The South

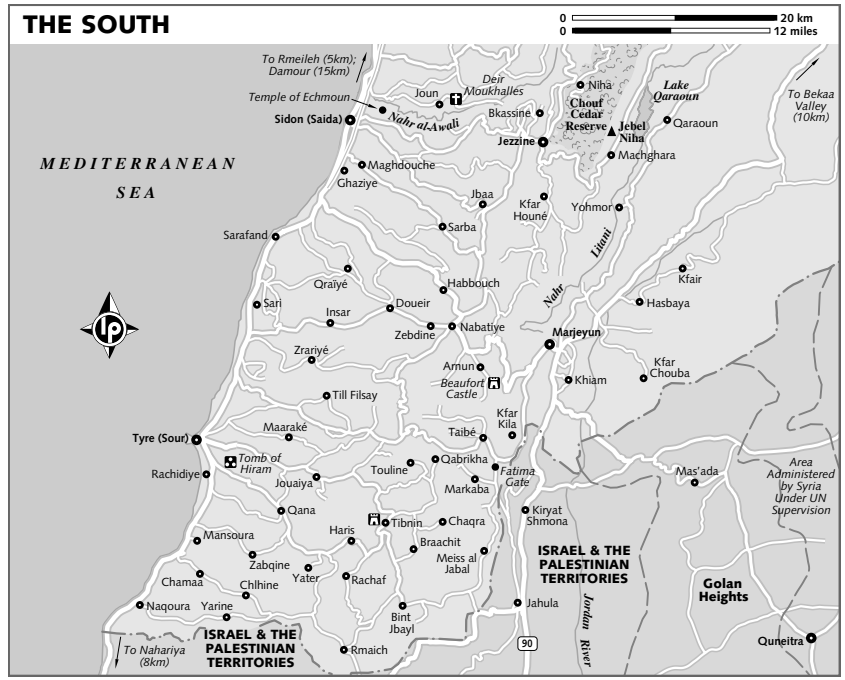
Less visited than other parts of Lebanon, the South is rich in history – both ancient and modern – making the currently accessible parts well worth exploring. The principal towns of Tyre and Sidon, known respectively in Arabic as Sour and Saida, are full of archaeological treasures, surrounded by lush plantations of bananas, dates and oranges and populated by welcoming locals.

The picture, however, is far from rosy. Hardest hit by the civil war (not to mention a historic lack of interest by Beirut's powerbrokers) the South seems to encounter yet another hurdle every time it attempts to get back onto its feet. Following Israel's withdrawal from Lebanon in May 2000 – before which much of the South was under Israeli or proxy South Lebanon Army (SLA) occupation – the South initially saw a resurgence in tourism as Lebanese and overseas visitors arrived, curious to see this isolated and previously out-of-bounds region. But the 2006 war between Israel and Hezbollah effectively put a stop to its tourist industry once again.

While visitors might initially be wary, those who do make it this far will be in for a treat. Both Sidon and Tyre remain fascinating places to visit, with locals more than willing to stop in the street to help a lost-looking tourist poring over a guidebook. While there are often limited accommodation and restaurant options available, with many businesses closing down or frequently changing hands, the lure of the region's beaches and souqs, along with the ancient treasures of Tyre, will quickly allay any qualms about visiting the area.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Get lost in the atmosphere of **Sidon's souqs** (p367), while snacking on fresh *sanioura* biscuits, the local delicacy
- Relax on the sand at a swanky **beach club** (p369) on the coastal strip between Sidon and Beirut
- Stop off at Tyre's splendid Roman remains and do a lap of its impressive **Roman hippodrome** (p376)
- Walk off a delicious seafood lunch enjoyed at Tyre's **Le Petit Phoenicien** (p377) with a stroll through the tranquil **Tyre Beach Nature Reserve** (p376)
- See how suds are made at the **Musée du Savon** (p367) in Sidon



SIDON (SAIDA) صيدا

☎ 07 / pop 170,516

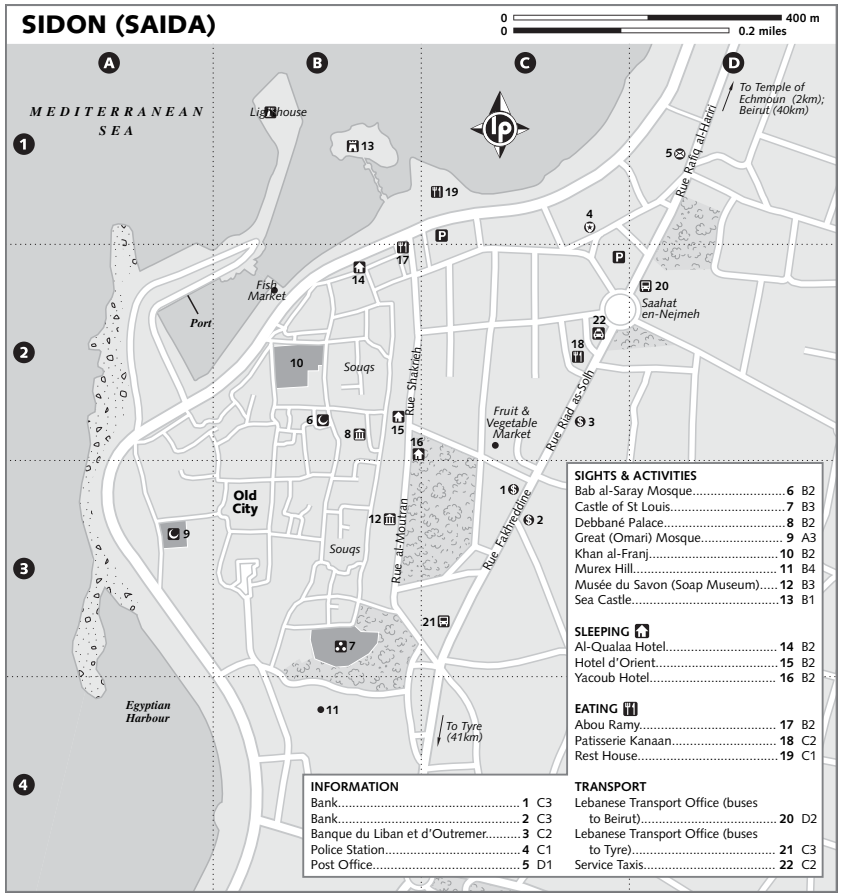
The port city of Sidon (Saida in Arabic), famous in modern times as the birthplace of assassinated former prime minister Rafiq Hariri, is approached from Beirut, 40km to its north, through thick citrus orchards and banana groves. Although not as well organised or commercial as Byblos – its closest equivalent in terms of harbourside charms – this once grand and wealthy Phoenician city exudes a strong feeling of 'living history' with its mosques, khans and vaulted souqs still very much in everyday use. There are few concessions made here to tourists, which means the selection of hotels and restaurants isn't particularly extensive. But what it lacks in facilities it makes up for in workaday charm and mysterious medieval alleyways ripe for the exploring, along with the most tempting aromas wafting from the souq-based food stalls.

History

The ancient town of Sidon was settled as early as 4000 BC, or 6800 BC according to some claims. In the Old Testament, Sidon is referred to as 'the first born of Canaan', which may have originated from the town's possible founder, Saidoune ibn Canaan. The word for 'fishing' or 'hunting' is *sayd* in modern Arabic.

As early as the 14th and 15th centuries BC, Sidon had a reputation as a commercial centre with strong trade links with Egypt. The city rose in prominence from the 12th to 10th centuries BC, its wealth generated from trading murex, a mollusc that produced an expensive, highly prized purple dye that over time became known as the colour of royalty and was eventually exploited to the point of extinction. Geography helped, too: like many Phoenician cities, Sidon was built on a promontory with an offshore island, which sheltered the harbour from storms and provided a safe haven during times of war.

In common with the other Phoenician city-states, Sidon suffered from conquest and invasion numerous times. In 1200 BC the Philistines destroyed the city and its fleet of trading ships, allowing Tyre to



eclipse Sidon as the most important Phoenician centre. Although often under Tyre's control, or forced to pay tribute to the Assyrians, Sidon recovered its status as a trading centre, only to be destroyed in 675 BC by the Assyrian king Esarhaddon.

The city's golden age came during the Persian Empire (525–332 BC) when the city was the capital of the Fifth Province, covering Syria, Palestine and Cyprus. Apart from murex, Sidon was famed for its glassmaking, which was considered the best in the world. During this period the Temple of Echmoun (p370), about 2km northeast of the city, was built. Inscriptions found there reveal that Phoenician Sidon was built in two sections: the maritime city, Sidon Yam; and the upper part, Sidon Sadeh, which was built on the lower spurs of the Mt Lebanon Range, upwind from the sickening smell produced by the murex dye works.

Sidon also became known for shipbuilding and provided experienced sailors for the Persian fleet. The king of Sidon was admiral of the fleet and successful in campaigns against the Egyptians in the 6th century BC, and later against the Greeks, giving Sidon a degree of independence from its Persian overlords. This lasted until the middle of the 4th century BC, when Phoenician rebellion, centred in Sidon, incurred the wrath of the Persians. Heading a huge army, King Artaxerxes Ochus arrived to beat the Sidonians into submission. According to

Greek historian Diodorus, residents locked the city gates, employing a 'scorched earth' policy, setting fire to the city rather than surrendering it. More than 40,000 people died in the ensuing inferno, weakening the city to such an extent that when Alexander the Great marched through in 333 BC, its residents were in no position to resist him and surrendered without a struggle.

Under the Greeks, Sidon recovered and enjoyed relative freedom and a sophisticated cultural life. Later the city came successively under the control of the Seleucids and the Ptolemies. Emperor Augustus, however, put an end to Sidon's independence when he brought it under direct Roman rule.

During the Byzantine period, the aftermath of the devastating earthquake of AD 551 saw Sidon fare better than most other Phoenician cities, and it soon became home to Beirut's famous School of Law, which was hastily moved from the wreckage of Beirut. In 667 the Arabs invaded and the city took on the Arabic name Saida, still widely in use today, remaining a wealthy centre, administered from Damascus.

In 1110 Baldwin I, King of Jerusalem, besieged the city and the Sidonians gave up after 47 days of resistance. In 1187 Saladin took the city and razed the ramparts to the ground in an attempt to render it useless as a Crusader base. It failed to deter the Crusaders, however, who hastily recaptured it. Subsequent battles for control saw Sidon passing to-and-fro between the two sides as many as five times, before finally falling to the Mamluks in 1291.

Sidon's fortunes rose in the 15th century when it became a trading port of Damascus. While the city flourished again in the 17th century under the rule of Fakhreddine (Fakhr ad-Din al-Maan II), who encouraged French merchants to the city to set up highly profitable trading enterprises between France and Sidon, prosperity was temporary. In 1791, the Ottoman pasha of Acre, Ahmad al-Jazzar, drove the French from the town and Beirut took over as the centre of commerce. An earthquake in the 1830s, followed by bombardment during the Ottoman–European campaign to remove Bashir Shihab II, helped ensure the city's fall into relative obscurity.

In the early part of the 20th century the area around Sidon was developed for agriculture, particularly fruit, evidence of which you'll see on roads leading to the town. During the civil war Sidon was fought over variously by the Palestinians, Syrians, Israelis, Hezbollah and the Shiite militia Amal, and again suffered greatly, both economically and through human and architectural casualties. In the postwar period, it benefited from being the birthplace of

TRAVEL WARNING

Following Israel's 2006 offensive in southern Lebanon, the area remains troubled and its future uncertain. At the time of writing, the main north-to-south highway connecting Beirut with Tyre was still closed in one section, due to an unrepaired motorway bridge, the target of an Israeli air strike. Thousands of UN Interim Forces in Lebanon (Unifil) troops remain stationed in the region, and there are several Lebanese army checkpoints on the roads between Sidon, Tyre and beyond.

At the time of writing it was wise not to venture too far off the main roads between Sidon, Tyre and Jezzine. A roadside bomb attack on Unifil troops on the main road between Marjeyun and Khiam on 24 June 2007 left three Spanish and three Colombian peacekeepers dead, and there are suggestions that there may be other bomb attacks planned. Therefore, some foreign offices also advise staying away from bars and restaurants popular with off-duty Unifil soldiers in Tyre.

In addition to this, the area is still littered with land mines, along with yet more unexploded ordnance and cluster bombs dating from 2006 (see Action Against Mines, p378). If you do decide to venture into the countryside beyond Tyre, do not wander off the roads.

Before attempting any trips to the South, it's best to keep up to date with the situation by checking the internet and print news sources. If you wish to travel outside Sidon or Tyre, it's best to check first with locals, your embassy or the Unifil troops you'll encounter on the road.

For more information on the location and work of Unifil, see the UN's Unifil pages at www.un.org/Depts/dpko/missions/unifil/.

former prime minister Rafiq Hariri, whose eponymous foundation channelled huge amounts of money into the city's reconstruction. Meanwhile other wealthy Sidon financiers such as the Audi and Debbané families (see Building Foundations, below) are sponsoring the ongoing restoration of the souqs.

Orientation

Most of the sites of interest to visitors, including the Sea Castle and souqs, are along or just off the seafront, where you'll also find plenty of good eating options and Sidon's best hotel.

The centre of town, around Saahat en-Nejmeh (a huge roundabout), is most useful for its bus and service-taxi stands, and is also the location of the police station. Rue Riad as-Solh, which runs south off Saahat en-Nejmeh, has plenty of banks with ATMs, moneychangers and travel agencies. The Audi Foundation at the **Musée du Savon** (Rue al-Moutran) provides free maps of the old city listing many of Sidon's heritage buildings.

Information

EMERGENCY

Ambulance (☎ 140)

INTERNET ACCESS

At the time of writing, there were few reliable internet cafés in Sidon. Those that exist tend to change hands regularly. Ask at your hotel for the name and location of the newest option in town.

MONEY

Dozens of moneychangers and banks with ATMs are clustered on Rue Riad as-Solh, close to Saahat en-Nejmeh.

POST

Post office (☎ 722 813; Rue Rafiq al-Hariri; 🕑 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat)

TOURIST OFFICE

Tourist office (☎ 727 344; Khan al-Franj; 🕑 8.30am-2pm Mon-Sat) A small office that can provide you with maps of the historic centre of Sidon.

Sights

With the exception of the Sea Castle, all Sidon's sights are free to visit. Though opening hours are provided, it's worth noting that these may change as a result of the season, day of the week, or whim of those in charge of unlocking the front doors.

SEA CASTLE قلعة البحر

Built by the Crusaders in 1228, the **Sea Castle** (Qala'at al-Bahr; LL4000; 🕑 9am-6pm, closes earlier in winter), connected to the mainland by a fortified Arab stone causeway, sits around 80m offshore on a small island that was formerly the site of a temple to Melkart, the Phoenician version of Hercules. One of many coastal castles built by the Crusaders, it was largely destroyed by the Mamluks to prevent the Crusaders from returning to the region, but its renovation was ordered by Fakhreddine in the 17th century.

BUILDING FOUNDATIONS

Founded in 1979, Rafiq Hariri's foundation continues to carry out work instigated by its billionaire poor-boy-made-good founder, despite his assassination in Beirut in 2005.

The activities of the foundation, many of which centre around his birth city of Sidon, include education, health care and the conservation of historic structures, as well as a USA-based branch, launched in 1995, dedicated to sending Lebanese students to study at major American universities and colleges. In Sidon itself, the Hariri Foundation has renovated a number of historic buildings damaged during Lebanon's bloody and turbulent years: the Great (Omari) Mosque, shelled by Israeli military planes in 1982; the Khan al-Franj (Khan of the Foreigners); and around 500 old city homes.

Meanwhile the Audis, another wealthy family, continue to do their own bit towards Sidon's reconstruction and restoration. The city's soap museum is part of the Audi foundation's commitment to the regeneration of the old city, while the foundation frequently organises cultural events. Likewise, the Debbané family has gifted the city its historic palace home to become a museum showcasing Sidon's glorious past.

The building consists of two towers joined together by a wall. The rectangular west tower, to the left of the entrance, is the best preserved, measuring 21m by 17m, and has a large vaulted room scattered with old carved capitals and rusting cannonballs. A winding staircase leads up to the roof, where there is a small, domed Ottoman-era mosque. From the roof there is a great view across the old city and fishing harbour. The east tower isn't as well preserved and was built in two phases; the lower part dates to the Crusader period, while the upper level was built by the Mamluks.

On summer days when the shallow water surrounding the castle is calm, you can see many broken columns of rose granite lying on the sea floor; archaeologists believe there's much more to be discovered further off Sidon's coast.

KHAN AL-FRANJ خان الفرنج

The largest, most beautiful and best preserved of the many khans built by 17th century Fakhreddine is **Khan al-Franj** (Khan of the Foreigners; admission free; 🕑 10am-6pm), donated to the French by Fakhreddine to encourage trade relations. The khans all followed the same basic design, with a large rectangular central courtyard, fountain, covered arcades (used for stables and storage) and a galleried second storey providing accommodation for merchants and travellers.

In the 19th century, the Khan al-Franj was Sidon's principal khan and the city's centre of economic activity, also housing the French consul. Today, it has been painstakingly restored courtesy of the Hariri Foundation.

GREAT (OMARI) MOSQUE الجامع الكبير

Facing the northern tip of the harbour is the **Great (Omari) Mosque**, said to be one of the best examples of 13th-century Islamic religious architecture. Originally a fortified Knights Hospitaller structure and converted to a mosque after the Crusaders were driven out of the Holy Land, it was heavily damaged during the civil war and underwent a lengthy restoration. The main prayer hall once housed the Church of St John of the Hospitallers and its original walls can still be seen. There are two entrances to the mosque: one down a maze of covered streets in the souqs to the north of the mosque; the other on the eastern side of the building (once the site of a palace built by Fakhreddine). Inside is a large courtyard surrounded on three sides by arched porticos and bordered on the fourth side by the prayer hall. There are two mihrabs (niches indicating the direction of Mecca) on the southern wall of the prayer hall, with a modern *minbar* (pulpit) in-between. You can visit the mosque outside prayer times; remember to dress modestly and women should bring a headscarf.

BAB AL-SARAY MOSQUE جامع باب السراي

The oldest mosque in the city is **Bab al-Saray Mosque**, which dates back to 1201. Located just east of the old Bab al-Saray (Saray Gate), it boasts the largest dome in Sidon and an enormous supporting column made from black stone, allegedly imported from Italy. The beautiful stonework has just been restored through a *waqf* (religious endowment). The mosque sits in the corner of a square, which has a pleasant **outdoor corner café** built on the site of the original *saray* (palace). It may not always be open to non-Muslims, so check before entering and, as with the Great (Omari) Mosque, remember to dress appropriately.

SOUQS الاسواق

The old covered **souqs** are the city's highlight, lying between the Sea Castle and the Castle of St Louis. This is where, in labyrinthine alleyways, shopkeepers ply their trades in workshops the same way they have done for centuries. Officially there are some 60 listed historic sites here, many of them in ruins, though renovation work is ongoing.

Scattered throughout the souqs are several coffeehouses and plenty of tiny canteens dishing out cheap, simple and tasty Arabic dishes; there are also a huge number of pastry shops where you can buy hot bread and biscuits. The delicious *sanioura* (a light crumbly biscuit) is a speciality of Sidon and the souqs are also famous for producing orange-blossom water (see The Essence of Summer, p368).

MUSÉE DU SAVON (SOAP MUSEUM) متحف الصابون

Although Tripoli may take credit for being the centre of the traditional soap-making industry, Sidon has Lebanon's first **museum**

THE ESSENCE OF SUMMER

Distilled from the fragrant blossoms of the orange tree, orange-blossom water – along with rose-water – is a speciality of Sidon and it's well worth picking some up to take home while in town. It's said that their correct method of distillation was finally perfected in the 10th century by Avicenna, an Arab physician. Nowadays, both remain popular in the Middle East for enhancing numerous dishes, both sweet and savoury, and orange-blossom water is the defining ingredient in the misleadingly named popular local *digestif, café blanco* (orange-blossom water in boiling water).

The trick, in cooking, is to use the distillations sparingly – just a drop or two at a time – orange-blossom water being stronger in flavour than rose-water. Orange-blossom water is particularly yummy when added to fruit salads, salad dressings or Arabic rice dishes, while rose-water can give a delicate flavour to custards, pastries and halva. Both also make lovely cooling summer drinks: add a few drops to a sugar syrup, then stir them into iced water, cocktails or iced tea to conjure a taste of the Middle East wherever you are.

High-quality versions of both are made by Matbakh Saida, and sold in the Musée du Savon's attached café.

(Soap Museum; ☎ 733 353; Rue al-Moutran; entry free; 🕒 9am-6pm Sat-Thu), courtesy of the Audi Foundation, dedicated to the craft. Located in the old city in the Khan al-Saboun, a 13th-century stone building adapted for use as a soap factory in the 19th century, it once produced soap to meet the needs of the hammams (bathhouses).

The well laid-out galleries and trilingual (Arabic, English, French) explanations take you through the entire soap-making process – referred to in the museum's brochure as 'saponification' – from the massive stone tub where the raw ingredients were mixed together to the shaping and cutting of the still-warm liquid.

The museum has a stylish café, which also sells books and locally produced treats such as figs in syrup, preserved goats cheese and orange-blossom water, and a boutique selling bath products that make great gifts.

DEBBANÉ PALACE

Created by the wealthy Debbané family, this interesting 18th-century **palace** (☎ 720 110; www.museumsaida.org; admission free; 🕒 9am-6pm Sat-Thu) is tucked away in a narrow souq alleyway on your left as you head from the harbour road to the soap museum. It's well worth a look-in.

CASTLE OF ST LOUIS قلعة المُعزّ

The ruins of this once-impressive **castle** stand on a mound to the south of town. The present structure dates back to the Crusaders, who built on the site of an earlier Fatimid fortress – as reflected in the local name, Qala'at al-Muizz (Fortress of Al-Muizz) after the Fatimid caliph Al-Muizz li-Din Allah, who fortified the site. The English–French name comes from Louis IX, who rebuilt and then occupied the fortress when he retook Sidon from the Ayyubids in 1253. After the Arabs retook the city it was restored, but it later suffered at the hands of the Mamluks. This, coupled with centuries of pilfering, has left the structure in poor condition.

The hill on which the castle is situated is thought to have been the ancient acropolis of Sidon. Archaeologists have uncovered remains of a theatre here, but the site remains largely unexcavated. There is a low wall, with an entrance gate, around the base of the hill. Since this entrance to the site is usually unlocked and unattended, it's generally possible just to wander in for a look around.

MUREX HILL

Just south of the Castle of St Louis is an artificial hill, **Murex Hill**, about 100m high and 50m long, partially covered by a cemetery. This is Sidon's ancient garbage dump, largely formed from the crushed remains of hundreds of thousands of murex shells, the by-product of the city's famed dye. It took 10,000 murex molluscs to make just one gram of purple dye which, in Roman times, was worth three times as much as gold when used on silk. Traces of the shells can be seen on the embankment heading south from the castle.

Sleeping

BUDGET

Hotel d'Orient (☎ 720 364; Rue Shakrieh; dm/s with fan US$5-7, d with fan US$10-12) Grim, grimy and with nothing but the price to recommend it, this is really only one for if you find yourself stuck in Sidon with only a few spare lira rattling in your pocket. It's on the right-hand side as you walk from the harbour to the soap museum: look for a faded 1st-floor sign.

MIDRANGE

Yacoub Hotel (☎ 737 733; Rue al-Moutran; s/d US$40/65; 🌀) Clean, quiet and comfortable, housed in a converted 200-year-old building, this is a great place to spend the night. You'll see it signposted off to the left on your way up from the harbour to the soap museum.

Al-Qualaa Hotel (☎ 734 777; www.alqualaa.com; s/d US$65/70; 🌀) Probably Sidon's best choice, this newly opened hotel in the thick of the seaside action, on the main road in front of the port, is in a beautifully restored building comprising a maze of antique-filled passageways and light, airy rooms, most with sea views.

Eating

Al-Qualaa Hotel (☎ 734 777; 🕒 8am-midnight) A rooftop café at the hotel serves nice mezze lunches and an additional terrace is the perfect location to enjoy a leisurely evening nargileh. It's a great place for soothing souq-aching feet.

Rest House (☎ 722 469/470; mezze LL4000, grills LL10,000; 🕒 11am-11pm) Sidon's upscale option is this government-owned venue, overlooking the Sea Castle. It's a restored Ottoman khan, with vaulted ceilings and inlaid marble and stonework. The shaded garden terrace is on the edge of the sea and has a nice view of Sidon's seafront. Food here is traditional Lebanese, with good mezze, seafood and Lebanese wine.

The best place for cheap eats is the stretch of felafel, seafood and mezze joints surrounding the Al-Qualaa Hotel on the seaside road, opposite the Sea Castle. A very popular local choice here is **Abou Ramy** (☎ 8am-9pm), though all the places offer comparable quality and prices and are packed at weekends. Wandering the souq, you'll also smell tempting, cinnamon-tinged aromas wafting from tiny eating establishments. Follow your nose to a cheap and delicious lunch in its atmospheric hidden alleyways.

If you want to sample *sanioura,* a speciality of Sidon, try **Patisserie Kanaan** (☎ 729 104; Saahat en-Nejmeh; 🕒 6am-11pm) a decent place for a rest and a cup of coffee.

Getting There & Away

Buses and service taxis from Beirut to Sidon leave from the Cola bus station (see p290). To Sidon, OCFTC buses (LL1000, one hour, every 10 minutes from 6am to 8pm daily) leave from the southwest side of the Cola roundabout. **Zantout** (in Beirut ☎ 03-223 414) also runs 14 express buses a day to/from Sidon (LL1500, 30 minutes, every hour from 7am to 8pm daily). Minibuses (without air-con) to/from Sidon cost LL1000 (LL1500 in the evening) and service taxis cost LL2500. Buses depart from the Lebanese Transport Office at Saahat en-Nejmeh, and service taxis from the service-taxi stand just across the roundabout.

A service taxi from Sidon to Tyre costs LL3500 and a minibus (leaving from Saahat en-Nejmeh) costs LL1000. The Zantout bus from Sidon to Tyre (LL750, one hour, around every hour from 6am to 7.30pm daily) leaves from the Lebanese Transport Office at the southern end of town on Rue Fakhreddine, the continuation of Rue Riad as-Solh, near the Castle of St Louis.

AROUND SIDON

Beach Clubs

Along the old coast road running between Beirut and Sidon are a number of wonderful beach clubs that make a welcome change from the capital's scene. All are equipped with pools, beach access – often involving real sand, a rarity in Beirut – and a variety of restaurants and bars. Unlike Beirut's beach clubs, many here don't charge an entry fee and most are open from 10am till late from around May to October. For full listings of all the possibilities for taking to the sands, go straight to the website Lebbeach (www.lebbeach.com), a site that tells you what's most sizzling on the beach scene. Three of the current best are listed below.

0 Cap (☎ 07-990 780; www.ocaponline.com; 🕒 9am-late) Stylish and relaxed with a great Italian restaurant and good facilities for kids, this place is about 15km north of Sidon, in Rmeileh.

Oceana (☎ 03-998 080) Further north up the coast near Damour is this bigger beach

CHECKPOINT ETIQUETTE

Though you'll find Lebanese army checkpoints dotted throughout the country, there's a higher concentration in the historically trouble-ridden south. Generally, as a tourist, you'll be waved through with a nod and often even a smile, but make sure to always have your passport and car rental papers to hand in case they're requested.

As a general rule, always stop at the checkpoint and wait for the minuscule, almost imperceptible hand signal that serves to wave you through. If you don't, you'll probably be asked to reverse and try again – before being waved through anyway. Two other common-sense measures are to refrain from taking any photos in the area, and to switch on the car's interior light when passing checkpoints at night, especially when there are no street lights.

club, able to fit 2500 sunbathers into its pools, beaches and sun lounges. Frequently the scene of all-night parties, it's yet another of the places that Lebanon's young and beautiful come to be seen. Look for the road signs directing you there from the Beirut–Sidon highway.

Bamboo Bay (☎ 07-995 042; entry at weekends LL20,000) in Jiyyeh is another ultra-luxe beach resort with all the necessary ingredients for unwinding beneath the rays, including an extensive spa and good Mediterranean restaurant.

Temple of Echmoun معبد أشمون

For a more cultural afternoon than hitting the southern sands, this Phoenician **temple** (admission free; ☼ 8am-dusk) is about 2km northeast of Sidon on the Nahr al-Awali. The whole area is filled with citrus orchards and the riverbanks are a favourite summer picnic spot with locals. The region has long been a fruit-growing area and the site of the temple is known as Boustan al-Sheikh (Garden of the Sheikh).

Echmoun was the principal god of the city of Sidon and was associated with healing. This is the only Phoenician site in Lebanon retaining more than its foundation walls and it requires a little imagination to picture it in its prime. Brochures are available at the site.

The temple complex was begun in the 7th century BC and the following centuries saw numerous additions to the basic building. Some of the ruined buildings, such as the Roman colonnade and the Byzantine church and mosaics, are far later than the original Phoenician temple and are an indication of how long the site retained its importance as a place of pilgrimage.

The legendary story of Echmoun closely follows that of Tammuz and Adonis. Echmoun began as a mortal youth from Berytus (Beirut). The goddess Astarte fell in love with him; to escape from her, he mutilated himself and died. Not to be thwarted, she brought him back to life in the form of a god, hence his story was linked to fertility and rebirth. He was still primarily a god of healing and is identified with the Greek Asklepios, the god of medicine, and the Roman Aesculapius. It is from the snake motif of Echmoun that we get the serpentine symbol of the medical profession; the image of a serpent coiled around a staff was found on a gold plaque at Echmoun.

The temple complex has a nearby water source for ritual ablutions. It was customary for people coming to the temple to bring a small statue with the name of the person who needed healing. Many of these votive statues depicted children and wonderful examples can be seen at the National Museum in Beirut (see p270).

Between the 6th and 4th centuries BC Sidon was known for its opulence, culture and industry. During this era, one of the rulers was Echmounazar II. His sarcophagus, discovered in 1858, had inscriptions on it relating that he and his mother, Amashtarte, built temples to the gods at Sidon, including the Temple of Echmoun. The sarcophagus is now in the Louvre in Paris.

Archaeologists rediscovered the temple built by Echmounazar II during the excavation of Boustan al-Sheikh earlier this century. It was destroyed by an earthquake around the middle of the 4th century BC. Although never rebuilt, the site retained its reputation as a place of healing and was used by both pagan and Christian pilgrims. The site remained popular until the 3rd century AD, though it was by that time in ruins.

As you enter the site, there is a **colonnade of shops** on the right that probably did a roaring trade selling souvenirs to pilgrims. On the left are the remains of a **Byzantine church** just past what was a large courtyard with some very faded 3rd-century-BC **mosaics** showing the seasons. On the right is a **Roman processional stairway**, which leads to the upper levels of the site. The stairway was added in the 1st century AD. Also on the right is a **nymphaeum** with a fountain and niches containing statues of the nymphs.

Further along on the right is one of the most interesting artefacts, the **Throne of Astarte**, which is flanked by two sphinxes. The throne is carved from a solid block of granite and is in the Egyptian style. There is also a very worn **frieze** depicting a hunting scene.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

From Sidon you can take a taxi to the site (LL6000) or get a service taxi (LL1000) or minibus (LL500) to the turn-off on the highway at the funfair and then walk the 1.5km past orchards to the ruins.

Joun جون

Joun is a large village in the midst of olive plantations above the river, Nahr al-Awali. Its claim to fame is that it was the home for many years of the famous traveller Lady Hester Stanhope (see The Antics of Lady Hester, below).

To reach her home, pass through the village and after about 2km turn left at the sign for the 'Stanhope Tyre Factory'; unsurprisingly, not one of Hester's own business concerns. Follow the road, bearing right at any forks, and eventually you will find yourself at the ruins of her once-substantial house. Fifty metres to the southwest was her tomb, which lay in the shade of an olive grove. Though the simple step-pyramid grave is no longer there, her final resting place remains a picturesque spot and is ideal for picnicking.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Joun is about 15km northeast of Sidon but is tricky to reach without a car. Your only

THE ANTICS OF LADY HESTER

The Middle East has always attracted intrepid women explorers and adventurers, and Lady Hester Stanhope was one of the more extreme examples. She was born into an affluent but eccentric life in London in 1776, the daughter of the domineering Earl of Stanhope and Hester Pitt, sister of William Pitt, the future prime minister of England.

She grew up without a governess and later became close to her uncle, William Pitt. When he was appointed prime minister, she moved straight into 10 Downing Street alongside him to play political hostess. Her first love was Sir John Moore, who took Hester's favourite brother, James, to serve with him in Salamanca. Both were killed in action, and when her uncle also died, Hester was left homeless and broken-hearted.

To assuage her grief, Hester decided to travel abroad and in typical colonial fashion, she and her retinue travelled in luxury throughout the Middle East. Her greatest moment of glory was riding into Palmyra in Syria on an Arab stallion at the head of her travelling procession. For more on Lady Hester and Palmyra, see The Good Things in Life Aren't Free…, p206.

By the time Hester arrived in Joun, her name was known across the Arab world. Having installed herself as a guest in the house of a Christian merchant, she announced that she liked the house so much that she would stay there for the remainder of her days. When it became clear that she meant this literally, the merchant protested to the local emir; Hester wrote directly to the sultan in Constantinople, who wrote back 'Obey the Princess of Europe in everything'.

Once she possessed the Joun house, Lady Hester became increasingly eccentric, reportedly forsaking books, instead communing with the stars. Although greatly respected by local people, among whom she liberally distributed money until she bankrupted herself, she gradually became a recluse, only receiving a few European visitors who would wait at Sidon for word of whether she would see them. The poet Lamartine was one such visitor, as was the son of a childhood friend, Kinglake (author of *Eothen*), who reported that at their meeting, she was wearing a large turban of cashmere shawls and a flowing white robe.

When she died in 1839 she was totally alone and in debt. The British consul had to be sent to take care of her burial and her remains were hurriedly placed alongside those of a young officer in Napoleon's Imperial Guard – reputedly a former lover – in a grave behind her house.

other option is to arrange a taxi from Sidon; a return trip should cost around US$25.

Jezzine جزّين

☎ 07 / pop 14,030

One of the South's most famous summer resorts and worth a few hours of wandering or waterfall-watching, particularly after the winter rains, Jezzine sits 950m up on the western slopes of Jebel Niha, 22km from Sidon and below one of the eastern Mediterranean's largest pine forests.

Known for its 40m-high waterfalls, cool summer temperatures and production of distinctive, hand-wrought cutlery and swords, the town has a long history, although most architectural remains have gone. One monument worth visiting is the **Farid Serhal Palace** (admission free; 🕑 10am-6pm Sun-Thu), an Ottoman-style building with lavish interiors and displays of antiquities. A new forest on the edge of town, inaugurated in April 2007, is home to 600 new budding cedar trees. If you're keen on investing in some new cutlery, which in traditional Jezzine style is colourful and bone-handled, drop in on **S&S Haddad** (☎ 03-683 369) on the main street.

In the valley below Jezzine is **Fakhreddine's Cave**, where Fakhreddine, like his father before him, hid from the Ottomans. His father eventually died there, but Fakhreddine was found and taken to Istanbul. Entrance to the cave is free and the site unguarded; ask a local for walking directions down from the town centre to the valley and the cave.

A good lunch option is **Rock Fall** (mezze from LL3500, mains from LL8000; ☎ 781 041), open all day, which serves up traditional Lebanese food and tasty mezze right next to the waterfalls.

To get to Jezzine, take a service taxi (LL3500) or taxi (LL9000) from Sidon.

TYRE (SOUR) صور

☎ 07 / pop 142,755

Tyre, 81km from Beirut, has a long and colourful history. Suffering dreadfully during the civil war and from Israeli incursions, the city remains full of Unifil troops, more than 13,000 of whom are stationed throughout the South. Predominantly Shiite like most of the South, you'll probably notice, on the outlying roads toward the city centre, scores of posters depicting Hassan Nasrallah, the Shiite cleric and Secretary-General of Hezbollah (see Who is Hassan Nasrallah?, p374), and Iranian clerics and leaders including the Ayatollah Khomeini.

Tyre, like much of the South, has traditionally met with indifference at the hands of Beirut's Maronite power brokers. Nevertheless, determined to override its troubles, you'll find the people warm and welcoming and the city definitely warrants a visit – if only a day trip from Beirut – for its souqs and wealth of Unesco World Heritage–listed Roman remains.

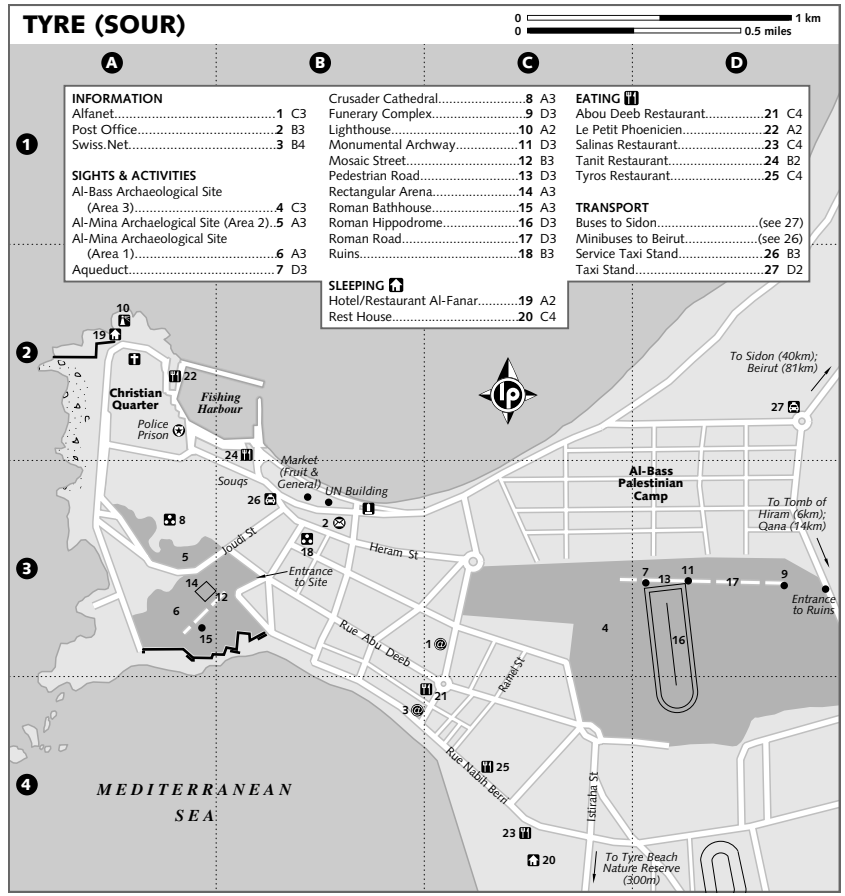
History

Tyre's origins date back to around the 3rd millennium BC, when the original founders are thought to have come from Sidon to establish a new port city. Tyre fell under the supremacy of the pharaohs under the 18th Egyptian dynasty, from the 17th to 13th centuries BC benefiting from Egypt's protection and prospering commercially.

Towards the end of the 2nd millennium BC, Tyre became a kingdom ruled by Abibaal. His son, Hiram I, ascended the throne in 969 BC and forged close relations with the Hebrew kings Solomon and David. Hiram sent cedar wood and skilled workers to help construct the famed temple in Jerusalem, as well as large amounts of gold. In return he received a district in Galilee that included 20 towns.

Under Hiram's reign, Tyre flourished. Hiram changed the layout of the city – he joined the offshore island (the older part of the city) with another small island and linked it to the mainland via a narrow causeway, and his ties with King Solomon helped develop trade with Arabia and North and East Africa. Such was Hiram's success that the Mediterranean Sea itself became known as 'the Tyrian Sea', and Tyre its most important city.

After Hiram's 34-year reign ended, however, Tyre fell into bloody revolution, even as it continued to expand its trading links. The city paid tribute to the Assyrians but remained close to the Israelites and was ruled by a succession of kings. The most famous woman of ancient Tyrian legend was Princess Elissa, also known as Dido. Embroiled in a plot to take power, when it became clear that she'd failed Dido seized a fleet of ships and sailed for North Africa. She founded a new port on the ruins of



Kambeh, which became known in time as Carthage, near modern-day Tunis. This became the seat of the Carthaginian empire.

The rise of Carthage gradually saw a corresponding fall in Tyre's fortunes. Weakened as a power, the Tyrians sued for peace when the Assyrians conquered the Levant and became their vassal state, but when Assyria's power weakened, Tyre rebelled against its overlords. Assyrian attempts to keep Tyre in line led to periods of war throughout the 7th and 6th centuries BC.

With the fall of the Assyrians in 612 BC, Tyre was peaceably controlled by the Neo-Babylonians until 586 BC, when it once again rebelled, leading to a 13-year siege by the Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar. The inhabitants stood firm behind the high walls of the island-city and the siege failed.

More successful, however, was the campaign of Alexander the Great. In 332 BC he marched along coastal Phoenicia exacting tribute from all its city-states. Tyre, in time-honoured tradition, resisted and prepared for a long siege. The city was considered impregnable, but Alexander began building a sea bridge to reach the city, under a constant hail of missiles from the Tyrians. Meanwhile, on the mainland, Alexander's engineers were constructing 20-storey siege towers, the tallest ever used in the history of war. After several months these great war machines lumbered across the land bridge and the battle for Tyre began in earnest.

WHO IS HASSAN NASRALLAH?

Born ninth of 10 children to a greengrocer in an East Beirut suburb in 1960, Hassan Nasrallah has become, in recent years, a figure recognised, and often reviled, throughout the Western world. Secretary-General of Hezbollah since 1992, he provides the organisation's face and voice on the international arena.

Nasrallah's rise to prominence began in 1975, when he joined the Shiite militia Amal movement during the civil war. After a brief period of religious study in Iraq, he joined Hezbollah following Israel's invasion of Lebanon in 1982 and soon became popular for his brand of fiery rhetoric, interspersing his activities in Lebanon with stretches of religious study and periods representing the organisation in Iran. In 1992 he replaced Abbas al-Musawi as secretary-general, after the former leader was killed by an Israeli helicopter attack. Nasrallah's own eldest son, Muhammad Haadi, was killed in 1997, aged 18, in combat with Israeli forces.

Though Hezbollah is often branded with the same extremist or terrorist label as Al-Qaeda and the Taliban, Nasrallah has publicly criticised both, particularly in his televised reaction to 9/11. Primarily advocating the destruction of Israel, however, Nasrallah's lead has seen the organisation pursue a policy of kidnappings and bombings, alongside its nonviolent political and social activities. But despite the often brutal methods employed by those under his leadership, Nasrallah's website (http://english.wa3ad.org/) offers a simple message:

'We do not want to kill anyone. We do not want to throw anyone in the sea. Give the houses back to their owners, the fields back to their landlords, and the homes back to the people. Release the prisoners, and leave us alone to live in this region in security, peace and dignity.'

Running low on supplies and morale, Tyre finally fell after seven months and Alexander, enraged at the dogged resistance of the Tyrians, allowed his troops to sack the city. The city's 30,000 citizens were massacred or sold into slavery. This destruction heralded the domination of the Greeks in the Mediterranean. Alexander's legacy lives on in Tyre, as the land bridge he created became the permanent link between the old city and the mainland, and Tyre became a peninsula.

The city eventually recovered from its devastation and, after a period of Seleucid rule following Alexander's death, became autonomous in 126 BC. In 64 BC, Tyre became a Roman province, then the capital of the Roman province of Syria-Phoenicia.

Later Tyre became one of the first Lebanese towns to adopt Christianity and was the seat of an archbishopric, with 14 bishoprics under its control. In the Byzantine period, flourishing silk, glass and murex industries, producing the prized purple dye, saw the city prosper.

The Arabs took the city in AD 635, and its prosperity continued. The Umayyad caliph, Mu'awiyah, transformed the city into a naval base and it was from here that the first Arab fleet set sail to conquer Cyprus.

With the arrival of the Crusaders, Tyre's future was to become less assured. By paying tribute in 1099, the city avoided attack as the Crusaders marched on Jerusalem. It narrowly survived another Crusader encounter (1111–12), when King Baldwin placed it under siege for nearly five months, finally giving up after some 2000 of his men had been killed. Twelve years later Tyre was not so lucky. People from other coastal cities had fled to Tyre when the Crusaders started to take the Middle East in 1124. After a siege of five and a half months, Tyre's defences collapsed and the Christian army occupied the city and the surrounding fertile land.

The Crusaders rebuilt the defensive walls and Tyre remained in Crusader hands for 167 years, until the Mamluk army of Al-Malik al-Ashraf retook the city in 1291. At the start of the 17th century, Fakhreddine attempted to rebuild and revitalise Tyre, but without much success. Following the fall of the Ottoman Empire, Tyre was included in the French Mandate of Greater Lebanon, and then incorporated into the Lebanese republic.

Once the State of Israel was established in 1948, Tyre's precarious position close to the sealed border further marginalised the city, which was already sidelined by Beirut and Sidon. Along with the rest of the South it suffered greatly during the drawn-out civil war, and Israel's long occupation of the adjacent border area left the city depressed long after the 1991 cease-fire. In recent years, the city has slowly begun to recover, but it suffered further setbacks in 2006 when the summer war between Israel and Hezbollah wrought new damage and left Beirutis – who, until then, were beginning to repopulate its hotels, beaches and restaurants – once again afraid to venture so far south. Currently Tyre is in the midst of yet another period of reinvention and renewal, attempting to struggle back to its feet, as it has done – successfully – for centuries.

Orientation

The old part of Tyre lies on the peninsula jutting out into the sea, covering a relatively small area. The modern town is on the left-hand side as you arrive from Beirut. The coastal route goes all the way to Tyre's picturesque old port, around which are a few cafés and restaurants. Behind the port is the Christian quarter, with its tiny alleys and old houses around shaded courtyards.

To the left of the port the road forks southwards and goes around the excavation site of one of the Roman archaeological sites. There are several streets running parallel between the northern and southern coastal roads, and that's where you'll find banks, moneychangers, sandwich stalls, travel agencies and the souq.

Information

INTERNET ACCESS

Alfanet (☎ 347 047; off Rue Abu Deeb; per hr LL1500; 🕒 10.30am-1am) Just north of the main roundabout, a reliable option for checking your email.

Swiss.Net (☎ 03-446 154; Rue Nabih Berri; per hr LL1000; 🕒 9am-midnight)

MONEY

There are banks and ATMs clustered around the service-taxi stand in the town centre.

POST

Post office (☎ 740 565; 🕒 7.30am-5pm Mon-Fri, 8am-1pm Sat) Near the service-taxi stand.

Sights

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES

In 1984 Tyre was declared a World Heritage site by Unesco in the hope of halting the damage being done to archaeological remains by a combination of hasty urban development and years of conflict. There are three sites within the city: Al-Mina (Areas 1 and 2), on the south side of the city, Al-Bass (Area 3), on the original mainland section, and a medieval site in the centre of town. It's well worth taking a guide at the entrance to one of the sites, who'll bring the ruins to life with their specialised knowledge for around LL10,000 to LL15,000 or LL20,000 for larger groups.

Al-Mina Archaeological Site

In an impressive setting leading down to the ancient Egyptian (south) harbour, **Al-Mina excavations** (Areas 1 & 2; adult/child LL6000/3500; 🕒 8.30am-30 min before sunset) incorporate remains of Roman and Byzantine Tyre. Upon entering, a double line of columns to the right is thought to be part of the **agora** (market place). Further down is a long **colonnaded road** leading directly to what was the southern harbour. The marble sections of the pavement date back to the Roman era, while the black-and-white **mosaic street** is Byzantine. To the right of the road, below a modern cemetery, are the remains of an unusual, **rectangular arena**, with five rows of terraced seating cut in to limestone. In the centre was a pool that may have been used for some kind of spectator water sport.

Beside the arena, and covering the area heading south towards the harbour, was the settlement's residential quarter. The remains are of small rooms, some of which have mosaic paving.

Across the colonnaded main road is the ruin of an extensive **Roman bathhouse**. Measuring some 40m by 30m, the complex did not fare well during the civil war. However, you can still see the vaulted mud-brick basement and several rows of stone discs, which were used to support a hypocaust (raised floor heated by hot air flowing underneath).

Crusader Cathedral

About a five-minute walk to the north of Al-Mina site, the remains of the **Holy Cross Cathedral** can be seen from the road. Foundations and granite columns are all that remain of the 12th-century building, giving scant indication of its importance in Crusader times. Beneath and around the cathedral is a network of Roman and Byzantine roads and

other buildings, one of which may have been the original temple of Melkart, the ancient god of the city.

Al-Bass Archaeological Site

On the landward side of Tyre, about 20 minutes on foot from the other sites, is the enormous **Al-Bass site** (Area 3; adult/student & child LL6000/3500; 8.30am-30 min before sunset). A colonnaded east–west road, possibly a continuation of the road at Al-Mina site, takes you through a vast **funerary complex** containing dozens of highly decorated marble and stone sarcophagi. The more elaborate have reliefs depicting scenes from Greek mythology and Homeric epics. Most are from the 2nd and 3rd century AD, but some date back as far as the 2nd century BC, and there are Byzantine coffins from as late as the 6th century.

A huge, triple-bay **monumental archway** stands further along the colonnaded street. Originally the gateway to the Roman town, it dates to the 2nd century AD. Behind it, to the south of the road, are traces of the city's old **aqueduct**, which brought water from Ras al-Ain, 6km south of Tyre. According to travellers' accounts, it was almost intact during the 19th century, but it did not fare so well in the 20th century.

Beyond the arch is the largest and best-preserved **Roman hippodrome** in the world. The partly reconstructed hippodrome is 480m long and once seated some 20,000 spectators. It was used for very popular and dangerous chariot races. *Metae* (turning stones), which you can still see, marked each end of the long, narrow course. The tight, high-speed turns at the *metae* were the most exciting part of the race and often produced dramatic spills and collisions.

FISHING HARBOUR & SOUQS

Small, but bustling with activity, the **fishing harbour** is the most picturesque part of Tyre, with its brightly coloured wooden boats and old-fashioned boat repair shops. There are also a couple of fish restaurants and cafés that overlook the water and make a good vantage point for watching the scene.

Behind them, running from east to west, lie Tyre's Ottoman-era **souqs**, which aren't as extensive as those of Sidon and Tripoli, but are still lively and interesting to explore.

As you walk around the northern side of the harbour, you come to the city's **Christian quarter**, where there are six churches (one ruined) reflecting Lebanon's multitude of Christian denominations. They are surrounded by narrow, winding residential streets, some lined with old houses, and make for a pleasant wander. Heading south, past the **lighthouse**, there are fantastic views of the sea.

TYRE BEACH NATURE RESERVE

Established in 1998, this small reserve – cut in half by the Rachidiye refugee camp – is an important sanctuary for birds, endangered turtles, bats and other wildlife, as well as containing a beautiful stretch of golden sandy beach.

The reserve is made up of two 'zones': the conservation area, which is open to the public 8am to 5pm every day except Sundays, and the recreation area, open all the time. There is no entrance fee, but a donation is highly appreciated and goes towards continuing the reserve's valuable work.

For more information on the reserve, including hiking and route maps, visit www.destinationlebanon.gov.lb and follow the links to Tyre coast.

Activities

SWIMMING

One of the best places to go for a dip is at the Rest House (see opposite), whose sandy beach offers kayaking and surfing for those not content to simply laze on the sands.

Near the Rest House, the northern portion of the **Tyre Beach Nature Reserve** is open to the public for swimming.

Festivals & Events

The annual **Tyre Festival** (☎ 791 252; www.tyrefestival.com) is held (in stable years) in late July/early August at Al-Bass archaeological site and includes a mix of local and international singers, artists and musicians. If you're in Tyre at the beginning of the Islamic year for **Ashura** (see Islamic Religious Holidays, p231) you can witness the Shiites mourning the death of Imam Hussein ibn Ali over a 10-day period that culminates in a procession.

Sleeping

Though Tyre has a couple of midrange hotel options, they're not really up to much, and it's currently best to either go for the budget or the top-end options listed below.

BUDGET

Hotel/Restaurant al-Fanar (☎ 741 111; www.alfanarrestaurant.com; d US$40, with sea views US$50, incl breakfast) Run by a friendly family, al-Fanar's location right on the edge of the sea near the lighthouse (*al-fanar* is Arabic for lighthouse) is hard to beat. It has a cute little pub and a decent restaurant dishing up homemade food and fish dishes. Good discounts can be negotiated out of the summer season (October to May).

TOP END

Rest House (☎ 742 000/740 667; www.resthouse-tyr.com.lb; d/ste US$75/110, with sea view US$100/130, incl breakfast;) A light and airy luxury hotel, its chalet-style rooms are popular – in good years – at weekends with city-dwellers down from Beirut. With a nice beach and pool, it makes a relaxing place to return to after tramping the ruins all day.

Eating

There is a fair choice of restaurants in Tyre and, despite its large Shiite population, alcohol is served at all but the budget options.

The cheaper joints are mostly clustered on or near the roundabout on Rue Abu Deeb: follow your nose – and the local crowds – to find the favourite of the moment. The perenially popular Abou Deeb Restaurant dominates the roundabout and serves tasty, filling felafels (LL1200) and shwarmas (LL2000).

Le Petit Phoenicien (☎ 740 564; Old Port; mezze LL3000-5000, fish LL40,000-70,000; noon-11pm winter, noon-2am summer) Also known locally as 'Hadeed', after the family that owns and runs it, this is considered the best place for seafood in Tyre. With a nice location overlooking the water and friendly staff, it's a great place to linger over a long, languid lunch while watching the fishing boats. Along the same lines, though without the sea view, the Salinas restaurant, just next to Rest House, comes highly recommended by locals.

Tanit Restaurant (☎ 347 539; mezze LL4000, grills LL15,000; 10am-late) Just around the corner from the port, both the restaurant and its bar are very popular with locals and off-duty Unifil troops. It serves up an eclectic range of cuisine, from Chinese stir-fry to steak and salads.

Tyros Restaurant (☎ 741 027; Rue Nabih Berri; mezze LL4500, grills LL6000-7500; 8am-late) This is a huge place that's extremely popular with locals, especially on weekends when it's advisable to drop in during the afternoon to book a good table in advance. It has a great atmosphere, the food is delicious and there's frequently live classical Arabic music on Saturday nights.

Getting There & Away

From Beirut, microbuses (LL2000, after 8pm LL3000) are the fastest direct option between Beirut and Tyre. Depending on traffic, they take between one and two hours and leave every 15 minutes or so from around 7am to 9pm. Large minibuses also ply the Tyre to Beirut route, depending on demand (LL2000 to LL3000, one to two hours, 6am to 8pm).

The first bus from Tyre to Sidon (LL1500, 30 to 45 minutes) leaves at 6am daily from the roundabout north of the entrance to the Al-Bass site. The last leaves at 8pm.

A service taxi from Beirut's Cola transport hub costs around LL7000. From Sidon, a service taxi will cost LL4000.

QANA'S TRAGEDIES

Sadly, Qana is best known not for its Biblical debate but for its frontline position, 12km north of the Israeli border, and for two incidents, a decade apart, in which Israeli Defense Force troops were charged with causing tragic civilian deaths.

The first incident took place on 18 April 1996, during Israel's Operation Grapes of Wrath, when a Unifil compound in the village was shelled by Israeli artillery. Reports indicated that 106 civilians – who had taken refuge there from the heavy fighting outside – were killed and another 116, along with four Unifil soldiers, injured.

The second occurred on 30 July 2006, when Israeli air strikes hit a civilian building. Human Rights Watch stated, following the incident, that 28 people were confirmed killed – of them, 16 were children who were sheltering in a basement from air strikes. Thirteen more were categorised as missing.

ACTION AGAINST LAND MINES

The south is scattered with unexploded ordnance of all kinds, including land mines and cluster bombs dropped by Israel, which have so far killed or seriously injured more than 200 civilians.

Cluster bombs, when dropped or fired, disperse hundreds of small 'bomblets' randomly over a large area which, according to Human Rights Watch, linger unexploded on the ground, with the same deadly threat as land mines, for many years. Lebanon is not the only country to be affected by this outfall of war: the group estimates that dozens of people in Southeast Asia die or are maimed every year by cluster bombs distributed by US troops during the 1960s and 1970s.

No one knows the exact amount of ordnance left behind in the south in the aftermath of 2006, but the UN Mine Action Coordination Centre (UNMACC) states that 800 separate cluster bomb sites have been identified. By November 2006, the Mine Action Coordination Centre, in association with Unifil and the Lebanese Armed Forces, had managed to locate and safely detonate 58,000 bomblets. They estimated that one million unexploded bomblets – out of an estimated total of around four million fired – remained to be cleared. Human Rights Watch said 90% of these were fired during the final 72 hours of the war.

Despite the efforts of various teams working to clear the area, the cluster bomb threat remains. In November 2007, the winter storms saw huge hailstones hitting the ground near the village of Marjeyun, detonating a number of hidden cluster bombs in the area.

Alongside the cluster bomb threat, UNMACC estimates that there are another roughly 15,300 items of unexploded ordnance on the ground in southern Lebanon, including air-delivered rockets and air-dropped bombs of between 220kg and 900kg.

For more information on the current situation in the region, visit the Mine Action website at www.maccsl.org.

AROUND TYRE

Visiting the area around Tyre may not always be possible, depending on the security situation. Ask the Lebanese soldiers at the frequent checkpoints, or check with your hotel, Unifil staff or locals in Tyre for up-to-date advice.

Tomb of Hiram قبر أحيرام

Around 6km southeast of Tyre, on the road to Qana, is a huge limestone tomb with a large pyramid-shaped top, rising to an overall height of almost 6m. Although some scholars contend that it dates back to midway through the 1st millennium BC, most likely to the Persian period (525–332 BC), it is locally known as Qabr Hiram, and has traditionally been associated with Hiram, the famous king of Tyre, who ruled some 500 years earlier.

Below the sarcophagus are large stone steps (now blocked) and a rock-cut cave, which were first discovered by the French theologist and historian Ernest Renan. When he started excavations at the foot of the tomb in the mid-19th century, he found an even earlier staircase connected to the mausoleum's foundations. There are other signs of tombs in the area as well as a sanctuary.

Qana قانا

This small **Shiite village**, 14km southeast of Tyre, was tragically catapulted into international consciousness in 1996 for the Israeli massacre of civilians and UN soldiers sheltering at a base here (see Qana's Tragedies, p377).

The village is at the centre of a scholarly debate as to whether it's in fact the biblical Cana, where Jesus performed his first miracle of turning water into wine. Until recently it was assumed that the Israeli village of Kefr Kenna was the site of biblical Cana, but the 4th-century historian Eusebius seems to support that Cana was near Sidon, as do the 3rd-century writings of St Jerome. Further proof for the claim is centred on early Christian **rock carvings** and a grotto 1km outside the village. The worn carvings depict 13 figures, said by proponents of the Qana-as-Cana position to be Jesus and his disciples. The cave, just below the carvings, could possibly be where he and his followers hid from persecution. Elsewhere in the village, large basins have been excavated and are said to have contained the water that was transformed into wine. Without more definitive proof no doubt the debate will continue, but the site is worth a visit.

To reach the carvings, go down the steep path next to the school, about 1km before the village (if you're coming from the Tomb of Hiram). The spot is marked by a modern, white-marble stone with black Arabic script. The track leads into a deep valley and it is a five-minute walk down to the grotto and carvings. The site is not supervised, so you can visit any time. The stone basins are between two back gardens of village houses, and you will need to ask the villagers (who are usually only too happy to help) for directions, or get your taxi driver to show you.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

You can take a service taxi from Tyre to Qana (LL2500) but they aren't frequent. A taxi from Tyre is about LL8000; LL10,000 for a return trip. The memorial to the bombing victims is at the UN base, 2km beyond the town.