

COUNTRY PROFILE



Syria still remains relatively undiscovered by mass tourism and it's rural population is considered to be one of the most hospitable in the region. This fascinating country is known as the cradle of civilizations—traders and conquerors throughout world history, from east and west, passed through Syria to leave their mark reflected in the abundance of well preserved antiquities.

Travelers with TLB Destinations trace their paths and the focus is on mingling the local community - our travelers experience destinations through the eyes of a local guide and benefit from real insider knowledge

TLB invites you to Take Life Beyond



Country Profile

Why choose Syria?

- * Close to Europe, average flight around 4 1/2 hrs
- * Hospitable population and home to ancient culture
- * Along the ancient Silk Road and at the crossroads of Asia, Africa, and Europe
- * Safe and friendly place to travel
- * Remains an authentic destination

Syria in brief

Borders Lebanon, Turkey, Iraq, Jordan, Israel, Mediterranean Sea

Government Syrian Arab Republic

Total Size: 185,180 sq km

Population: 19,747,586 million (plus 40,000 in Golan Heights)

Capital: Damascus

Languages: Arabic (official); Kurdish, Armenian, Aramaic, French, English somewhat understood

Time: G.M.T. + 2 hours / April – October : G.M.T. + 3 hours

Climate: Along the coast hot, dry, sunny summers (June to September) and mild, rainy winters (December to February) along coast; cold weather with occasional snow in the capital Damascus. Lightweights are essential in summer with protective headwear. Heavy winter clothing is advisable in winter.

Terrain: Mainly semiarid and desert plateau; narrow coastal plain; mountains in the west.

Electricity: 220 volts AC, 50Hz. European-style two-pin plugs.

Visa and passport requirements: Group visa can be pre-arranged by TLB. Individual visa to be applied for in home country. Passport valid for at least six months required by all nationals.

National Holidays: There are several public holidays observed every year. The holidays of the Islamic calendar are observed depending on the lunar calendar. During the lunar month of Ramadan that precedes Eid al-Fitr, Muslims fast during the day and feast at night and working hours are 0900-1400. Some establishments are closed during the day and there may be restrictions on drinking.

Cultural considerations: Syria is primarily a Muslim country; and conservative wear is advisable. Beachwear or shorts should not be worn away from the beach or poolside.

Currency The local currency is the Syrian Pound (SYP; symbol S£) = 100 piastres. Syrian currency cannot generally be reconverted to hard currency.

Credit Cards: Credit cards are accepted most places.

Telecommunication: Mobiles can be used in most Syria except in parts of the desert. Internet is available in most of the hotels.

Health and medical: In Syria always drink bottled water. Health insurance is recommended as well as the appropriate vaccinations. Basic medical facilities exist in the main cities but there are few outside them.

SYRIA's main attractions

Exploring the world's oldest inhabited city **Damascus** is an experience: the Umayyad Mosque, the Tomb of St John the Baptist, and the Tikiyeh Mosque.

The 18th-century Al Azem Palace houses the National Museum, featuring impressive displays of artifacts considered one of the most important collections in the Middle East. A good point to wind down the day is the top of Mount Kas-sioun which offers a splendid view over the city. The city of **Bosra** was prosperous city until the 17th century; the evidence is in the monumental remains of temples, arches, churches, mosques, and a 13th-century citadel. A Roman amphitheater, built in the 2nd century, is the masterpiece of this impressive site and is one of the best conserved in the world. **Palmyra**, a town set in a desert oasis where the legendary Queen Zenobia ruled and stood against the two great empires of the Romans and the Persians, later a major trading route along the Silk road from China. The ruins of this majestic city are expansive and visitors can explore buried tombs and a display of ancient treasures are prized as containing some of the most famous monuments to the Classical period in the Middle East. The Arab citadel towering above Palmyra is the perfect spot to watch a spectacular sunset over the ancient city. **Crac des Chevaliers**, 65 km west of Homs and 75 south-east of Tartus is considered the most magnificent medieval citadel in the world. Rising from an altitude of 650m it was built on the site of a former castle erected by the emirs of Homs to accommodate Kurdish garrisons. In it's glory days it could accommodate 5,000 soldiers with their horses, their equipment and provisions for five years. The citadel covers an area of 3,000 m2 and has 13 impressive towers, in addition to an expanse of corridors, bridges and stables. The crusader castles of Salaheddin, near Latakia, and Markab, near Banyas, also merit a visit.

Homs, known primarily for its *norias*, wooden water-wheels, that used to transport the water from the Orontes river to irrigate fields, dates back to 5,000BC. Around the city, there are still more than 100 norias that were all built during the 13th century, some still functioning today. Not to be missed are the Great Mosque, the Al Azem Palace's Museum, and the agricultural fields surrounding the town, where traditional cultivation practices are still observed by farmers.

Aleppo is thought to have been inhabited perhaps as early as 6 B.C and competes with Damascus on being the oldest inhabited city in the world. Built on the crossroads of the main caravan routes, this ancient city's main feature is an immense Citadel, one of the most magnificent examples of Islamic Arab military architecture and a designated UNESCO World Heritage Site. Aleppo is famed for it's unique architecture dating back to the 13th and 14th centuries: the caravanserais, and Turkish baths in the old city. 16th and 17th architecture features in the Armenian quarter, with its magnificent stone engravings. A colorful souk features a maze of narrow alleys over several kms where trading is done in silver, tissue, copper and vegetables - traditions appear unchanged since bygone times. Northwest of Aleppo lies the citadel of **St. Simeon** which is worth a visit, as are the **Dead Cities**, the ghostly ruins of homes abandoned centuries ago.