

Love & live in style

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nti magazine

Bright lights, sun city

THE HEADY DAYS OF A BEIRUT SUMMER

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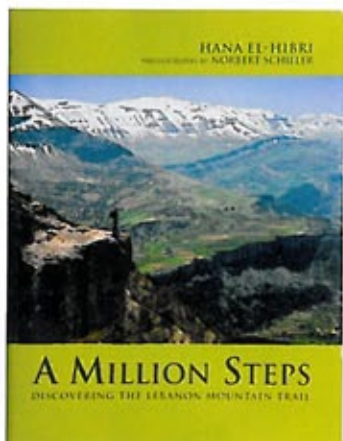


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Michel Comte: Thirty Years and Five Minutes This glorious tribute to photographer Michel Comte, published by teNeues, brings together the most dramatic and expressive photos that Comte has taken over the past 30 years. There's a black-and-white shot from *Esquire* of a heavily made up Sharon Stone, screaming from behind a wire fence, and another for a 2003 Lancôme ad of an affected Uma Thurman wrapped in a black cloak Mike Tyson is caught in a praying position from inside the pages of *Interview* magazine, and a sensual Carla Bruni (pre-Nicolas Sarkozy) bares all for a 1993 safe sex ad campaign. Other celebs captured for eternity by Comte's lens include Mickey Rourke, Sonia Braga, Sophia Loren, Cindy Crawford – and the list goes on.



A Million Steps Hana el Hibri's breathtaking, feast of a book documents her month-long trek across the Lebanon Mountain Trail (LMT). For 29 days, and accompanied by a team of five other hikers, El Hibri traversed the entire length of Lebanon on foot, getting up close and personal with a country that so many of its citizens barely know (see p.252). Along the way, El Hibri met with warm, welcoming villagers, hiked across mountain peaks covered in snow and stopped to admire the natural beauty of Lebanon, its majestic cedar trees, brilliantly colored wildflowers and ancient, biblical landscape. Norbert Schiller's heart-stopping photographs provide intimate, seldom-seen glimpses of such places as the pine forest above Mtain, the Romain ruins at Sheikh Adbullah and the blue expanse of Lake Qaraoun.



Screening Berlin, Eleven Views of Mount Ararat and Toufican Ruins? This trio of innovative works by Lebanese photographer Gilbert Hage comes courtesy of new Lebanese publishing house Underexposed. The novel venture focuses on photographic artworks put forth in eccentric formats. In *Screening Berlin*, Hage captures the city's street life from inside a boat that's gliding down the Spree River. In *Eleven Views of Mount Ararat*, the photos are of Lebanese interiors (one guesses Lebanese-Armenian homes), each of which showcases a different painting or rendition of Mount Ararat. The most harrowing of the works, *Toufican Ruins?*, captures in stilted, eerie photographs the devastation wrought upon Lebanon by Israel during the 2006 summer war.

Available at Virgin Megastore.

Across Lebanon in 29 days

WALK THE ENTIRE LENGTH OF THE MEDITERRANEAN COUNTRY ALONG THE LEBANON MOUNTAIN TRAIL

We woke up early, well before dawn, and have now been walking for hours following a well-worn path. After a steep ascent we are far from busy Beirut, treading rocky tracks winding up the hillside toward the village of Mtein. Above us, a flock of migrating birds cross the cloudless sky, and we stop in our track to peek upward.

Christian, our resourceful trek leader, is getting impatient. "Yalla, habibi," he says. "We still have 15 kilometers to walk in order to reach Mtein by noon." He explains the hurry: A gathering is expecting us to celebrate this year's Lebanon Mountain Trail (LMT) Thru-Walk. And the launch of *A Million Steps*, a book that tells the tale of one woman's experience of trekking across Lebanon in 29 days (see p.84).

Back in April 2009, Hana el Hibri and five team members put their best foot forward to embark on a month-long trek across the length of the LMT, a 440-kilometer hiking trail extending from Qobaiyat in the north of Lebanon to Marjayoun in the south. It's a story told from the heart: El Hibri cares passionately about Lebanon's endangered natural beauty, and she's keen to protect the trails from environmental threats. "I recognize that my unconventional pursuits arouse people's interest and attention. I hope that they may also inspire others to seek new challenges," says El Hibri.

The LMT passes through high mountain ranges and deep valleys as well as 75 towns and villages, three nature reserves – Horsh Ehdén, the Tannourine Cedar Reserve and the Shouf Cedar Reserve – Qadisha Valley (a UNESCO World Heritage Site), ancient castles, abandoned olive oil and silk mills and Roman ruins.





The idea of a trail connecting Lebanon's high-mountain villages was spearheaded by ECODIT, a worldwide environmental consulting company. "The LMT invites us to honor and conserve the rich cultural and natural heritage of Lebanon's mountains," says Joseph Karam, CEO of ECODIT. Hikers who discover the trail will not only explore incredible natural sites, but also benefit the economy of rural regions by providing income to the rural lodgings and local tour leaders.

Last April, the Lebanon Mountain Trail Association (LMTA) organized the second complete Thru-Walk, from Qobaiyat to Marjayoun. "We did this to remind the Lebanese people of the need to protect their heritage...and to promote eco-tourism as a viable business sector," says John Kairouz, executive director of the LMTA.

It pays to have some sturdy walking boots as one hiker discovered. This year, Adrian Cazalet, a 74-year-old British veteran trekker, came to Lebanon to complete the Thru-Walk in 29 days. "It's been a wonderful experience. The scenic beauty, the hospitality of the locals. The diversity has been incredible," says Cazalet.

Several years ago, Cazalet spent five months trekking the Appalachian Trail, a 3,380-kilometer hiking trail that spans the distance between Georgia and Maine in the United States. Thousands of hikers flock to the trail each year. This trail was an inspiration for Karam to initiate this country-long stretching trail in Lebanon.

Trekking on the LMT with a local guide means exploring pine forests and daisy-strewn meadows, and tracing ancient cobbled paths beneath soaring cliffs and snowcapped summits. At the end of the day, the numerous family-owned bed and breakfasts *en route* offer the comforts of water, local food and bedding.

El Hibri laughs when I ask her if she really counted the million steps. "As I put my first step forward, I clocked up the first half meter. There were only a millions steps to go."

Sabina Llewellyn-Davies