

Dearest Lebanese Expats,

Greetings from the land of cedars, potholes, and enough hummus to win a Guinness World Record! We, your fellow Lebanese still clinging to this beautiful, chaotic corner of the world, under bombardment from our lovely southern neighbours, are writing to you today with a vital message, ***don't forget where you came from!*** But seriously, send back some money, God knows we need it! Our banks are shut, you know!

As you find yourselves scattered across the globe like sesame seeds on a kaak, let me take a moment to revel in the charm that comes with being Lebanese, no matter where you may roam? Now, we know what you may be thinking, what's so great about being Lebanese? Seriously, if you're thinking that, are you even Lebanese?

Lebanon, land of questionable electricity, "temporary" road closures that last decades, and a national sport of arguing over who makes the best knafeh. Spoiler alert: it's your Teta's recipe, hands down. But fear not, our beloved wanderers! Lebanon's charm lies not in its smooth efficiency, because let's face it there is none, but in the glorious, messy, and utterly unforgettable experience it offers.

Well, my dear compatriots, allow me to regale you with tales of our love for family, our culinary prowess, our unmatched zest for life, our razor-sharp wit, and our legendary hospitality. Sit back, grab a cup of strong Lebanese coffee, and prepare to nod in amused agreement as we embark on this whimsical journey through the wonders of our Lebanese-ness.

First and foremost, let's talk about family. Ah, the Lebanese family. A glorious, messy tapestry woven with love, drama, and enough food to feed a small army with leftovers for next week. We Lebanese take family to an Olympic level. Remember those awkward family gatherings back in the village? The ones where your third cousin twice removed knows your deepest high school secret, and your Aunt Nadia pinches your cheeks so hard you swear you see stars? The upside? You'll never be lonely, and there's always someone to borrow a cup of sugar or, more likely, a million Lebanese pounds. The downside? Privacy is a rumour.

Let us commence with Mamma and Baba, the undisputed rulers of the family roost. Mamma, with her eagle eyes and a vocabulary rich in guilt trips, ensures the house runs like

clockwork, Lebanese clockwork, that is. If something disturbs the everticking maternal clock, expect a masterfully thrown sandal to connect with your head, no matter where you may be! Baba, the silent but ever-present patriarch, dispenses wisdom in the form of grunts and the occasional dramatic sigh until his engine starts revving, then its zero to one hundred in less than five seconds.

Next we move to Teta and Jeddo, the keepers of family lore and the source of endless unsolicited advice. Teta, a master chef and dispenser of backhanded compliments "*You've gained weight, habibi, but it looks good on you!*" or the obligatory relationship questions, "*So, when are you going to give me some grandchildren?*". Teta will shower you with food and affection, often simultaneously. Jeddo, the font of family stories, some true, some embellished, will regale you with tales of "*the good old days*", which probably involved less traffic and more electricity.

Then we have our uncles and aunts, a vibrant, opinionated bunch who know your entire life story, even the bits you tried to bury deep. Prepare for unsolicited matchmaking attempts, fashion critiques "*That outfit? What were you thinking?*", and fierce loyalty, they'll defend you to the death, even if you were clearly in the wrong. And finally your cousins, your built-in best friends and childhood partners in crime. Prepare for endless teasing, inside jokes only you understand, and the occasional, or frequent, family feud that erupts over the most trivial things .

Conversations in a Lebanese family are rarely calm affairs. It's a cacophony of loud voices, passionate arguments, and everyone talking over everyone else. Don't worry, it's not a fight, most likely. It's just the Lebanese way of expressing love and interest. Just be prepared to raise your voice a notch if you want to be heard, and good luck getting a word in edgewise.

Lebanese family gatherings are legendary. Imagine a scene straight out of My Big Fat Greek Wedding, with enough food to feed a village, enough wine and arak to float a boat, and enough drama to fuel a telenovela marathon. There will be singing, dancing, and enough stories retold for the hundredth time to make your head spin. Just remember, family disagreements are inevitable, but they usually end with a hug and another plate of food.

The Lebanese guilt trip is an art form. A simple "*Inta ma fik tzourna aktar?*" from Teta can leave you feeling like the world's worst grandchild. And don't even get us started. Mamma's

ability to weaponise the phrase *"After all I've done for you..."* But here's the secret, it comes from a place of love. They just have a very expressive way of showing it.

Despite the chaos, the unsolicited advice, and the occasional guilt trip, the Lebanese family is a source of spiritual sustenance, immense love and support. They'll be there for you through thick and thin, even if they drive you slightly crazy in the process. So, to all our fellow Lebanese expats, remember, you may have left Lebanon, but Lebanon never truly leaves you. And that, my friends, is a beautiful thing, even if it comes wrapped in a package of slightly overbearing love and questionable fashion choices.

Speaking of sustenance, who can forget Lebanese cuisine? Oh, the glory that is Lebanese cuisine! We're talking about a symphony of flavours so good, even the most discerning palate will do a happy dance. Lebanese food is a celebration of fresh ingredients, and enough garlic to ward off vampires for a lifetime. Picture this, a table groaning under the weight of mezze dishes, each more tempting than the last, while the air is thick with the scent of freshly baked bread and the tantalising aroma of spices.

Mezze, is the cornerstone of any Lebanese meal, is basically an edible all-you-can-eat competition disguised as an appetiser course. Beware, the sheer variety and deliciousness of mezze can easily become your entire meal. Don't say we didn't warn you. Tabbouleh bursting with fresh herbs, plump kebabs sizzling on the grill, manaeesh so good you'll dream about it. And let's not forget the eternal debate over who makes the best hummus, a topic more fiercely contested than the latest political scandal, and no hummus is not Israeli!

Lebanese love their grilled meats. From juicy shish tawouk to succulent kafta, these skewers are a carnivore's dream. Just be prepared for the occasional theatrical display as the chef throws flames around with reckless abandon, it's all part of the experience, we swear. Lebanese bread is more than just a delivery system for deliciousness, it is an art form. Manaeesh, a za'atar- and cheese-topped flatbread, is the ultimate comfort food. Saj, can be wrapped around anything from grilled meats to vegetables, for a portable and delicious meal on the go, perfect for those inevitable post-feast food comas.

No Lebanese meal is complete without a decadent dessert. Baklava, a phyllo pastry layered with nuts and drenched in syrup, is a guaranteed sugar rush. Kanafeh, a cheese pastry soaked in syrup and topped with pistachios, is a delightful textural contrast of crispy and gooey. Just remember, portion control is a foreign concept in Lebanese dessert land. Arak, the

anise-flavoured spirit that graces most Lebanese tables, is best enjoyed with friends and a healthy dose of caution. It goes down deceptively smooth, but its fiery kick can sneak up on you faster than you can say *"yalla for one more round!"*

A Lebanese feast is not for the faint of heart, or stomach. You'll be uncomfortably full, but strangely happy, in a blissful state of culinary satisfaction. Just don't blame us if you have to roll yourself out of the restaurant. Lebanese food is a love affair with your taste buds and your arteries. Just be prepared for the inevitable post-feast food coma, and stock up on Alka-Seltzer, you'll need them.

But it's not just about the food; it's about the experience. In Lebanon, a meal is not just a meal, it's a social event, a bonding ritual, a chance to reconnect with loved ones and forge new friendships. Us Lebanese have mastered the art of turning even the most mundane gathering into a feast fit for royalty; complete with endless rounds of laughter, animated discussions, and, of course, impromptu dabke sessions that leave the neighbours wondering if we've lost our minds.

Let's not forget Lebanese fashion. A vibrant tapestry woven with high-end labels, questionable market finds, and enough gold jewellery to blind a pirate. We're a nation that seamlessly blends high-end couture with questionable choices picked up at the local souk. You'll see women rocking designer handbags next to their mothers sporting questionable floral print pantsuits. And the men? Well, they've mastered the art of looking effortlessly cool in a t-shirt and jeans, even after a night of questionable decisions fueled by arak. It's a unique aesthetic, to say the least.

Lebanese fashion is a masterclass in the high-low mix. You'll see women strutting down the street in couture gowns accessorised with a chunky plastic phone case because practicality has its limits, darling. Men may rock a perfectly tailored suit with mismatched socks, a testament to their commitment to both style and comfort, and maybe a slight laundry mishap. It's all about expressing your individuality, even if your individuality involves questionable choices.

Lebanese have a healthy obsession with brand names. Dropping names like Chanel and Gucci is as essential as breathing. But comfort? Who needs it when you look fabulous? Those designer stilettos might leave your feet screaming for mercy, but hey, suffering for fashion is

a true Lebanese art form, just don't expect anyone to offer you a seat on the bus.

Lebanese love their accessories. Think chunky gold necklaces layered like armour, statement earrings so large they could double as satellite dishes, and enough bracelets to jingle like a walking Christmas tree. The key is to go big, go bold, and go for broke, hopefully not literally, those gold chains ain't cheap.

Ah, the Lebanese debate. The Lebanese love a good debate. It's a national pastime, a spectator sport, and a guaranteed way to ensure your blood pressure medication remains readily available. Politics, family drama, the best way to fold awarma, nothing is off-limits. We'll argue with passion, raise our voices enough to wake the neighbours, and then head to dinner together like nothing ever happened.

No topic is off-limits in a Lebanese debate. Politics, family drama, even the weatherman's questionable fashion choices can spark a passionate debate. Remember, there are no wrong answers, just LOUDER and more CONVINCING answers. Lebanese believe that the louder your voice, the more valid your argument. Forget logic and reason – sheer volume and passionate hand gestures are the keys to winning a debate. Don't worry about losing your voice, that's just a sign of a good debate and a possible future visit to an ENT specialist.

Interrupting is not considered rude in a Lebanese debate, it's practically encouraged! Think of it as a way to show your enthusiasm and eagerness to share your “very important” opinion. Just be prepared to be interrupted back, and maybe even triple-interrupted, because everyone has something to say, and they're going to say it LOUDLY. Don't confuse the shouting with actual anger.

Lebanese families debate with such passion, you might think World War III is about to erupt. But fear not, it's just our way of showing we care, and maybe subtly judging your political views. Chances are, everyone will be laughing and sharing a cup of coffee together within minutes, unless Uncle George gets *really* worked up about the state of the economy, then things might get dicey.

A Lebanese debate is not just a verbal battle, it's a full-body experience. Expect dramatic hand gestures, passionate facial expressions that could rival a Shakespearean actor, and the occasional eyebrow raise that speaks volumes, especially from your Teta. Just remember to

keep your cool, a raised eyebrow from your mother is a force to be reckoned with. The end of a Lebanese debate is usually as sudden as its beginning. One minute you're arguing about the merits of tahini versus pine nuts in baba ghanoush, the next you're being embraced by your opponent, because family, after all. Just because the debate is over doesn't mean the grudge is.

Ah, Lebanon. The land of cedars, ancient ruins, and enough beaches to rival a Victoria's Secret swimsuit catalogue, with slightly more enthusiastic crowds. Of course, Lebanon boasts stunning natural beauty. From the majestic mountains to the sparkling Mediterranean coast, it's a playground for the adventurous soul. You can ski in the morning and swim in the afternoon, as long as the electricity is cooperating, of course.

Just be prepared for the occasional power outage that might leave you skiing by moonlight, a truly unique Lebanese experience. Lebanon boasts some of the most stunning beaches in the Mediterranean. Pristine sands, sparkling turquoise waters – it's a picture-perfect paradise. Just be prepared for the "interesting" characters you might encounter.

There'll be the overly enthusiastic tannoy salesman, "Sunglasses! Only TEN THOUSAND lira!", the families with sound systems that could rival a nightclub, and the ever-present vendors hawking everything from inflatable bananas to questionable knock-off Ray-Bans. It's all part of the charm, really, or at least that's what we tell ourselves. Lebanon offers the unique experience of skiing in the morning and swimming in the afternoon.

Hit the slopes in the majestic Faraya mountains, then head down to the coast for a sunset swim. Just don't be surprised if you find a flock of overly enthusiastic sheep blocking your ski run, wildlife encounters are all part of the Lebanese adventure. At night, escape the city lights and head to the mountains for some of the most breathtaking stargazing, because sometimes, the power cuts have an upside.

Beirut, the pulsating heart of Lebanon, is a city that never sleeps. Trendy cafes, world-class restaurants, and a nightlife scene that would make Studio 54 jealous, it's a playground for the young, and the young at heart...with good health insurance. Then there's Byblos, a charming ancient city with a rich history and a laid-back vibe. Wander through the souk haggling for souvenirs, or explore the historic ruins, just be prepared for the occasional stray cat seeking a cuddle.

Lebanon is an adventurer's paradise. Explore hidden caves with a spelunking tour, or dive into the crystal-clear waters of the Mediterranean and marvel at the vibrant marine life, just keep an eye out for those sunken tanks, they're a new tourist attraction, we swear. And no adventure is complete without a roadside falafel stop. These delicious chickpea fritters are the perfect fuel for your explorations, and a guaranteed way to experience the true flavours of Lebanon, and maybe a slight case of heartburn, but that's just character building.

Lebanon is full of unexpected delights. Stumble upon a hidden waterfall during a hike, or find yourself serenaded by a street musician with a voice like an angel. You might even get offered a donkey ride on your way to the beach, because why not?. Embrace the unexpected, fellow Lebanese expats, because that's what makes Lebanon such a unique and unforgettable place.

Lebanon offers a taste of luxury without breaking the bank. Five-star hotels at bargain prices, delicious meals for a song, it's a budget traveller's dream. Just be prepared for the occasional hiccup, like a surprise power outage that leaves you showering by candlelight, romantic, right? Hey, that's just Lebanon, a place where luxury meets a touch of delightful chaos.

Perhaps the most enduring quality of being Lebanese is our legendary hospitality. Lebanese hospitality, it's legendary, it's overwhelming, and it's guaranteed to leave you with a full stomach and a story, or two for the grandkids. In the words of Khalil Gibran, "*Hospitality is the greatest virtue*," and we've taken that to heart with a passion that borders on obsession.

No matter how humble our abode, we'll greet you with open arms, offer you enough food to feed a small village, and insist you stay for another cup of coffee, strong enough to keep you awake for days. Just remember the cardinal rule, to be Lebanese is to be generous to a fault, always ready to share our home, our food, and our hearts with those we hold dear. Prepare for an assault on your personal space. Lebanese greetings involve a symphony of air kisses, cheek pinches strong enough to leave temporary bruises, and enough "*Habibi's*" to make you feel like royalty, or slightly uncomfortable, depending on your social anxiety level.

Leaving a Lebanese gathering is an art form. Saying goodbye once is considered rude, twice is barely acceptable, and after the third attempt, you might just be ushered back inside for another cup of coffee and a slice of kanafeh. Persistence is key, my friend, but eventually,

you'll escape with a belly full of food, a heart full of warmth, and a renewed appreciation for the slightly overwhelming, utterly wonderful world of Lebanese hospitality.

But perhaps the greatest thing about being Lebanese is our zest for life. Ah, the Lebanese *joie de vivre*. It's not just a way of life, it's a full-on sensory experience – a symphony of laughter, music, overflowing plates, and enough energy to power a small village. We know how to find joy in the simple things, laugh in the face of adversity, and party like there's no tomorrow because sometimes, in Lebanon, it feels like there might not be. Speaking of laughter, let's talk about the Lebanese sense of humour, a weapon more powerful than any politician's rhetoric.

We are a resilient bunch, survivors who know how to make the most of every moment, even when the lights are off. In the face of adversity, we turn to laughter as our saving grace, our shield against the absurdities of life. Whether it's poking fun at our politicians, and let's face it, they give us plenty of material to work with, navigating the chaos of Beirut traffic, or simply finding humour in the everyday quirks of Lebanese life, our wit knows no bounds. After all, if you can't laugh, you'll end up crying, and we'd much rather save our tears for the latest episode of a Lebanese soap opera!

Lebanese families are the heart and soul of our *joie de vivre*. Gatherings are loud, chaotic affairs filled with passionate discussions about everything from politics to the best way to make kibbeh. There will be unsolicited advice, endless questions about your love life, and enough love to smother you. Just remember, a little family drama is just our way of showing we care, and maybe keeping you on your toes.

Lebanese life is set to a pulsating soundtrack. Belly dancing music will have even your Teta shaking a leg, and classic Arabic hits will have you belting out tunes you never knew you knew. Don't worry about being tone-deaf, the sheer enthusiasm is what counts. Just be prepared to explain to your neighbours why Dabke music sounds suspiciously like joyful screaming, it's a cultural thing, really.

Lebanese have a unique relationship with time and danger. Traffic laws are more like suggestions, deadlines are flexible concepts, and jaywalking is considered an Olympic sport. But we face it all with a smile and a healthy dose of black humour. Because hey, if you can't laugh at the absurdity of life in Lebanon, you'll probably cry.

The Lebanese are the masters of improvisation. Need a last-minute costume for a party? Duct tape and a bedsheet will do the trick. Power outage? No problem, we'll just whip out the candles and tell ghost stories, by flashlight, of course. Our motto? *"Shu fi?"* a question that basically translates to *"We'll figure it out, with a little ingenuity and a lot of yelling."*

Lebanese know how to find joy in the simple things. A beautiful sunset, a delicious meal shared with loved ones, a good laugh with friends, these are the things that truly matter. We don't need fancy vacations or expensive possessions, our happiness comes from the warmth of human connection and the ability to find beauty in the everyday, even if that beauty involves dodging potholes on the morning commute.

So, my dear Lebanese expatriate comrades, as we navigate the highs and lows of life in distant lands, let's hold fast to the things that make us uniquely Lebanese. Whether it's the food, the laughter, the hospitality, or simply the indomitable spirit that runs through our veins, let's celebrate our Lebanese-ness with pride, and maybe a side order of kibbeh nayyeh!

Yours in hummus and hilarity,

We who stayed behind to remind you of where you come from!