

# 7 beautiful spots in Lebanon you've never heard of before

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Lebanon has always been a popular tourist destination and the locals pride themselves on being dynamic life-lovers with energy to do just about anything.

After all, the country's capital was the only Middle Eastern city to make the 2016 “[Best International Cities for Food](#)” list, published by New-York based travel magazine Travel & Leisure.

Any local would agree: going out for lunch, dinner or drinks on the weekend is an experience in itself.

Similarly, the reputable (cliché) notion of being able to “ski and swim in the sea” on the same day also sums up the general scope of what we do for leisure.

But, this happy weekend routine doesn't have to be JUST about food, ski slopes, or luxurious beach resorts. With close-to-perfect weather, breathtaking views, easy accessibility, and so many different options, there is no reason our time off can't be different.

Many of us are looking to hikes in nature, camping, long cruises, and soothing weekend getaways to fulfill our need for leisure, relaxation, and detachment.

Here are seven beautiful “spots” you won't find out about on any touristic website... Just take your dog, pick up a friend, and drive:

## **1. Hike from Nabe' el 'Asal to the Chabrouh Dam in Faraya, North Lebanon**

Faraya is the most popular winter destinations for skiers, hikers, and lazy bums alike.

But, have you ever wondered what's behind the famous FARAYA sign? An easy and calm hike from Nabe' el 'Asal upwards takes you to the Chabrouh Dam, a 1300 meter long, eight million cubic meter capacity water facility.

Not only is the view breathtaking, but it's a perfect spot for camping, picnics, and letting your dogs on the loose in both winter and summer.

### **How to get there:**

If you don't want to walk too much, you can simply drive to the dam's front gate (Google Maps search: Chabrouh Dam/Lake) and walk inside.

Otherwise, a 50 minute hike from the Nabe' el Aasal spring (Google Maps search: Nabaa el Aassal) takes you along Ain el Talaa, Ain es Saiyed, and Ain ez Zaaroura...a beautiful and energizing walk to the final destination.

## **2. Secluded strip of public beach in Jbeil, north of Beirut**

Jbeil is famous for its souk, long pier, and cultural/historical heritage... We all know the widely popular fish restaurants and the old boats docked inside the port.

But, driving a little bit further away from the main Byblos mina takes you to the old Ahiaram Hotel (Google Maps search: Ahiaram Hotel Byblos).

Right next to the hotel on the left is a long staircase so engulfed in green shrubs and plants, it's barely even visible.

Once you take the first step, you'll immediately anticipate reaching the bottom and when you do, you'll find a strip of clean, isolated, public beach. A small kiosk selling beer, juices, and water is available, and the shore doesn't get too crowded.

It's perfect for a romantic getaway, time alone, or a family trip to the beach.

### **How to get there:**

Take the highway to Tripoli and exit at Jbeil. Search for the Ahiaram Hotel. The stairs are on the left if you're facing the front door of the hotel.

### **3. Off-road nature walk just 12 minutes away from Beirut in Soheima, Hazmieh**

Hazmieh is close to Beirut and offers a wide array of restaurants and shops, apart from being a mostly residential area. The “Soheima” road towards Bellevue Medical Center takes you from Hazmieh to Mansourieh in a matter of minutes.

What is most charming about this road, however, is the greenery that leads to a small bridge over running water. It's really narrow and only one car can pass at a time (and big trucks won't fit).

Right before the bridge (from the Hazmieh side) and after you pass an old tunnel lined with rocky columns (Qanatr Zoubaida) is an area to park the car and then an obvious broken down barrier separating the road from the open greenery... If you walk through that passage for about 20 minutes, you'll really start to feel like you're on an exotic holiday. The secluded but close reserve is perfect for long walks, picnics, and even running or biking for sports.

#### **How to get there:**

From anywhere in Hazmieh, follow the signs to the Bellevue Medical Center. The bridge is hard to miss.

### **4. Samkit Amchit, a family affair, Amchit, North Lebanon**

Although I am attempting to stay away from food, I have to mention it at least ONCE! We all know and love Amchit with its exquisite sea views, clean waters, and perfect camping spots. But the next time you're headed for the beach, pass by Pierre Abboud's Samkit Amchit fish restaurant.

The first awesome thing about this place: the husband gathers the fish, and the wife cooks it and they've been doing this together for many years. The other awesome

thing about this place: exotic fresh fish sandwiches, something different than anything you've ever tried.

The owner mostly prides himself on being the "fresh fish mogul." In his own words: "You can get fish anywhere in Lebanon but not fish like this."

### **How to get there:**

On the highway to Tripoli, take the Amchit exit. Drive downwards towards the sea side road and find the St. Zakhia Church on google maps. Samkit Amchit is facing the church and opens from 5:00am till 5:00pm every day except Sunday.

## **5. Unlimited Blue in Naqoura, South Lebanon**

When one thinks of beaches in South Lebanon, Tyre and Sidon are usually the areas that come to mind.

But the south holds many more wonders: further along the Tyre-Naqoura highway is Enn Naqoura, a small village of low hills by the sea coast which is basically on the very corner of South Lebanon.

The water is the cleanest you'll find in Lebanon and given the rock-studded shores and secluded location, a trip to Naqoura is definitely for the adventurous weekenders who like to get as far away as possible.

### **How to get there:**

On the Sidon highway, go towards Tyre (Sour). Go through Tyre and follow the signs to Naqoura. Once there, watch out for signs on the right indicating a passage way from the street to the sea shore.

## **6. A true taste of the Lebanese mountains only 40 minutes away in Ras el Maten, Mount Lebanon**

A trip to the “mountains” really doesn’t have to take hours or an entire day. Within the Baabda governorate, there are an infinite number of options. After Mansourieh and before Broumana is the Monte Verde Road, or the “Green Mountain” road – a beautiful, scenic, and quiet road overlooking wide valleys and tree-laden mountains.

After driving for about 20 minutes, you’ll reach the village of Ras el Maten (it’s basically the first obvious village). Drive for ten more minutes and look for a statue of a cedar tree on the right.

That is your starting point: down that road, you can drive down into the valley for a picnic or just to hang out.

Alternatively, take an off-road route by foot and use Google Maps to locate the nearest spring, river, cave, or monastery (there are many between 20 minutes and 2 hours away by foot).

If you find yourself hungry afterwards, top it off with some exquisitely fresh home-made pizza at the famous local family-run restaurant Mama Mia Pizza (Google Maps: Mama Mia – Restaurant).

### **How to get there:**

Right after Mansourieh and before entering Ain Saade, there is a petrol station on the right facing a big billboard displaying many signs: Ras el Maten is one of them. Follow the Monte Verde road for 20 minutes until You reach Ras el Maten (sign posted). Look for the cedar statue on the right and park there. Mama Mia Restaurant opens Wednesday to Sunday from 11:00am till 12:00am.

## **7. Abandoned Train Station in Chouit-Araya**

Another unbelievably close and yet fulfilling sunny-day trip: a walk around the abandoned train station of Chouit-Araya.

An excellent spot for taking professional pictures, walking the dog, or having a picnic, the old, broken down station is surrounded by rocky ruins, tall thick trees, and up-hill/down-hill tracks.

For an added dose of adventure, walk inside the station complex and check out the old Lebanese architecture and the artifacts that tell of many different settlers over the years.

**How to get there:**

Take the Damascus roads that leads to Chtoura. Shortly after crossing Jumhour, look out for a big ARAYA sign on the right. Drive straight up the village till you reach a mini highway type of road and look out for a downhill exit to the left, blocked by a metal chain (just to prevent cars from driving down, for security reasons. It's perfectly okay to walk down by foot). Park there, and head down.