

Lebanon (Lebanese Republic) (Lubnan)

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Location and area

Lebanon is a republic in the Middle East, bordered on the north and east by Syria, on the southeast and south by Israel, and on the west by the Mediterranean Sea. Its area is 10,452 km². (Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2002).

Topography

Lebanon is characterized by a very narrow coastal plain extending along the Mediterranean Sea and two major mountain ranges in the inland, which are separated by the fertile Bekaa (al-Biqā) Valley. The Lebanon range rises abruptly from the coastal plain; it is cut by numerous deep gorges and contains the country's highest peak, Qurnat as-Sawda' (3,083 m). The other range, the Anti-Lebanon, lies along the Syrian border in the east. Lebanon's major, and only navigable, river, the Litani, is in the Bekaa Valley. Many of the other rivers flow only during the rainy winter season. (Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2002).

Climate

The climate varies from a Mediterranean subtropical climate along the coast and in the Bekaa Valley to a generally cool one in the upper mountains. Summers are hot and dry; winters are mild and humid. Frost is rare at lower elevations. The mean temperature in the lowlands is 27° C in summer and 10° C in winter. The mountainous region is somewhat cooler. Annual precipitation, occurring mainly in winter, is 890 mm along the coast, 635 mm or less in the Bekaa Valley, and more than 1,250 mm in the mountains. (Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2002).

Land use

About 18 % of the Lebanese land area is arable, including the intensively cultivated coastal plain and the Bekaa Valley. Sheep, goats, and cattle are grazed in the uplands, contributing to soil erosion and the nearly total destruction of the forests, once renowned for their cedars (Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2002).

Wetlands

The Ammiq nature reserve (1 km²) is the only natural wetland remaining in the Bekaa. It used to stretch 25 km all the way to Zahle, but because most of the area has been drained for farmland, the marsh is currently only 4 km long and 1 km wide (www.lebanon.com/tourism/ammiq.htm, www.thisiscyberia.com/Environment/birdman.asp). The swamp, is unprotected and under threat from drainage schemes (Spiers 1999).

Peatlands

According to the interpreted World Soil Map (Van Engelen & Huting 2002) no histosols exist in Lebanon and 49 km² of gley soils.