Dear Reader,

Beirut city center is gradually being rebuilt, restored, modernized and revitalized.

It is also being extended towards the sea to form a new city waterfront with ample, landscaped open space.

The product of a grand vision, the project is a model in post-war reconstruction, urban regeneration and waterfront development.

By inviting you to join us on this tour of Beirut city center, we would like to share with you the excitement of an historic city-making venture, and to offer you a preview of what is to become the finest city center in the Middle East.

Nasser Chamama
Chairman - General manager
Beirut and the City Center

Strategically located in the Levant, on the eastern coast of the Mediterranean, Lebanon has always been a crossroad linking East to West and sea to hinterland. The capital, Beirut, is intensely involved in the economic and cultural life of the region.

Beirut’s inherent assets include:
• a location as a maritime gateway and a new airport.
• a liberal political and economic environment and a free press.
• a well-grounded banking system and an emerging capital market.
• excellent higher education and medical services.
• a young, adaptable, highly educated and trained population.
• a cosmopolitan character, with global connections and the use of English and French in addition to Arabic.
• an important archeological and architectural heritage and all-year round cultural and leisure events.
• many other assets relating to natural setting, climate, culture and life-style.

Beirut city center enjoys a privileged position on the waterfront and at the heart of the capital, in a site continuously inhabited for more than 5000 years. It has a long tradition as the focus of business, institutional, cultural and leisure activity.
The Master Plan

It has been only a few years since the vision of the Beirut city center was articulated. In 1992, it was translated into a Master Plan. Following Solidere’s inception in May 1994, the foundation stone for the project was laid in September of that year.

With the realization of the Master Plan, Beirut city center is receiving praise for the quality of its urban planning, entirely new infrastructure, reconstituted public domain, restoration and development.

The Master Plan:
- is a detailed, phased and coordinated plan of action for the creation of a 191-hectare modern, mixed-use central district, with 118 hectares constituting the traditional Beirut city center, and a 73-hectare extension towards the sea.
- involves the installation of a completely new infrastructure.
- preserves heritage buildings and integrates important archeological sites.
- provides an urban design framework for the reconstruction, rehabilitation and redevelopment of the superstructures, including the restoration of preserved and historic buildings.
- offers a flexible, market-oriented development framework for the emergence of a sustainable business, leisure and living environment.
- plans for a mix of facilities that will coalesce over time to form a new kind of city center.

The Beirut city center reconstruction and development project covers 191 ha (472 acres)
- 118 ha (292 acres) originally constituting the traditional city center
- a 73 ha (180 acres) extension being reclaimed from the sea.

Approximately 98 ha (242 acres) consist of public space, of which
- 59 ha (146 acres) are roads
- 39 ha (96 acres) are open space.

About 93 ha (230 acres) are allocated for development, including around 22 ha (54 acres) of retained, religious or state property, exempted lots of the Master Plan.

The Master Plan has a development target of 4.69 million square meters (50.5 million square feet) of floor space.

The guidelines for the various end-uses, modifiable depending on market conditions, are as shown below.
Master Plan*

Includes proposed modifications to the Waterfront District Sector Plan, sectors A & D, and to roads north of Martyrs’ Square.
The Public Domain

The reconstituted public domain is enhanced by high-quality open space: landscaped streets, squares, pedestrian areas. The streets and avenues are planted with a mix of evergreen, deciduous and seasonal flowering trees.
Landscaping

The garden adjoining the Roman Baths has a small amphitheater hosting open-air concerts and performances. In addition to trees, the terraces hold large clay pots filled with aromatic herbs, medicinal plants and scented flowers, violet, jasmine and lavender, thus reconstituting the sights and scents of Roman times.

The Zokak El Blatt garden, overlooking the city from the ring road, is also landscaped with traditional Lebanese flora: laurel, olive, pine and mulberry trees.

The landscaped open space in Weygand street provides a visual setting for the Municipality building and the Al Omari and Emir Assaf mosques.

Hardscaping and Street Furniture

Beirut city center's finishing, hardscaping and street furniture, are high in quality, both as far as design and materials.

Ornamental lampposts, moulded from period designs, and traditional paving are used in the Conservation Area, with modern light poles and concrete paving prevailing elsewhere. A 1930s Beirut ambience is re-created in the Foch-Allelbey and Maaraad area. Recycled cobblestone is used in pedestrian streets, new basalt sets in vehicular streets. Foch street has tall, wrought iron light poles, while brass lanterns hang from the Maarad arcades.
The Conservation Area

At the heart of the city, the Conservation Area has a large number of historic monuments, public or religious buildings. Its original character has been preserved, thanks to special finishing and landscaping, and to faithful restoration of heritage buildings as well as other landmarks, with infill development reinforcing the scale of retained structures.
Nejmeh and Maarad

Modeled during the second half of the 1920s after Place de l’Etoile in Paris, the star-shaped Nejmeh area was executed in the 1930s. Its buildings are designed in an early 20th-century eclectic style imported from Europe, combining classical and Islamic revivalism with Art Nouveau and Art Deco.

Foch-Allenby

Enclosed by four main streets, the Foch-Allenby district has pedestrian internal roads. Its restored buildings form an alignment of beautiful façades. Their architecture reflects an early 20th-century European style with some Neo-Ottoman details. The frontages exhibit a rich variety of details and stone ornamentation: arches, cornices, portals, friezes and inscriptions.

On Foch street is the Abou Bakr (Dabbagha) mosque; on Weygand street are the historic Al-Omari and Emir Assaf mosques and the Municipality building.

A large number of new and returnee owners and tenants have speeded up property restoration in the Nejmeh-Maarad and Foch-Allenby area, encouraged by Solidere’s relocation there.

In accordance with its original vocation, the district is housing banks, businesses, institutional and professional offices, and retail outlets. These include fashion boutiques, antiques shops and specialty restaurants and cafés. The area is also animated by special activities, including street markets and music festivals.

Nejmeh Square is marked by its clock tower, facing Parliament building, both date back to 1934. The historic St George Greek-Orthodox cathedral and St Elias Greek-Catholic church, the deputies’ new office building and other landmarks, complete the square.

Among the radial streets leading to Nejmeh Square, Maarad street, now predominantly pedestrian, is the most characteristic. Stretching between the “Grand Theatre” and the Al Omari mosque, its continuous arcades open up to sea views along Allenby street. The predominant style of the buildings is Neo-Ottoman.

Night crowd in Nejmeh Square

Foch-Allenby views

Maarad Street arcades

Maarad street façades
Riad El Solh Street

Riad El Solh street is an important financial district. A large number of banks operate there, complemented by financial institutions in and around it.

Financial activities are also overflowing to other areas of the city center.

The street has a distinctive architecture dating back to the fifties and sixties, with landmarks including the Post, Telephone and Telecommunications building.

Behind its western façade is the Roman Baths garden, part of an open space developed around the restored archeological site of the baths.

Monumental stairs lead to Rue des Capucins, which runs along the Serail hill towards the Capuchin church.

The Serail Hill

Commanding a superb view of the sea and mountains, the Serail hill is crowned by two Ottoman buildings around a square adorned with a clock tower: the Grand Serail and the Council for Development and Reconstruction building.

Seat of the prime minister’s offices, the Grand Serail is a magnificent, meticulously renovated building, with its own garden and planted courtyard.

Below the Serail, a cascading open space, landscaped with new and salvaged trees, also preserves city memory by integrating a basin with several fountains and an existing wall framing an ancient frieze. On street level, a statue of the Lebanese artist Omar Ouni adorns the garden which bears his name.
The Heritage

Large-scale archeological excavations in the city center have brought to light new revelations about Beirut’s 5000-year history. Allowing in-depth interpretation of the site’s heritage, they provide an extra perspective on the regeneration of the city center and, more generally, on the reconstruction of the country.
The Heritage Trail

The Heritage Trail is a pedestrian circuit linking the archeological sites and heritage buildings in and around the historic core. The visitor will be made aware of a rich and complex pattern of historical layers, integrated within the modern city fabric.

As it connects the present with the past, the trail is expected to reveal spatial and temporal continuity, hence stressing the city’s unity and cultural identity.

Starting from the ancient Tell with its archeological remains and planned Site Museum, visitors can stroll along:

- Weygand street, site of the Municipality and the Al Omari and Emir Assaf mosques.
- The Cardo archeological site, with the intersecting Roman Cardo Maximus and Decumanus Maximus, and Byzantine, medieval and Ottoman remains.
- Nejmeh Square, site of the Roman Forum, and the colonnaded Maarad street with its fine 1930s buildings.
- The Roman Baths and gardens and, on the Serail hill beyond, the Ottoman Grand Serail and former military hospital.
- The Souks of Beirut, rebuilt on the ancient street pattern and incorporating retained archeological features. These include a Phoenician-Persian quarter, Roman and Byzantine finds, a section of the medieval city wall, the Ottoman wharf and the Mamluk Ibn Iraq Zawiya.
- Old Harbor Square, marking the site of the ancient harbor. Fragments of its salvaged wall are being reinstated in the square, and the story of the city’s port from ancient times will be illustrated there. Near the square, the visitor may tour the well-preserved and pedestrianized historic Foch-Allenby district.
- Before returning to the Tell site, the visitor may mount steps to the belvedere that overlays remains of the Crusader castle. A hanging garden will offer views across the archeology park and towards the first basin of the city’s busy port.
The Canaanite wall

Roman Baths

Hadiqat As-Samah

Integrating many archeological layers, Hadiqat As-Samah will extend from the Cardo Maximus to the site of Emir Fakhreddine’s 17th century palace and orange groves. The new garden, encircled by churches and mosques, is destined to be a place for calm and gentle reflection.

The design for Hadiqat As-Samah, by the US/UK practice of Gustafson Porter, was chosen from six entries submitted in an international landscaping competition.

The Tell Site Museum

To the north of Martyrs’ Square, with its new perspective opening onto the sea, the ancient Tell and other archeological sites will be integrated in a park setting. The sites include preserved parts of the Canaanite wall and gate, the Phoenician glacis, Hellenistic remains, the foundations of the Crusader castle, and vestiges of the Ottoman citadel.

A Site Museum will display finds from the Tell and adjacent sites. Information about Beirut’s history will be provided through audio-visual displays and virtual reality models of the city at main historical eras. A pathway leading to nearby archeological sites will guide visitors from the Bronze Age through medieval times.

Hadiqat As-Samah, northern end of the Cardo

Roman Baths
Residential Neighborhoods

Beirut city center is a livable area. Traditional neighborhoods with a preserved fabric are re-emerging as urban villages at the periphery, with other new residential quarters emerging elsewhere in the center and on the waterfront.
As in other preserved parts of the city center, new construction is treated as ‘infill’. Accordingly, it follows relatively strict development guidelines, calling for designs in keeping with the form and scale of adjacent preserved buildings.

The completed development is entirely occupied. The residents are serviced by a nursery school, a polyclinic, convenience shops, galleries, sports and recreation facilities. The Association of Banks headquarters adds a quiet, dignified institutional note to the neighborhood.

Saifi epitomizes Solidere’s concept of an ‘urban village’, with a detailed plan that takes into account the preserved fabric; measures to exclude through traffic; and a network of green spaces and pedestrian ways paved with cobblestone.

Saifi has a rich architectural heritage: turn-of-the-century central hall houses with traditional triple-arch windows, Art Deco buildings, and modern buildings ranging from the fifties to the seventies.

Restoration has revived heritage while addressing modern needs. A palette of colors, ranging from brick-red to yellow-ochre, enhances the neighborhood’s identity.
Saifi Village

Developed by Solidere, Saifi Village is a very successful residential complex. The 30,000-sq m project has infilled an area of many restored structures with new apartment buildings. The design, inspired by Saifi’s vernacular architecture, draws on the scale and rhythm of the existing fabric, thus reinforcing the sense of place.

Saifi Village consists of 16 buildings forming four clusters which extend along six streets. Their scale is broken, both vertically and horizontally to match the urban context. The design thus gives the impression of small-scale street architecture built up over time.

Vertically, bulk is reduced through the articulation of volumes and the use of color. The façades are painted in harmonious pastel tones, blending with the palette used in the restored buildings. Within the façade, the pattern of openings is inspired by rhythms encountered in the preserved fabric of the neighborhood. While horizontal continuity is ensured at the ground floor level, the façade treatment is differentiated at higher levels, by using horizontal elements and setting back the upper floors.

An important part of the scheme is the central courtyards and gardens, linked to a network of walkways between the blocks. The backs of buildings thus constitute an important elevation as a garden and living-room façade.

Characterized by efficiency, comfort and good management, and provided with ample storage and parking space, the one- to four-bedroom flats are all occupied. Encouraged by this success, Solidere has initiated an extension of Saifi Village.

Saifi has its own Quartier des Arts grouping a number of art galleries, antiques and artisans’ shops.
In the neighboring Zokak El Blatt, neatly restored apartment buildings are occupied upon delivery. Renowned for its antiques collection and beautiful garden, a heritage mansion is being converted into a private museum.

A modern complex houses several embassies. Another consists of apartments and offices. A health club extends its services both to the local residents and to members within and beyond the city center.

Wadi Abou Jamil and Zokak El Blatt

Originally a cluster of stone buildings with terracotta-tiled pitched roofs, cascading below the Serail plateau towards the sea, Wadi Abou Jamil holds a strong identity as a Levantine hilltown. Together with Zokak El Blatt to its south, it combines preserved apartment buildings with heritage mansions.

Wadi Abou Jamil has turn-of-the-century central hall Lebanese houses, as well as more recent buildings dating from the thirties to the fifties. Preserved residences usually enjoy high ceilings in addition to generous verandahs, loggias and private gardens. In some cases, fine woodwork, wrought iron, marble floors and decorative false ceilings are further evidence of their former splendor.

Following the ‘urban village’ principles applied in Saifi, Wadi Abou Jamil is being developed as a low-rise residential area, combining restoration and infill construction in a high-quality landscaped and traffic-controlled environment.

Its landscaping comprises a central neighborhood square, a busy market square at its west end, and tree-lined streets and alleys.
The Souks of Beirut

At the very heart of the city center, in an area known for trade since antiquity, the Souks district links the restored and revived Conservation Area to the new Hotel and Waterfront districts.
The project also integrates a restored Mamluk-period shrine and such features of the traditional souks as the ancient street grid, access ‘gates’ and landscaped squares. On the site of Khan Antoun Bey, the department store is inspired by the architecture of this Ottoman caravanserai. A landscaped square featuring a fountain will face the store and the restored Majidiya mosque.

In addition to the hundreds of shops that form the souks proper, the Souks of Beirut facilities include a gold and jewelers’ market, a supermarket, an international department store, and an entertainment complex comprising cinemas, restaurants and games arcades, all above a 2,500-space parking structure.

Several other mixed-use projects are currently under way in the Souks District, some of which will have a prestigious address on Park Avenue.

Intended as a major magnet in the city center, the Souks of Beirut will offer residents and visitors an integrated shopping, entertainment, cultural and social destination, covering 100,000 square meters of floor space with ample landscaped areas.

The Souks comprises four distinct areas, designed by different international and Lebanese architects.

While adopting an innovative approach to accommodate contemporary needs, the Souks of Beirut draw on the site’s heritage. Archeological remains found on the site, such as the Phoenician-Persian site, recovered sections of Beirut’s medieval wall, and possibly some Byzantine mosaics, are incorporated in the design.
New development areas

New development areas, such as the Ghalghoul, Serail Corridor and Hotel districts, were the object of detailed sector plans, in accordance with the phasing strategy for the city center, and are now witnessing important projects.
The main Riad El Solh Square has been landscaped to provide an ideal setting for its restored statue.

A multi-use landmark project designed by a major international architect will initiate large-scale development in the district.

The ‘Grand Theatre’, dating back to the thirties, is to become once again a major cultural and entertainment node, with the nearby Emir Amine garden defining a focus for the associated theater district.

A primary gateway to the city center, the Ghalghoul district will offer a mix of office, residential, hotel and institutional facilities. Retail and leisure services will also be provided.

UN House, headquarters of the Economic and Social Council for Western Asia (ESCWA) and other United Nations agencies, is a modern ‘intelligent’ office building. Facing it is the Gibran Khalil Gibran garden.

The prime location and orientation have made it a much sought-after address. Developments completed and underway include residential and office buildings with retail facilities.

Bordering the east by Park Avenue and to the north by Park Boulevard, four city blocks to the north of the Serail hill fall within the Grand Serail view corridor.

New developments lay special emphasis on residential use, accompanied by a mix of hotel and office uses with restaurants and shops at street level. Designs are to preserve the exceptional sea views, a Mediterranean roofscape panorama thus becoming visible from the Serail hill and from neighboring high-rise buildings.

An Old Shoreline Walk is being landscaped along the prewar water edge. Starting from Beirut Marina’s town quay, it underpasses the Corniche, proceeds past All Saints Anglican church, and follows the original sea wall line along Zeytouneh street, turning to the northeast after Park Avenue to meet the root of the Ottoman sea wall.

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The Hotel District

Extending the prewar city center towards the Beirut Marina and the new waterfront, the Hotel District is bordered to the north by the Corniche and the waterside park.

Part of the city's traditional hotel area, this high-density sector, with a modern and ebullient character, is destined for a mix of office, residential and leisure use, with hotels planned around the Beirut Marina, along the grand corridors of Mina El Hosn Square and the Old Shoreline Walk.

Zeytuneh street, expanded into a major east-west avenue, links the district to the Souks of Beirut. Protected by maximum building heights, it forms a view corridor to the mountains to the east.

Towards the western edge of the district, the grand Mina El Hosn Square will open northerly sea views to the inner and southern parcels, establishing a primary address for all surrounding sites.

A gateway pedestrian bridge across the Corniche is planned to link the Square to Beirut Marina's town quay and a belvedere overlooking the marina and sea beyond.

Viewed from the sea or the city, the hotel district will have a distinctive silhouette, its highest buildings towards its western and northwestern boundaries. Height, setback and other massing controls will allow optimum light and maximize views towards the sea and mountains.

The market promptly responded to the investment opportunities in the Hotel District. The Marina Towers residential complex and the Four Seasons five-star, 260-room hotel, will have direct views on and access to the Beirut Marina. Other hotels and residential towers or mid-rise developments are under way or nearing completion. They include Platinum Tower and Beirut Tower, both designed by leading international architects.
The New Waterfront

Equipped to accommodate around 500 boats, Beirut Marina will be the focal point of leisure activities on the new waterfront. It will have an essentially traffic-free environment, with town quay restaurants and shops.
The New Waterfront District is planned as a prime mixed-use district on reclaimed land, accommodating modern financial, business and residential facilities. It will also be an attractive tourism and leisure destination, with activities centered on two marinas and a 74,000-square meter waterside park.

The Old Shoreline Walk bordering the traditional city center is receiving special landscaping. Pedestrian links with surrounding areas include a bridge across the Corniche, leading to the elevated Mina El Hosn Square in the Hotel District. Several pedestrian underpasses beneath the Corniche, will connect the waterfront to the park and Hotel District.

The New Waterfront District sector plan, includes the landscaping of the Corniche, and the design of a second marina on the eastern edge of the city center.

The distribution of masses in this district aims at preserving view corridors, creating a bold signature of carefully located high-rise buildings offering spectacular views to sea and mountains.

Development will offer a mix of commercial, leisure, hotel and residential uses. Residential use is expected to predominate in the areas facing the Corniche and park. Blocks and parcels east of Allenby street are proposed as a mix of offices and retail use, with a concentration of residential and hotel towers and high-rise buildings on the Foch street frontage, commanding the finest views towards the mountains.

Festival, retail, leisure and cultural uses, and an international convention hotel, are planned around the east marina and the quaysides of the Beirut port first basin.

The framework of streets and open space creates real estate value, as the majority of development blocks face an amenity of some kind, park, waterside or plaza.

The New Waterfront District will afford Beirut its greatest opportunity to create a new signature and regain its regional role.
A Vibrant City Center

With the reconstruction effort, much change has taken place in the past few years, and life has returned to the heart of Beirut. A steady stream of new owners and tenants has moved into the city center. Hundreds of establishments have already settled there.

Most of the new housing is let or sold during construction and restored residential space is immediately occupied. A variety of residential and commercial landmarks are underway, both in the existing city center and on the new waterfront.

But Beirut city center is coming alive in other ways too. At the heart of an ever-growing, vibrant and sophisticated capital, it has a long cultural and tourist tradition and is home to various artistic performances and street activities.
The Planet Discovery interactive science museum, also equipped with a Microsoft electronic library, is a favored destination for children between the ages of 3 and 15.

The nearby New Waterfront exhibition center familiarizes the public with marine works, land treatment and reclamation projects. It also houses other exhibitions.

BIEL

Beirut International Exhibition and Leisure Center is hosting activities in large-scale temporary structures on the new waterfront, including an exhibition hall, conference areas, a banquet pavilion and a seaside restaurant.

**Souk al Barghout**

Periodically held since 1994 in Martyrs’ Square, the Foch-Allenby or Nejmeh-Maarad areas, or on the new waterfront, the Barghout flea market has become a traditional feature of Beirut city center. Always popular, it draws large crowds of people who spend the late afternoons and long evenings shopping or browsing through a large array of antiques, jewelry, paintings, carpets, handicrafts and brocante, on display in the various shops or stalls in and around the beautifully restored buildings.

**Planet Discovery**

Permanent and temporary activities are merging throughout the year, much to the enjoyment of young and old. Open-air concerts are held in the Roman Baths open space and elsewhere, Live bands, shows and dancing sometimes continue through the night. The public is given a wide choice of shops and galleries, as well as restaurants and sidewalk cafes where it can sample delicious specialities while enjoying garden or archeological views. Residents, returnees and visitors are reclaiming the city center open space to exercise, jog, play baseball, ride scooters and bicycles. They also simply walk and push baby carriages, or relax in public gardens.

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The Finest City Center

In developing the finest city center in the region, Solidere is striving to achieve an esthetically pleasing downtown area for the capital, a place where the quality of life, work and leisure ranks high.
Central Beirut is recognized as one of the world’s most important regeneration projects at a time when attention has turned to recycling urban land and making central cities work.

The project has received acclaim as a model for sustainable urban development at the 1996 UN Habitat II conference in Istanbul and at EXPO 2000 in Hanover.

At home, the city center renewal harbors great ambitions: looking outwards, to lead Beirut’s challenge to regain its presence in the region; looking inwards, to rekindle the center’s role as a common arena and meeting point for all, and so help reconnect the city as a whole.

More than a model urban project for the new millennium, the re-emerging downtown must spearhead Beirut’s contest with competing regional cities. It must also contribute significantly to the postwar healing process.

If the project can achieve these challenging agendas, it will have succeeded in creating ‘the finest city center in the Middle East’.
Beirut City Center
Developing the finest city center in the Middle East