HOME

THE SOUL OF LEBANON



Marlo Thomas

THE LEBANESE-AMERICAN MEGASTAR BEHIND
ST. JUDE CHILDREN'S RESEARCH HOSPITAL

LEBANON THROUGH THE EYES OF
FRENCH AMBASSADOR
H.E. Bruno Foucher

RAGHIDA DERGHAM
THE COURAGE TO COME HOME

Dr. Mohamed H. Sayegh
AT THE HELM OF AUBMC

LEBANON'S CHAMPION
Chirine Njeim
OLYMPIC SKIER TO
OLYMPIC RUNNER

Pierre Rabbat
LIGHT-HEARTED HUMOR,
SHAKING THE STATUS QUO

NOT JUST A SELFIE BACKDROP!
EXPLORING BEIRUT WITH WALKING TOURS

In 17th century Europe, young, affluent, educated men would pack their trunks of Oxford shoes and tweed jackets, and go on a grand tour of the continent. They would travel for a year or more, by carriage, horse and train, to see the sites: Paris, the great Italian cities, the Alps, Viennese balls, Greek ruins, Turkish delights. Some would then loop back up and home through Germany and the Netherlands. Those still thirsty would go east instead, through the Orient, down the Silk Road to Chang'an. Trips took years, carriages, horses, trains, elephants, butlers, porters and many trunks.

Tourism is different today. Leisure is a luxury. Time and budgets have shrunk trips to marathons of checklists: five-day itineraries of "must-sees" briefly glanced at from air-conditioned buses, quick photo ops and some junk from souvenir shops to take home and dust, till next year.

But there are those who, in spite of the lack of carriages, butlers and trunks, still lust for truly new experiences, culture, history and adventure. Those who travel to really see a city, not use it as a selfie backdrop. The real tourists: scourers of streets, alleys and stories, in a group, rain or shine, following the local tour guide on an afternoon walking tour.

The walking tour concept has sprouted and spread to nearly every big city in the world. Beirut is no exception; there are dozens on offer for the footsy traveler to choose from. For a price or for free, for an hour or a day, Beirut will *open sesame* right before your eyes… a cavern of gems.

One of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world, Beirut has been HOME to the Phoenicians, Greeks, Romans, Arabs, Crusaders, Ottomans, French and today the more than two million people walking its streets. It witnessed the birth of the alphabet and two of the three Abrahamic religions, the first forms of commerce, and with it trade diplomacy, democracy and law. And, of course, the color purple (the rich purple dye created by the Phoenicians).

Some tours will walk you through the city's history—wars, conquests and uprisings; protests and assassinations; checkpoints and demarcation lines; bullets and shrapnel lodged in walls. Others will take you on a stroll through ruins, mansions, skyscrapers; architecture and archeology. Still others will zigzag through alleys and passageways, under bridges, through gardens and hidden doors; art in public spaces, culture, the city's literary and musical treasures. And for the food lovers, of course, some tours offer a taste of Beirut, the best *man'oushe*, or *laham bajine* or *fatte*. You'll discover where to eat a proper *kibbe*, a really sweet and sticky *knefe* or *baklawa*, or both. Disclaimer: the pace of the walk gets a little slow toward the tasty end.

So many tours to choose from. Many are very, very good. If in doubt, ask a local, or just be brave and try it; at worst, it will be just a walk. At best, the tour will be a grand one, into the very heart of a city, an intimate experience of Beirut through the eyes of someone who loves it deeply.

So, whether you know this city well or not, love or loathe to exercise, pull out your walking shoes. There is a tour starting soon somewhere; join it. You will not regret it.

By Yara Zgheib

Walking tours in Beirut

Beirut is so dense and rich with history and culture that a walking tour is one of the best ways to see it. While walking tours come and go, here are a few of the current offerings.

WalkBeirut
WalkBeirut, the most famous of the tours, offers an extensive, in-depth tour of the capital, while Ronnie Chatah, an author and scholar of Middle East studies and political science, talks about Beirut's history, financial system, politics and resilience.

Sundays at 4 or 4:40 p.m., register at walk@bebeirut.org.
www.bebeirut.org

Free Walking Tours Beirut
Free Walking Tours Beirut gives people the chance to discover Beirut while also providing a platform for local guides to share their own passion and stories.

Tuesdays at 5 p.m.
Register with Saskia Nout at 70913809
www.freewalkingtoursbeirut.com

Layers of a Ghost Town
This tour tells the story of the reconstruction of the downtown of the once divided city of Beirut.

Saturdays 2 – 6 p.m.
Early May to early November
703447571

Hidden Gem
A walking tour through Gemmayzeh to discover its architecture, theater, art and history.

Saturdays at 5 p.m.
Register on Facebook: www.facebook.com/hiddengemwalk/



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