

LEBANON

JABAL MOUSSA - WELCOME TO THE GARDEN OF EDEN

May 2, 2017

Red Tapir

Jabal Moussa is probably **one of the finest nature reserves in Lebanon**. Sitting on the shoulders of Mount Lebanon, it covers an area of 6500 hectares. Altitude ranges between 350 and 1700 meters, explaining its rich biodiversity. It's home to 723 flora species, a classic stop for migrating birds and the last refuge for hyenas, wolves and boar. For *creatures* like you and me - trying to escape the *urban jungle* - **it's the perfect getaway**.

The reserve is situated in the Kesrouan district, 42 km from Beirut. The road doesn't cause too much trouble. Just take the classic Ferraya route and turn left at the Faitroun roundabout. Keep following the road and you'll end up in Mchati. **If you don't have your own wheels, join one of the many hiking groups on Facebook**. One of the most popular options among expats is [Living Lebanon](#). Tours leave from Saifi Urban Gardens - the *backpackers' central* in Gemayzeh. Jabal Moussa is one of the monthly classics.

The park has different entrances. We pick the one next to the Mchati church. A man with *telepathic talents* already awaits us with tickets (LL 8000/person). We start climbing the steep Roman steps. As we get higher, we discover **the park's greatest asset: the sound of silence**. The path is covered with a crispy layer of dry oak leaves. Acorns crack under our boots. Now and then, there's a

sharp *swish* as tiny lizards run for their lives. A slower forest resident crosses our path too: a land turtle.

The uneven, Roman road keeps snaking its way up. Whoever made this path was in great shape. I'm constantly running out of breath. *Weird*. Not long ago, I was climbing [Mount Rinjani](#). Now, just the thought of that nasty Indonesian volcano makes me wanna throw up. I guess I've been *hibernating* too long. We pass the **rock carvings left by Emperor Hadrian**. It takes quite some imagination to notice the Roman inscriptions. I'm all too happy to reach the open area called 'the arena'. The natural slope creates a vague, natural theatre, flanked by blossoming trees. **We are left alone with the buzzing sound of bees**. *Heaven*. I can't think of a better place to picnic. Make sure you carry every piece of trash out. The reserve is totally saved from garbage, a rare sight in Lebanon. Let's keep it this way.

We go through a natural funnel of rocks and reach a second circle with a hidden *citerne*, the perfect *motel* to park a flock of sheep. Traditional buildings are smartly constructed into a nearby slope. Inside, I'm amazed by the arches made of natural stone. True mastery. A more elaborate, Lebanese house - now in ruin - is standing on the side. It's spring, everywhere we look nature is at its best. Tiny, wild orchids and hyacinths are blossoming on the forest floor. They are quickly harvesting the sun, before the trees steal the light. I suggest you do the same thing. **Visit Jabal Moussa before the hot summer kicks in.**