

Love in Lebanon: Bon Voyage!

“Hello everyone! It’s Katy here, and welcome back to my vlog where I travel the world and give you my honest opinion and the reality of each country. I’m at the airport on my way to a new country. To be honest with you, I’ve heard many amazing things about this country like its food, culture, beauty of nature, and especially, get this: It is said to be the most peaceful and high-class country in the Middle East! Can you guess which country it is? Yuppp, our next destination is LEBANON!” – *“This is the final boarding call for flight 136A to Lebanon. Please proceed to Gate 4 immediately.”*- “OMG IM SOO LATE! GUYS, I’LL TALK TO YOU WHEN I ARRIVE IN LEBANON. STAY POSTED! PEACE OUT.”

I hurried to the airplane, sat on the seat designated for me beside the window, and waited patiently till the plane took off. Sitting beside me was the most handsome man I had ever laid eyes on. He had ocean-blue eyes, chocolate-colored hair, and his perfume was addictive. I felt myself blushing as I saw him looking at me and then I realized that I was staring at him, so I looked away, quickly avoiding eye contact at all cost. I put a Marvel movie on and started watching when I heard a husky voice with an accent saying:

“So, you’re a fellow Marvel fan...”

I nodded.

It was him! The handsome man next to me who also happened to be a marvel fan; this is going to be an interesting trip.

“I’m Ziad by the way. You’re going to Lebanon for business or pleasure?”

“I’m Katy. It’s for pleasure, and in fact, this is the first time I visit this country.”

“Really? Well, I’m from Lebanon and I would love to be your guide, since I too am here for pleasure and won’t take no for an answer.”

“Mr. Ziad, are you asking me out on a date?”

“Maybe...”

We both laughed and then started talking about random things and getting to know each other.

We talked and laughed the whole trip; everything around us felt blurred. It was like we were the only ones there. We didn't even realize we had arrived in Lebanon until the pilot interrupted us by saying that the plane has landed. If all the Lebanese people have the same attitude and character as Ziad, then I guarantee that I will love it here.

We got off the plane, and I opened my camera and started rolling:

“Hey again, I’ve finally landed in Lebanon! We have a special guest joining us on this journey: we met each other on the way here on the plane, it’s Ziad! He’s Lebanese and he volunteered to be our guide through Lebanon.”

Ziad waves at the camera as I then turn it to the airport and continue:

“And now as you can see, the airport is technologically enhanced. People are riding electric scooters, golf carts, and everything is going smoothly at the gates. The people here are very friendly and always have a smile on their face. Did I mention that this airport is huge?! Well, this is the best first impression in the history of my vlogs! Keep it up Lebanon! I’ll finish up at the airport and go straight to the hotel, since it’s 9 pm here. Talk to you tomorrow! STAY TUNED!” and I turned off the camera.

After we finished up at the airport, Ziad and I exchanged numbers and went our separate ways for the night. I entered the self-driving taxi where I just entered the address of the hotel in Beirut, and it drove to the exact location. On my way to the hotel, there was a beautiful view outside the window, with people laughing, dancing, and drinking. The nightlife here seemed very beautiful. Before I knew it, I arrived at the hotel, checked in, and went to bed excited about my first day here.

I woke up early the next morning and decided to stand on the balcony and look at the view from it. The fresh ocean breeze hit my face as I looked at the majestic pigeon rocks and the clear ocean. I was mesmerized by the view in front of me but got interrupted by a notification on my phone. I checked it to see who it was. It was Ziad. He had asked me to send him my location so we could start our tour of Lebanon.

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“Good morning, everyone. It’s Katy and Ziad here. Ziad as you know volunteered to give me a tour of Lebanon. So Ziad, what’s the schedule for the day?”

“Okay so first we will go to Bsharre to show you The Cedars of God and the snow, then to Jbeil to show you the famous castle, have lunch there, and lastly we will take a ride on a boat in Jbeil and have a swim perhaps.”

“Can’t wait! I’ll keep you guys posted! Peace out!”

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On the way to Bsharre:

“So, let’s recap everything I’ve done on this trip: I’m going on a date in a foreign country with a man I’ve met for the first time on the plane . What is happening right now is so crazy and unbelievable, but at the same time, I feel safe. I know that it is said that this country was the safest country to live in with the lowest crime rate in the world, but I didn’t think this was true. This country continues to amaze me.” I said to Ziad.

“If you think this is all, wait till you meet people on the street and interact with them or even look at how the government and the officials are ethical and law-abiding. This country really is something different. Now, we’ve arrived at our first destination Milady; let’s show you a fraction of nature’s beauty here.”

Ziad descended from the car and opened my door, then directed me to the Cedar Nature Reserve. When we entered, I could hear him talking but was too taken by the view that I couldn’t grasp a thing he was saying. Majestic Cedars

towered over us, their trunks tall and proud, and when I looked up, I couldn't help but wonder at the sheer nobility and history. I came back to my senses when I heard Ziad calling me. I searched for him and found him pointing to a tree and telling me that the tree he was pointing at was 4500 years old. I was even more astonished than before. We continued to walk through the reserve with Ziad acting as guide till we reached the end and took off to our next destination.

Fast forward to Jbeil's castle. The castle's most stunning feature is its courtyard—surrounded by arched porticos with a fountain at the center and dotted with palm trees and flower bushes, casting shadows across the flagstones where noble knights once strolled. It's easy to imagine women in flowing gowns passing by, or peasants selling produce from wagons. Every part of the castle evokes a sense of wonder and amazement. The castle's many chambers and halls provide ample space for exploring.

As the tour came to an end, we walked the streets of Jbeil scanning people and seeing them laughing and talking to each other in harmony; it just made me feel so warm inside. As we reached the restaurant, we were welcomed by an old man who seemed like the owner. He ushered us to our table and took our order. The food was delicious, and I just couldn't have enough. Lebanese food is out of this world.

We later went to Jbeil's port and took a boat ride. I stood at the bow of the boat leaning on the railing, feeling the fresh breeze hit me and taking in the moment when I felt a pair of hands slither their way towards my waist.

I turned towards Ziad and said,

“Slick move trying to recreate the scene from Titanic.”

“What can I say, I'm a hopeless romantic.”

Our gazes locked, and we were about to kiss when we heard the captain speaking. He said that we could jump into the water if we wanted to go for a swim.

I took this moment to trick Ziad, so as I seemed to be going for a kiss, I pushed him into the water and laughed so hard as he had this priceless expression on his face. Then on second glance, I saw that he was drowning; I jumped right

after him to help, but I just heard him laughing. We laughed together and continued our day having the time of our lives.

At the end of the day, Ziad took me back to my hotel, promising that we would meet again someday, and then I went back to my hotel room exhausted. As I lay on the bed, it hit me. I hadn't filmed anything that day, and I had to leave tomorrow. I didn't know what to do, but then I got the best idea. I opened my camera and started recording:

“Hey everyone! I'm back to give you an update. Honestly, I'm really sorry, but I was too busy having fun and being mesmerized by the beauty of this country. If I had to summarize everything about this country, I wouldn't be able to because that would be impossible. If I start talking, I wouldn't be able to stop, but what I could say is that everyone lives in harmony no matter their race or their ethnicity. I felt like it was too good to be true, but it is. The beauty of the culture and nature makes me feel speechless. Personally, I fell in love with Lebanon and its people. I would love to come to live here for the rest of my life.”

Lea Melki