

LEBANON



Country Dialling Code (Tel/Fax): ++961

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Capital: Beirut **Time:** GMT + 2

Background: Lebanon has made progress toward rebuilding its political institutions and regaining its national sovereignty since 1991 and the end of the devastating 16-year civil war. Under the Ta'if Accord - the blueprint for national reconciliation - the Lebanese have established a more equitable political system, particularly by giving Muslims a greater say in the political process while institutionalizing sectarian divisions in the government. Since the end of the war, the Lebanese have conducted several successful elections, most of the militias have been weakened or disbanded, and the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) have extended central government authority over about two-thirds of the country. Hizballah, the radical Shi'a party, retains its weapons. Foreign forces still occupy areas of Lebanon. Israel maintains troops in southern Lebanon and continues to support a proxy militia, the Army of South Lebanon (ASL), along a narrow stretch of territory contiguous to its border. Syria maintains about 25,000 troops in Lebanon based mainly in Beirut, North Lebanon, and the Bekaa Valley. Syria's troop deployment was legitimized by the Arab League during Lebanon's civil war and in the Ta'if Accord. Damascus justifies its continued military presence in Lebanon by citing the continued weakness of the LAF, Beirut's requests, and the failure of the Lebanese Government to implement all of the constitutional reforms in the Ta'if Accord.

Location: Middle East, bordering the Mediterranean Sea, between Israel and Syria

Map References: Middle East

Area: total: 10,400 sq km land: 10,230 sq km water: 170 sq km

Climate: Mediterranean; mild to cool, wet winters with hot, dry summers; Lebanon mountains experience heavy winter snows

Terrain: narrow coastal plain; Al Biqa' (Bekaa Valley) separates Lebanon and Anti-Lebanon Mountains

Natural Resources: limestone, iron ore, salt, water-surplus state in a water-deficit region, arable land

Population: 3,578,036 (July 2000 est.)

Nationality: noun: Lebanese (singular and plural) adjective: Lebanese

Ethnic Groups: Arab 95%, Armenian 4%, other 1%

Religions: Muslim 70% (5 legally recognized Islamic groups - Shi'a, Sunni, Druze, Isma'ili, Alawite or Nusayri), Christian 30% (11 legally recognized Christian groups - 4 Orthodox Christian, 6 Catholic, 1 Protestant), Jewish NEGL%

Languages: Arabic (official), French, English, Armenian widely understood

Economy: The 1975-91 civil war seriously damaged Lebanon's economic infrastructure, cut national output by half, and all but ended Lebanon's position as a Middle Eastern entrepot and banking hub. Peace has enabled the central government to restore control in Beirut, begin collecting taxes, and regain access to key port and government facilities. Economic recovery has been helped by a financially sound banking system and resilient small- and medium-scale manufacturers, with family remittances, banking services, manufactured and farm exports, and international aid as the main sources of foreign exchange. Lebanon's economy has made impressive gains since the launch of "Horizon 2000," the government's \$20 billion reconstruction program in 1993. Real GDP grew 8% in 1994 and 7% in 1995 before Israel's Operation Grapes of Wrath in April 1996 stunted economic activity. Real GDP grew at an average annual rate of less than 3% per year for 1997 and 1998 and only 1% in 1999. During 1992-98, annual inflation fell from more than 100% to 5%, and foreign exchange reserves jumped to more than \$6 billion from \$1.4 billion. Burgeoning capital inflows have generated foreign payments surpluses, and the Lebanese pound has remained relatively stable. Progress also has been made in rebuilding Lebanon's war-torn physical and financial infrastructure. Solidere, a \$2-billion firm, is managing the reconstruction of Beirut's central business district; the stock market reopened in

January 1996; and international banks and insurance companies are returning. The government nonetheless faces serious challenges in the economic arena. It has had to fund reconstruction by tapping foreign exchange reserves and boosting borrowing. Reducing the government budget deficit is a major goal of the LAHUD government. The stalled peace process and ongoing violence in southern Lebanon could lead to wider hostilities that would disrupt vital capital inflows. Furthermore, the gap between rich and poor has widened in the 1990's, resulting in grassroots dissatisfaction over the skewed distribution of the reconstruction's benefits and leading the government to shift its focus from rebuilding infrastructure to improving living conditions.

Industries: banking; food processing; jewelry; cement; textiles; mineral and chemical products; wood and furniture products; oil refining; metal fabricating

Currency: 1 Lebanese pound = 100 piasters

Railways: total: 399 km (mostly unusable because of damage in civil war) standard gauge: 317 km 1.435-m narrow gauge: 82 km (1999)

Highways: total: 7,300 km paved: 6,200 km unpaved: 1,100 km (1999 est.)

Ports and Harbors: Antilyas, Batroun, Beirut, Chekka, El Mina, Ez Zahrani, Jbail, Jounie, Naqoura, Sidon, Tripoli, Tyre

Airports: 9 (1999 est.) Airports - with paved runways: total: 7 over 3,047 m: 1 2,438 to 3,047 m: 2 1,524 to 2,437 m: 2 914 to 1,523 m: 1 under 914 m: 1 (1999 est.) Airports - with unpaved runways: total: 2 914 to 1,523 m: 1 under 914 m: 1 (1999 est.)

Visa: required by all

Duty Free: goods permitted: 200 cigarettes or 20 cigars or 200g of tobacco, 1 litre of alcohol, a reasonable amount of perfume

Health: a yellow fever vaccination certificate is required from travelers arriving from infected areas

HOTELS•MOTELS•INNS

BEIRUT

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