

# Aphrodite Duty Free: The sun never stops shining in Lebanon



Aphrodite Duty Free's new stores in Beirut and Tripoli will offer the world's best-selling brands of tobacco products, liquor, wines, perfumes, cosmetics, consumer electronics, mobile phones, souvenirs

and confectionery

Tunisian businesswoman Mariem Mersni, a veteran in the duty free industry, has been tapped by Aphrodite Duty Free to manage two important new seaport stores that will begin operating soon in Beirut and in Tripoli. Not only are they state-of-the-art stores, but they also carry a message of hope, optimism and renewal.

Aphrodite Duty Free's founders and owners are the Lebanese businessmen and brothers Karl and Jad Raphael, who own and operate travel retail stores in seaports, border shops and airport shops specializing in luxury products.

Mersni enthuses: "I feel very proud to be able to work with Karl and Jad. I have known them my entire career in duty free and I have the utmost respect for these professional and honest businessmen."



Mariem Mersni, General Travel Retail Director at Aphrodite Duty Free

The brothers' retail business began in the mid-1990s when they built up a solid travel retail infrastructure in West Africa. Since then, Aphrodite Duty Free has shown continuous growth and has successfully created a dynamic retail environment.

At the beginning of 2009, the company expanded its operations to cover Lebanon where it launched its stores and warehouses in the Beirut seaport duty free zone covering a total space of 875 square meters.

Aphrodite stores sell the world's best-selling brands of cigarettes, cigars, liquors, wines, perfumes, cosmetics, consumer electronics, high-end and collectible lighters, mobile phones, souvenirs and confectionery items.

### **Strong and dynamic infrastructure**

Aphrodite's retail locations work in synergy to provide an exciting consumer experience and effective sales results in diverse travel retail sectors.

Aphrodite Duty Free has become one of the leading companies in its sector through the creation of new business co-operations and its international product range. Its main customers are embassies, the United Nations ship chandler, cruise lines and other tourists. The goal is to expand into the international market.

After the Beirut explosion in 2020, when the shop was completely destroyed, Aphrodite's Chairman and CEO Karl Raphael decided to not give up, believing in the strategic location and its potential to rebound as a profitable business with a new concept store.

Mersni, who is the General Travel Retail Director at Aphrodite Duty Free, describes the new store as "very unique, inspiring elegance, professionalism and modernity".

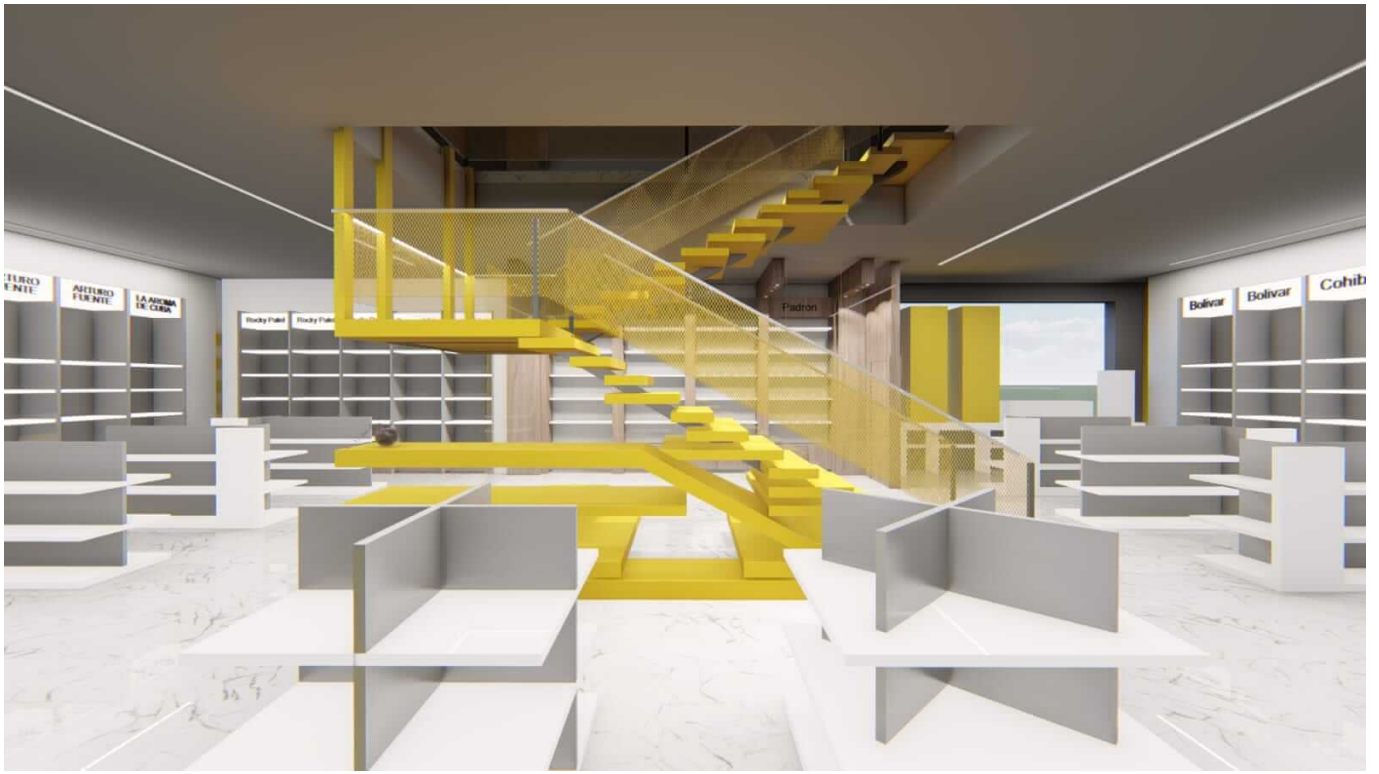
She is upbeat on the location, too, despite the tragedy that took place in 2020. "Lebanon is the center of the Middle East and is the liveliest country in the world. Most tourists are from Europe and the Middle East. We will carry all product categories. The embassy has a quota for buying, and they will order from us."

She adds: "It's like creating a new baby, as the store was totally destroyed by the bomb." While the Beirut store replaces the original shop, Aphrodite's Tripoli location is brand new.

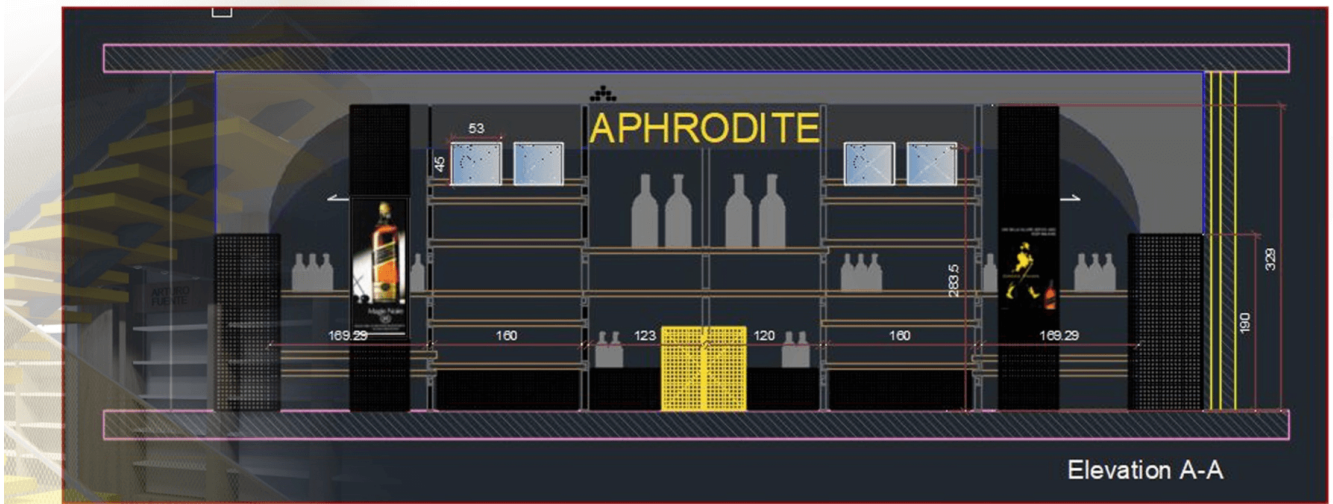
### **The best duty free experience**

Mersni, who divides her time between Beirut and Paris, believes she is the perfect fit for this position with her strong experience in the duty free business.

Her immediate goal is to get the businesses going at the ports as soon as possible. "The port shops will open in the next two months with a grand opening in May or June. I'm extremely enthusiastic about this project. No matter what Lebanon goes through, the country never gives up hope. The yellow and gray color scheme used throughout our stores signifies the sun and that the sun will rise again. The sun never stops shining in Lebanon."



More renderings of the new Beirut Seaport Duty Free store, with state-of-the-art design and feel



Speaking about her new role, she enthuses: “I do the purchasing, strategizing, marketing and budget planning. I will be visiting potential suppliers during the IAADFS Summit of the Americas show in West Palm Beach, Florida, in April and also at the TFWA World Exhibition in Cannes. I look forward to spending one-on-one quality time with all the suppliers I’ve known over the past 20 years during my time in the industry.”

Mersni tells *Global Travel Retail Magazine*: “You know my profound passion for the duty free business. While I will continue with my company’s usual activity, Aphrodite Duty Free will be my premium focus, and I will put my all in to making it the best duty free experience!”

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