

THE FINAL COMEBACK OF A LEGEND
THE BEGINNING OF A LEGACY

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## Beirut is Back!





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## Once upon a time, in a land known as Lebanon, there was a city called Beirut.

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People came from all over the world to visit Beirut's beaches and restaurants, to shop at its exclusive European stores and drink at its elite nightclubs. One day in 1975, the city saw the beginning of a war that would last sixteen years. The tourists stayed away, fearing the violence that destroyed hundreds upon



## **Media Gallery**

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Rita Gardner –
"Try to
Remember: A
Look Back at OffBroadway"

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All For One And One For All, "The Three Musketeers" thousands of lives. Even after the war ended in 1990, the citizens of Beirut suffered through years of uncertainty and strife. As the political situation began to calm, however, they started to build, and soon, Beirut stood in all its glory again, waiting to welcome the hordes of admirers eager to experience the wonders of the Paris of the Middle East for themselves. The Lebanese ministry of tourism recently reported that 1.85 million tourists had visited Lebanon by the end of 2009. The vast majority of these tourists came to see the new Beirut. Thanks to an influx of foreign investment over the last two years, Beirut has been transformed from a pale, war-torn shadow of its former self to a bustling city with a rapidly-growing economy. However, questions still remain, the foremost being: in a country that has seen only a few consecutive years of peace since the seventies, how long can this era of calm and prosperity last?



Ryan Raad, one of the most successful PR representatives and event planners in Beirut, is confident that the current economic and political situation has staying power. "Yesterday, it was a moment of calm before the storm. Today, it's not." Raad maintains. The owner of a luxury events and high-end lifestyle service company called Chic Alors, Raad started his business in Dubai, but moved back to Lebanon to take advantage of the recent boom by opening a Beirut branch. Chic Alors has a corporate and wedding division, and recently started publishing a luxury lifestyle magazine, Bespoke. "It's looking very bright. I think it's

going to be a prosperous couple of years for Beirut." Raad affirms. "The best thing about Lebanon is...the people," he observes. The people of Lebanon are very hospitable, very welcoming. They have this joie de vivre, because of living in constant war, and that is where Beirut's energy is derived from." However, Raad fears that Beirut might lose some of its authenticity and culture as a result of the recent wave of globalization: "It's a double-edged sword. In many ways, there is a lot to fear, because of the way Lebanon is...evolving. We are losing our values. Things are changing. Again, the Lebanese people, their resilience and joie de vivre, that's not going to change. But I think the bad things will change; the close-mindedness, the religious stances, the backwardness."

Tania Nawbar, who represents White, one of Beirut's most popular high-end nightclubs, shares Raad's optimism. "The crowd this year has been very fun.



They're very classy," she states. "We're always packed, we always have a lot of people, but the variety has changed, which is good. We have people from Holland, from America, from the U.K." Asked how the recent economic boom has affected business, Nawbar replies: "At the rate we're going right now, it looks like there are big things in

store for Lebanon, and White. Eventually, we will move to somewhere much bigger, because at the moment, we can barely accommodate the people who are waiting for tables." Faced with the challenge of keeping a fickle crowd happy, Nawbar has faith in White's ability to please: "As long as you keep your customers entertained and surprise them at all times, they'll always be happy," she claims.

Business is so good in Beirut, in fact, that highly specialized establishments



Preview

catering to a very specific group of patrons are thriving. Burgundy, a winebased restaurant that serves "well-traveled" French cuisine, is one of these enterprises. "The concept behind this restaurant is, like its name, burgundy," the owner, Ziad Mouawad, maintains. "The idea was to create a 'church' of burgundy wines." Everything at Burgundy, from the ingredients in the food, to the wood and metal of the architecture, is of the finest quality. As for the cuisine, "we have invested in a good kitchen," Mouawad explains. "To be able to serve a good filet or a good fish, you need a good chef." This is where Brody White comes in. A veteran of the Paris gourmet scene, White hails from Vancouver, Canada, and is unafraid to let the food take a backseat to the wine. "This restaurant isn't about the food, it's about the wine," White emphasizes. "It says so on the front door." A restaurant with this level of specialization is sure to be misunderstood by some patrons, but as Mouawad describes, "coming here and trying to change the concept just because a client has certain habits is largely useless. You wouldn't go to a Chinese restaurant and ask for pizza."



From restaurants to nightclubs to fashionable clothing stores, Beirut is back and better than ever. As for how long this boom can last, it's hard to tell. Even the ever-confident Raad has a moment of doubt: "Every day is a surprise. You never know what's going to happen in Lebanon. People want to make money fast; people

want to live their lives to the maximum...because we don't control our fate. Our fate is controlled by the powers that be." Hopefully, the powers that be decide to let Beirut continue its successful comeback.











- Sulome Anderson - on August 2, 2010.

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