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In Transit

Expert Travel Advice

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Q&A: A Saturday in Beirut

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Q.

I have just one Saturday to spend in Beirut, tacked on to the end of a business trip. What should I be sure not to miss?

*Melissa Cavanaugh,
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A.

With the Mediterranean spread in front and the mountains behind, [Beirut](#) is a world-class cultural, intellectual and gastronomical center. It topped our cover feature “[The 44 Places to Go in 2009](#)” (Jan. 11, 2009). Here are a few suggestions, several of which were recommended in an e-mail message by Lionel Beehner, who recently wrote “[Byblos, Lebanon’s Ancient Port, Is Reborn](#)” (Jan. 3, 2010).

To begin the day, explore downtown Beirut, and look for the Al-Omari Mosque, a 12th-century church that was converted to a mosque in 1291; the recently built blue-domed Al-Amin Mosque; and the restored Roman baths. Or take a taxi northeast of the city (about 11 miles) to the Jeita Grotto ([jeitagrotto.com](#)) to explore the caves with impressive stalactites and stalagmites; the upper portion is open year round and can be seen on foot, while the lower is accessible only by boat.

In his article “[In Beirut, Raw Materials Meet Magic](#)” (Dec. 27, 2009), Seth Sherwood described the city’s food as the most “ingenious, flavorful cuisine” of the Middle East, so take a break from sightseeing and head to one of the best lunch spots in town, Le Chef (Rue Gouraud, 961-1-445-373), in the Gemmayzeh neighborhood. In the afternoon, make your way to Raouché, a neighborhood teeming with cliffside cafes and beach bars, and stroll along the Corniche, a coastline promenade; walk south and you’ll spot the Pigeon Rocks — two striking rock formations standing in the sea. Have your last meal at the hip restaurant Walimat Wardeh (Rue Makdissi; 961-1-343-128), in the Hamra neighborhood, and if you want, dance the night away. (Just don’t miss that outbound flight.)