



## “I wanted to do something that celebrated our similarities rather than focused on our differences.”

**NAME:** Kamal Mouzawak **AGE:** 41 **WHERE HE LIVES:** Beirut, Lebanon **OCCUPATION:** Creator of Souk el Tayeb, the first farmers' market in downtown Beirut. Kamal is also the founder of Tawlét (the name comes from the Arabic word for table), a cooperative restaurant in the city's Mar Mikhael district, where each day a guest chef from a different region of the country dishes up authentic Lebanese cuisine.





At Tawlét, a cooperative-style restaurant founded by Kamal Mouzawak, guest chefs prepare regional Lebanese dishes for the daily buffet, including pumpkin kibbeh and *fatayer*, savory pies filled with wild herbs and cheese.

**Beirut is a sexy place right now.** People are talking about it; the *New York Times* named it the No. 1 place to visit in the world in 2009. For me, it's home. It's where I live, and I feel a responsibility to my community here. The city is a paradox, a schizophrenic place with different layers. Lebanon is a unique country in that there is no majority group, so the concept of "other" has no context here. There is no minority. We are East, West, Christian, Muslim, rural, city. We speak Arabic, French, and English. On the street, you can see a woman in a chador [head covering] or a woman in a bikini. Both have a right to coexist here. Our challenge is how to live together.

I live in Gemmayzeh, a neighborhood that borders the Central District. Gemmayzeh was devastated during the Civil War [1975–1990] and reconstructed afterwards. It's near the area known as the Green Line, which used to be a no-man's land of shrubs and trees that separated Christian East Beirut from Muslim West Beirut. It was a very segregated city, totally dif-

ferent worlds, and each group was afraid to go to the other part of town.

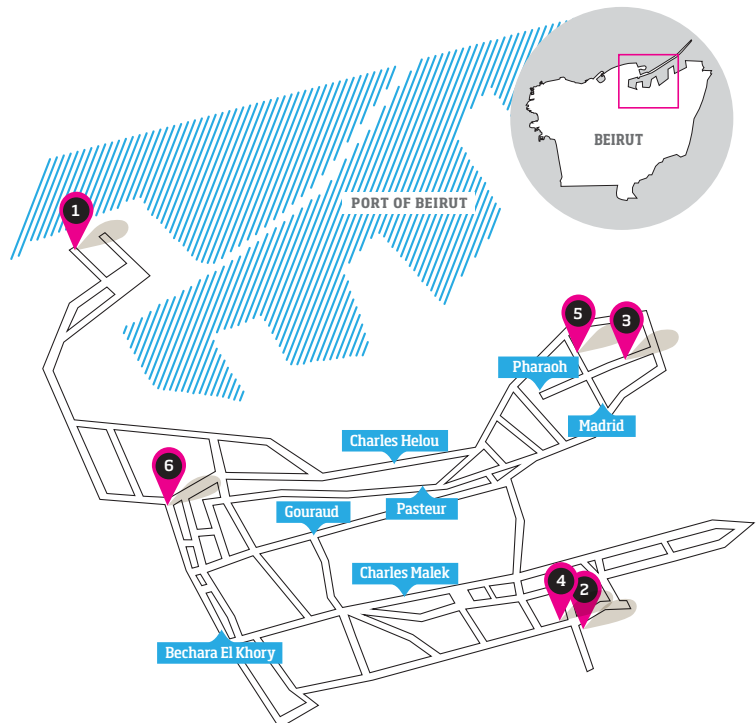
Today, the Green Line is gone. The Central District is home to some of the most expensive real estate in the city, full of fancy new buildings, high-end boutiques, chic stores, and lavish apartments as well as restored mosques, synagogues, and churches. Then there's a more casual, everyday, outdoor café culture, and another layer, near the Mar Mikhael district, where you find car repair shops, appliance stores, and Tawlét, our cooperative restaurant, behind some buildings bearing bullet marks. This area was one of the closest to the war front; when we came here we had to take war-damaged cars out of the building.

I grew up with the war going on around me. As an adult I wanted to do something that celebrated our similarities rather than focused on our differences. In a country as divided and diverse as Lebanon, I wanted to find common ground between communities by bringing them together at the table.

Food is our shared identity. Muslims, Christians, and Druze eat the same food. The only differences are regional. I was raised Maronite Catholic; for Easter we eat a buttery cookie stuffed with dates, pistachios, or walnuts called a *mamoul*. Sunnis and Shiites eat the same cookie for a different celebration, Eid-al-Adha, a feast that marks the end of the annual pilgrimage to Mecca. We sell them at Souk el Tayeb, our downtown farmer's market.

My grandfather and uncles farmed; they grew vegetables, fruits, and herbs. So I knew there were small-scale producers growing and making traditional food without anywhere to sell in the city. I wanted to preserve rural agricultural traditions and bring them to the city. That was the idea behind Souk el Tayeb.

I spend a lot of time meeting and eating with people from Lebanon and all over the world. I often work late and don't go out much, though there is no shortage of nightlife in Beirut. I enjoy having a drink at sunset by the Mediterranean Sea. Why not?



MAP BY GUSTAV KATZ

# Beirut, Lebanon

## 1. SOUK EL TAYEB

"The waterfront, where the market is held, used to be an area where people threw their garbage. Now it's a place that promotes producers who farm in traditional ways and preserve artisanal culinary methods. When you visit, don't miss the *manousheh* [flatbread filled with *labneh*, a yogurt-like cheese with herbs] made by Oum Ali, or Rima Massoud's purslane pie. Vendors also sell honey, wild herbs, rare vegetables, pickles, preserves, olive oil, and flowers."

Parking lot at the entrance to Beirut International Exhibition & Leisure Center (BIEL)  
Saturdays, 9 a.m.-2 p.m.

## 2. TAWLÉT

"Tawlét is my life: a cooperative-style kitchen where producers from the market cook home-style lunches. Lebanese people may not share religion or politics, we may come from the city or country, we may have money or not, but we can all share *kebbeh* [a traditional dish made with bulghur]."

Sector 79, 12 Naher St.,  
Chalhoub Building #22  
Monday-Friday, 1 p.m.-4 p.m.;  
Saturday, noon-4 p.m.  
Cooking classes Monday-Thursday, 4 p.m.-6 p.m.

## 3. PAPERCUP

"I come to this beautiful, unique bookstore at least once a week. They carry an amazing collection of books on art, architecture, and photography, and they have a great magazine selection. You can have coffee, tea, and cake, then browse. I always find something to buy."

Agopian Building, Pharaoh St.,  
961/1-443-083, [papercupstore.com](http://papercupstore.com)

## 4. MANOUCHE

"This casual place is named for a dish of the same name. *Manouche* is a flatbread, a bit like a pizza. It can have tomato and red pepper paste, chard, sorrel, *za'atar* [Middle Eastern spice mix], and feta cheese. For Beirutis, eating the dish is a very popular way to start the day."

Around the corner from Tawlét

## 5. LIWAN BEIRUT

"A boutique that sells Mideast-chic clothing and home décor. The shop has a modern design sensibility, pure and simple, but it's inspired by the traditional shapes, techniques, and fabrics of the region."

56 Madrid St., 961/1-444-141, [liwan.org](http://liwan.org)

## 6. THE POOL LOUNGE AT LE GRAY HOTEL

"I love to visit the Pool Lounge at sunset when it feels like the whole of Mount Lebanon is rising from the Mediterranean and facing you in glowing hues, from pinks to reds. It's just wonderful. I come here for a *tête-à-tête* with a friend to drink a martini or a beer."

Martyrs' Square, Beirut Central District,  
961/1-971-111

