



- 1 Le Gray legrayhotel.com
- 2 Four Seasons fourseasons.com/beirut
- 3 Bokja bokjadesign.com
- 4 Burgundy burgundybeirut.com
- 5 Beirut Souks solidere.com/souks2
- 6 Tawlet tawlet.com
- 7 Milliam M milliam.com
- 8 Grand Hyatt hyatt.com

The urbane traveller

Brave new Beirut

A modern outdoor souk populated by luxe international retailers and an artisanal quartier dotted with must-visit indie boutiques are just two of the many reasons Lebanon's bustling capital is back



Buoyed by a welcome period of political calm, the onetime "Paris of the Middle East" is once again living up to its vaunted former moniker. War-scarred but as ever resilient, the Levant's liberal metropolis is in the midst a monumental make-over with large-scale building projects buttressed by

the creative contributions of returning émigrés and longtime habitués. And yet, many still credit hotelier Gordon Campbell Gray's eponymous 87-room tour de force, **Le Gray**, with spurring its rebirth. A self-admitted "accidental hero", his stylish hotel took five years to complete and now features a trio of lively lounges, including a panoramic rooftop space and two buzzing eateries. Equally significant has been the opening of the **Four Seasons**, a property that, in the words of its general manager, put its "seal of approval" on the country. Also with a rooftop lounge, bar and pool, the 26-storey Marina-facing tower features gilded Arab motifs, mosaics and 230 rooms, each with a sizable city or Med-facing balcony. A stone's throw away, the cornerside 18-floor **Grand Hyatt** is one of a handful of forthcoming projects that will doubtless add further impetus to Beirut's transformation, with a landscaped piazza and pool area.

Not that the city needs any more encouragement, mind you. Homegrown designers, including

Milia Maroun, whose brutalist boutique, **Milliam M**, was among the first in the must-visit Saifi Village artisanal quarter, remain in the fashion vanguard. She is now joined by a roster of other indie fashionistas as well as big brand designers at the **Beirut Souks** nearby: a lattice of indoor-outdoor spaces designed, in part, by Zaha Hadid and Rafael Moneo on the site of Roman ruins and as the successor to the city's ancient trading stalls. And let's not forget **Bokja**, a must-visit storehouse for elusive Central Asian fabrics that

adorn bohemian furnishings sold *in situ* but also in better shops worldwide. The culinary scene, too, has upped its game for a new century—witness **Tawlet** ("table" in Arabic): a popular canteen with a buzzy communal table, school chairs and freshly made regional specialities. Or the five-month-old eatery-cum-wine bar, **Burgundy**, where a pair of imported Michelin-starred chefs are already causing a minor gastronomic stir that like everything here, are creating waves all across the Mediterranean and beyond. **FH**



Life at Le Gray: evening dining at Indigo on The Roof; above right, the panoramic views from the hotel's pool



MALDIVES MAKEOVER

From the northernmost atoll down south across the equator, a new wave of development is sweeping through the Maldives. On the Haa Alifu Atoll, Waldord Astoria's first Asian property, **Beach House Maldives** (beachhousemaldives.com), completed a renovation of its 83 pool villas in March. Each of the 49 duplex villas at **Raffles Resort Konottaa** (raffles.com) will also feature pools when unveiled later this year in the pristine Gaafu Dhaal Atoll. Farther south, on a tiny island in the North Huvadhoo Atoll, the 50 villas at **Alila Villas Hadahaa** (alilahotels.com) offer mod tropical style with cool, clean lines. Sybarites, meanwhile, can look forward to the opening of **Six Senses Laamu** (sixsenses.com) later this summer, with nest-like treatment rooms built with locally sourced materials. Also slated to open late this year are **Anantara Kihavah** (anantara.com), with 78 beach and overwater pool villas, and the **Viceroy** (viceroyhotelsandresorts.com), a 61-villa hideaway on Shaviyani Atoll. Next year shows little sign of a let up either, with rumours of openings from **Mandarin Oriental**, **Regent Hotels**, **Jumeirah** and **Bvlqari**.

AOEFIE O'RIORDAIN

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