



Destination Syria

Population:	20 million
Language:	Arabic
Time:	GMT/UTC + 2
Electricity:	220V, 50Hz
Dialing Code:	963
Currency:	Syrian Pound =100 piasters (referred to as Lira)

General

The Syrian Arab Republic steeped in history, with reputedly the world's oldest continuously-inhabited city of Damascus, now the capital. Bordered by Iraq, Jordan, Israel and the Palestinian Territories, Lebanon and Turkey, it has a Mediterranean climate with hot dry summers and mild wet winters. Summer temperatures range from 20c to 46c+ inland and winter averages of 14c and of course seriously cold in the desert.

History

Syria boasts a long and arduous history from the Persians, Egyptians and the Romans until it came under French rule in the early 19th century. Now a modern day democracy governed by Bashar al-Assad who is showing greater reformist and moderate tendencies than his predecessor his father.

Visa Requirements

Please note that visas are the responsibility of the traveller. The visa requirements vary depending on where you are from and where you are going. We keep the following information as up to date as possible, but rules do change. It is important that you check for yourself.

Entry visas can only be issued by the Syrian embassy or consulate in the original country of the tourist or his place of residence. For those holding American passports, it may be difficult to obtain a visa to Syria.

NB: Visitors who have Israeli visa stamps in their passport will not be granted a visa to enter Syria.

Citizens of all Arab states, Gulf Emirates and Sultanates, are exempted from entry and transit visas, residence permits and exit visas.

Please ensure that your passport has at least a further 6 months validity and spare pages for any visa stamps.

Travel Insurance

It is mandatory for you to organise travel insurance prior to your departure and we will ask for details of your insurer and the emergency contact details before you leave home.

Health and Medical

Inoculations are not required unless you are travelling from an infected location. If you come from a country where diseases such as cholera and yellow fever are prevalent, you will have to show a certificate of inoculation at your point of entry into Syria. Although not required, it is preferable to have preventative shots against polio, tetanus and typhoid. Syria is a clean country, but it is nonetheless advisable to take some precautions until your digestive system adjusts. We strongly advise you to consult your own medical practitioner for specific personal advice. Bottled water is recommended. Medical services are well developed and many of the doctors have been trained overseas and speak English. Antibiotics and other drugs normally sold on prescription in the West are often available over-the-counter in. You should carry prescriptions of any medications you may need, making sure you have the generic name as your specific brand may not be available. If you wear glasses, bring a spare pair and a copy of the prescription as well.

Safety and Security

Syria is a very safe country to visit and travel around. There is very little crime or anti-Western sentiment, however we would caution against conversations in regard to politics and terrorism. You can expect security checks as we travel around and of course like anywhere else you need to be aware of your surroundings and ensure the safety of your personal belongings.

Telecommunications

As long as you have global roaming on your mobile telephone you will have no problem connecting to the providers in Syria. Email devices such as Blackberry are a bit more hit and miss but we have found that 3G devices may be more successful than the older models. All the large hotels have internet access and there are internet cafes in Damascus.

Useful Travel Information

Currency: The Syrian Pound, often referred to as Lira, is divided into 100 piasters. The currency fluctuates and you should seek up to date information. Special tourist exchange rates have been put into operation so that the exchange rates at hotels are the same as those at the other exchange centres. Most of the major town centres have at least one or two ATMs.

The Syrian Pound is not always available outside the country, however, ordering from your bank before you leave may be successful. US\$ is easily exchanged at the border crossing from Jordan.

Credit Cards: Credit cards are easily used in the larger cities and in the hotels although beware of the credit card fee of up to 4%. Small shops, restaurants and of course markets and stalls only take cash. Traveler Cheques are accepted at most hotels, larger shops and restaurants. Major cards accepted are Master Card, Visa, Eurocard, AMEX and Diners Club. NB: Don't plan to buy drinks or small souvenirs with credit. There are ATMs in the larger cities dispensing local currency.

Religion and Culture

The overwhelming majority of the Syrian population is Sunni Muslim and respect must be given to this. You will see few women in the streets by themselves, usually escorted by a male and/or a female relative. We discourage tight and revealing clothing for both men and women. Experience shows that paying due respect to the culture you are in equates to a more friendly and hospitable experience and amiable conversation and engagement with the locals which more often than not is the most rewarding aspect of our travel. We suggest that ladies avoid clingy, tight or suggestive attire. Our suggestion is for loose cotton clothing, longer sleeved shirts and pants (also useful to keep the sun out) and for men short sleeves, T-shirts and longer pants are acceptable.

As we explore Syria you will see women in varying forms of dress from the headscarf and loose clothing to those completely covered with the burkha and showing no skin at all.

Electrical

Electricity supply is 220v and sockets are mostly of the European two pronged variety, although some places have English style plugs. We suggest you bring a universal adaptor.



European circular plug with two metal pins

Alcohol

While alcohol is not actually permitted to Muslims, there are bars serving a wide range of alcoholic drinks. However, during Ramadan it is illegal to drink in public from dawn to dusk, even for non-Muslims. You will find many bars serving the locally brewed beer and all the hotels have bars serving a variety of wine, beer and cocktails.

Cuisine

The Syrian cuisine is varied and rich, and diverse in choice with culinary delights made of vegetables, legumes and meats. Syrian 'pizza' made on a hot copper mound and spiced with rosemary and other herbs of your choice is one the best snacks. The national dishes include Yabrak (vine leaves stuffed with rice and minced meat), ouzi (pastry stuffed with rice and minced meat) and a variety of vegetables cooked with meat and tomato sauces, usually presented on separate plates and eaten by mixing it with cooked rice. Mensaf (pieces of lamb on rice and pine nuts) is another favoured national dish. The Syrian cook has a way with pastries and sweets, famous all over the world. Fresh fruit is plentiful and the best dried fruit you will ever taste (often coated in dark rich chocolate) comes from Syria. On a hot day there is nothing better than the ice cream made in front of you and coated with crushed pistachios.

What To Bring



Important Items to Include:

- Local Currency – Syrian Pounds (£) & USA\$ for exchange – remember you will need a lot of small notes for tips
- Your passport
- Travel Insurance Policy
- Copies of your documentation e.g. passport, credit cards etc
- Sunscreen
- Camera (a large zoom can be valuable addition)
- Wide brim hat
- Torch/Pen light
- Waterproof jacket
- Binoculars
- Insect repellent
- Waterproof shoes/sandals
- Hiking boots or comfortable well worn sturdy shoes
- Luggage locks
- Medicines and prescriptions
- Glasses, sunglasses and items of a personal nature
- Swimmers
- First aid kit

Things to Consider

- Pack light - Leave empty space in your suitcase to buy souvenirs.
- Ensure you have mobile telephone global roaming agreement
- Some email devices may not work. Check with your provider

Notes

- Check your airline's policy on luggage allowance and what is allowable in the cabin and what must go into your hold baggage. Many airlines will not allow duty free over the amount of 100 ml on board so check this before stocking up.
- Ladies should be aware that not all feminine hygiene products may be available and are advised to bring a supply with them.
- Travelling with a group will provide you with the pleasure of new friendships and perhaps some frustrations. Your fellow travellers may be from around the world, differing cultures and likely a range of age groups. We ask you to be understanding and patient with your fellow travellers for the benefit of everyone's travel experience. Remember too that you have responsibilities to the group. If you are requested to be at a place at a certain time, ensure that you don't keep the rest of the group waiting.

