beirut

[bei-rut]

noun

Capital and largest city of Lebanon, located in western Lebanon on the Mediterranean coast.



FOREWORD

I would love to thank all the kind-hearted Lebanese people who showed me an immense amount of hospitality in Beirut during my stay. I was blessed to be welcomed to a nation which has seen darker days but still was able to rebuild itself from the ashes.

A nation whose history cannot be detached from that of my homeland, Afghanistan. Two nations which have been known in the past decades for instability, corruption, war and violence. But behind these bloody chapters of history lies a reality that cannot be hidden: a reality about the soul of this nation and its capital, Beirut, whose heart trembles with stories that are bound to be told.

The Cedar Bastion is the first book in the new series 'Azadi Unchained'. Azadi is a Persian word meaning 'freedom': the freedom to say what you believe, believe what you want and want what you desire. For me, and for this book, it means the freedom to go where I want and to tell others about the beauty and pain I witnessed and felt during my travels.



azadi

[ah-zah-dee]

noun

The state of being free; the power or right to act, speak, or think as one wants without restraint.

Origin: Persian.



January 2023.

Anxious, but thrilled.

The unknown is standing right in front of me. Even though I had experienced this moment a hundred times before.

The airport in Amsterdam. Hundreds waiting to board. A young lady sips her piping hot coffee as it is her fleeting comfort, while the stewards check the passengers into the flight, the sky is waiting for the travelers. An older gentleman polishes his glasses aggressively, as if he polishes away his own thoughts. A family desperately looks for their passports while holding their toddlers in their tiring arms, the minutes tick by fast. The piano in the corner of the terminal is being played by little kids to pass the time. The vending machine around the corner has its busiest moment, dispensing the small comforts for the hungry and restless souls in front of it. All wait full of guilt, fear, frustration, confusion, excitement and above all, hope to finally reach the homeland once more.

Lebanon.





Lebanon, Liban, or لبنان
The heart longs for it in every language

It has been called the 'Switzerland' of the Middle East
It would not do justice to its charming soul

Gifted with the names of Phoenicia and Canaan
History speaks along the mountain passes, reaching the azure-blue Mediterranean waves

A place with many names
A place where the heart will remain… forever.



Elias Khoury, the literary giant
Khalil Ghibran, the poet of the people
Bechara El Khoury, the father of the Cedar Bastion

Soil that gives life to the land
Souls that fill the land

Tolls that have been paid
The whole of Lebanon was no more



