of Jeita Grotto holds a stalactite about 8.2 m long, often described as the longest known stalactite in the world.
10. In 2014 archaeologists found a stone block in the Roman quarry at Baalbek estimated to weigh about 1,650 tonnes, suggested to be the largest ancient stone block ever found.
11. The Litani is the longest river that flows entirely within Lebanon. In ancient times it was called the Leontes, the 'lion river'.
12. Qurnat as Sawda', at about 3,088 m, is the highest point in Lebanon and in the whole Levant.
13. Lebanese and other Levantine emigrants took sfiha to Brazil, where the

esfiha is now a popular snack, and fatayer to Argentina, where they are sold as empanadas árabes.

- 14.** The national anthem, adopted in 1927, begins with the words "All for the country, for glory and the flag".

TALK ABOUT IT

Questions for the group

- Have you ever been to Lebanon, or has someone in your family? What do you remember?
- Have you ever tasted Hummus or Tabbouleh? What is a dish you remember from a trip?
- The civil war ends (1990). Do you remember hearing about it? Where were you then?
- Israeli troops leave the south (2000). Do you remember hearing about it? Where were you then?
- Have you seen The Roman temples of Baalbek, in person or in pictures? Which famous place would you most like to see?
- If you could spend one day in any city of Lebanon, which would it be and why?

QUIZ

How well do you know Lebanon?

Circle the right answer. The answers are on the last page.

1. Arak turns milky white when it is mixed with water.

- A) True
- B) False

2. How do you say hello in Lebanese Arabic?

- A) Ma'a salameh
- B) Sahtein
- C) Tikram
- D) Marhaba

3. As of 2026, besides the Lebanese pound, which currency is widely used for cash payments in Lebanon?

- A) US dollar
- B) Euro
- C) Swiss franc
- D) Pound sterling

4. Which spice gives the Lebanese cake sfouf its bright yellow colour?

- A) Cardamom
- B) Cinnamon
- C) Turmeric
- D) Paprika

5. What does 'shukran' mean?

- A) Hello
- B) Goodbye
- C) Thank you
- D) Please

6. It is fine to photograph military checkpoints in Lebanon.

- A) True
- B) False

7. According to tradition, settlers from which Phoenician city founded Carthage in 814 BC?

- A) Tripoli
- B) Tyre
- C) Baalbek
- D) Byblos

8. The Sea Castle of Sidon was built by the Romans.

- A) True
- B) False

9. The name Lebanon comes from an old Semitic root 'lbn'. What does it mean?

- A) Cedar
- B) Mountain
- C) Sea
- D) White

10. In which mountain town was the writer Kahlil Gibran born?

- A) Sidon
- B) Zahlé
- C) Bsharri
- D) Tripoli

11. What is the police emergency number in Lebanon, as of 2026?

- A) 112
- B) 175
- C) 140
- D) 100

12. Six columns of the temple of which Roman god still stand at Baalbek?

- A) Jupiter
- B) Mars
- C) Neptune
- D) Apollo

Quiz answers

1. True

True. The aniseed oils cloud the clear spirit when water and ice are added.

2. D) Marhaba

Marhaba means hello. Ma'a salameh is goodbye.

3. A) US dollar

The US dollar. Since the economic crisis many places prefer cash in dollars, and change is often given in Lebanese pounds.

4. C) Turmeric

Turmeric colours the semolina cake yellow, and aniseed gives it its flavour.

5. C) Thank you

Shukran means thank you. Many Lebanese also say yislamo, or the French merci.

6. False

False. Photographing soldiers, checkpoints or military sites can lead to arrest.

7. B) Tyre

Tyre. Tradition says Queen Elissa, also called Dido, led settlers from Tyre to found Carthage in what is now Tunisia.

8. False

False. The Crusaders built it in 1228 on a small island linked to the shore by a causeway.

9. D) White

White, probably because of the snow on the mountains.

10. C) Bsharri

Bsharri, at the head of the Kadisha Valley. A museum there honours his life and work.

11. A) 112

112 is the police. In Lebanon 140 is the Red Cross ambulance and 175 the fire brigade.

12. A) Jupiter

Jupiter. Only six of its 54 columns still stand; the nearby Temple of Bacchus is much better preserved.

Lebanon visa page

Name: _____ Date: _____



Next stops

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Country: _____	Country: _____	Country: _____

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<https://worldstroll.com/countries/lebanon>