

ASIA · HISTORY · ARCHITECTURE · SACRED SITES · FOOD · CULTURE

 Syria

Syria holds some of the Middle East's greatest monuments: the Old City of Damascus and its Umayyad Mosque, the Crusader castle of Krak des Chevaliers, Aleppo's citadel and souqs, and the Roman-era ruins of Palmyra and Bosra. Many sites bear the scars of the war that began in 2011. Check the FCDO travel advice closely before considering any trip.

 **The UK Foreign Office (FCDO) advises against all travel to Syria.**
Read the latest FCDO travel advice before planning a trip. Your travel insurance may be invalid if you travel against FCDO advice.
FCDO advice last updated 2 September 2026.

 CAPITAL Damascus	 CURRENCY Syrian pound (SYP) £1 ≈ SYP 162	 LANGUAGE Arabic, Kurdish	 BEST TIME Mar–May, Sep–Nov
 DAILY BUDGET £30–£150 ££ Moderate	 PLUGS Type C, E, F, L 230V · adapter needed	 FLIGHT FROM LONDON 7h 30m via Istanbul, Doha or Dubai ~£450–£850 return	 TIME ZONE UTC+3 standard time

Syria has been a crossroads for millennia, and its monuments trace Aramaeans, Romans, Byzantines, Umayyads, Crusaders, Mamluks and Ottomans. A first trip traditionally runs north from Damascus, with its Old City, souqs and Umayyad Mosque, via Maaloula, where a form of Aramaic is still spoken, to Krak des Chevaliers above the Homs Gap, the wooden waterwheels of Hama, the Dead Cities and Aleppo. Palmyra lies in the desert to the east and Bosra's black-basalt Roman theatre to the south. Distances are modest, with most of these sites a few hours apart along the main north–south highway.

More than a decade of war has left deep damage: Aleppo's souqs burned in 2012, Palmyra's Temple of Bel was blown up in 2015, and many communities are still rebuilding. Power, banking and transport have all been badly affected, cash is essential and circumstances change quickly, so travel is best arranged with an experienced local guide or operator. Those who do visit describe extraordinary hospitality, superb food and the strange privilege of seeing great sites almost empty. It suits experienced Middle East travellers with flexible plans. Always check the FCDO travel advice before planning anything.

Top 5 highlights

- 1

SACRED SITE

Umayyad Mosque and Old Damascus

Built in the early 8th century on the site of a Roman temple and Byzantine church, the Umayyad Mosque has glittering gold mosaics and a shrine said to hold John the Baptist's head. Approach through Souq al-Hamidiyah.
- 2

HISTORY

Krak des Chevaliers

Perhaps the best-preserved Crusader castle anywhere, held by the Knights Hospitaller from 1142 to 1271 and later strengthened by the Mamluks. Its concentric walls, vaulted halls and towers command the Homs Gap.

3

HISTORY

Palmyra

A desert oasis city that grew rich on caravan trade under Rome. Its long colonnaded street, agora and Valley of the Tombs still impress, despite the deliberate destruction of several monuments by Islamic State in 2015 and 2017.

4

ARCHITECTURE

Citadel of Aleppo

A massive medieval fortress on a mound above the old city, entered by a dramatic bridge and gatehouse built by the Ayyubids and Mamluks. Below it, sections of the covered souqs have been restored after wartime fire and fighting.

5

HISTORY

Bosra

A black-basalt town in the south whose 2nd-century Roman theatre, enclosed within a later Arab citadel, is among the best preserved anywhere. The town also has Byzantine churches and one of Islam's oldest surviving mosques.

Biggest cities

LARGEST CITY

Damascus

≈ 2.4 million people

One of the world's oldest continuously inhabited cities: the Old City's souqs, the Umayyad Mosque, Straight Street, Ottoman courtyard houses turned into hotels and cafés, and Mount Qasioun views at dusk.

2ND LARGEST CITY

Aleppo

≈ 2 million people

Syria's great trading city, with a mighty citadel, once-famous covered souqs being restored after wartime damage, and a cuisine many Syrians rate as the country's finest.

3RD LARGEST CITY

Homs

≈ 800,000 people

Syria's third city, heavily damaged in the war, has the restored Khalid ibn al-Walid Mosque and is the closest city to Krak des Chevaliers, about 40 km to the west.

Ranked by urban-area population where available. Figures are rounded estimates, and sources define city limits differently, so rankings of similar-sized cities can vary.

When to go to Syria

Best time: **Mar–May, Sep–Nov.**

Jan

Feb

Mar

Apr

May

Jun

Jul

Aug

Sep

Oct

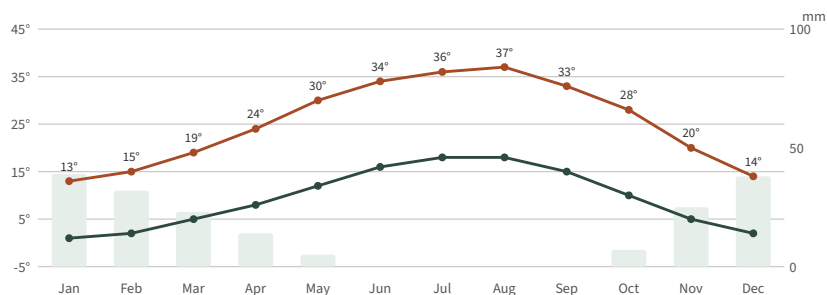
Nov

Dec

■ Best ■ Good ■ Mixed ■ Poor

Average climate in Damascus

— High °C — Low °C ■ Rain (mm)



Festivals & events

Feb–Mar	Ramadan During the holy month, which moves about 11 days earlier each year, Old Damascus comes alive after sunset with iftar feasts, sweet stalls and late-night cafés; days are quiet.
Sep	Feast of the Cross, Maaloula On 13–14 September, the Christian village of Maaloula lights bonfires on its cliffs and celebrates with church services, fireworks and music to mark the finding of the True Cross.

How much does Syria cost?

SHOESTRING £30 per person / day ≈ SYP 4,871 hostels, street food, buses	MID-RANGE £70 per person / day ≈ SYP 11,366 3-star hotels, restaurants, some taxis	COMFORTABLE £150 per person / day ≈ SYP 24,355 4-star+, guided trips, private transfers
---	--	---

Estimates per person per day, excluding flights. Prices vary by season and city.

Food to try

Kibbeh Shells of bulgur and minced lamb stuffed with spiced meat and pine nuts, then fried, baked or served raw; Aleppo is said to have dozens of varieties.	Fatteh A Damascus breakfast of toasted bread layered with chickpeas, garlicky yoghurt and tahini, topped with pine nuts and sizzling ghee.	Booza Stretchy ice cream thickened with mastic and salep, pounded by hand and rolled in pistachios; Bakdash in Souq al-Hamidiyah has made it since 1895.
--	--	--

Getting around

Long-distance coaches and minibuses connect Damascus, Homs, Hama, Aleppo and Latakia, and shared taxis cover shorter routes. Most foreign visitors travel with a licensed local guide and driver, which also simplifies the logistics of reaching remote sites such as Palmyra. Domestic flights are limited. Carry cash, as cards are rarely accepted and ATMs may not take foreign cards.

Practical information

PLUGS & VOLTAGE  C E F L 230V — bring a UK-to-C/E/F/L adapter
DIALLING CODE +963
TAP WATER Not safe — drink bottled or treated water

EMERGENCY NUMBERS Emergency services may be limited in Syria due to the 14-year conflict that country has gone through. FCDO: in London on +44 (0)20 7008 5000 . Source: FCDO “Getting help”
TIME ZONE UTC+3 (standard time)
DRIVING On the right

TIPPING

Leave around 10% in restaurants and small change in cafés, and give guides and drivers a larger tip at the end of a trip.

ETIQUETTE

Dress conservatively, especially at religious sites, where women cover their hair and everyone covers shoulders and knees. Avoid political discussion, and never photograph military or government buildings.

MAIN AIRPORTS

Damascus International Airport (DAM), Damascus; Aleppo International Airport (ALP), Aleppo

Visas & entry for Syria

Shown for a British passport.

Visa required — apply before you go

You must have a visa to travel to Syria.

If you choose to travel to Syria against FCDO advice, ensure you have the right visa or you may be refused entry. You can apply for a visa, and check the status of your visa application via this website.

From the UK government's FCDO entry requirements for British passport holders — read the full page for passport validity, permits and exceptions.

Health & vaccinations

See a travel health nurse, GP or travel clinic **6–8 weeks before you go**. Make sure routine UK vaccinations (such as MMR and diphtheria-tetanus-polio) are up to date.

RECOMMENDED FOR MOST TRAVELLERS

Hepatitis A Tetanus Typhoid

SOMETIMES ADVISED — DEPENDS ON YOUR TRIP, ACTIVITIES AND HEALTH

Hepatitis B Measles Rabies Tuberculosis

YELLOW FEVER CERTIFICATE

No yellow fever certificate is required to enter.

MALARIA

Very low risk of malaria

- There is thought to be a very low risk of malaria in small, remote foci of El Hasaka: awareness of risk and bite avoidance recommended.

Source: TravelHealthPro (National Travel Health Network and Centre), checked 21 October 2026. This is a summary, not medical advice.

Public holidays in Syria

The next 12 months. Banks, offices and some sights may close, and transport and hotels get busy around these dates.

Tue 8 Dec 2026	Liberation Day
Fri 25 Dec 2026	Christmas Day

Sat 26 Dec 2026	Boxing Day
Fri 1 Jan 2027	New Year's Day
Mon 8 Mar 2027	Revolution Day
Tue 9 Mar 2027	Eid al-Fitr (date may shift)
Wed 10 Mar 2027	Eid al-Fitr (date may shift)
Thu 11 Mar 2027	Eid al-Fitr (date may shift)
Sun 21 Mar 2027	Mother's Day
Sun 28 Mar 2027	Gregorian Easter Sunday
Sat 17 Apr 2027	Independence Day
Sat 1 May 2027	Labour Day
Sun 2 May 2027	Julian Easter Sunday
Thu 6 May 2027	Martyrs' Day
Sat 15 May 2027	Eid al-Adha (date may shift)
Sun 16 May 2027	Eid al-Adha (date may shift)
Mon 17 May 2027	Eid al-Adha (date may shift)
Tue 18 May 2027	Eid al-Adha (date may shift)
Sun 6 Jun 2027	Islamic New Year (date may shift)
Sat 14 Aug 2027	Prophet's Birthday (date may shift)
Wed 6 Oct 2027	Tishreen Liberation War Day

National holidays only. Dates based on lunar calendars can move by a day or two depending on official announcements.

Useful phrases in Arabic (Levantine)

ENGLISH	ARABIC (LEVANTINE)	SAY IT
Hello	مرحبا	<i>MAR-ha-ba</i>
Thank you	شكراً	<i>SHUK-ran</i>
Please	من فضلك	<i>min FAD-lak</i>
Excuse me	لو سمحت	<i>law sa-MAHT</i>
How much is this?	بقديش هاد؟	<i>b'ad-DEESH haad</i>

Know before you go

- Check the FCDO travel advice before planning and again just before departure; circumstances and access to sites can change quickly, so keep plans flexible.
- Bring all the cash you need in clean US dollars or euros. Syria removed two zeros from its pound in 2026 and some people still quote old prices, so confirm which is meant.
- Use a licensed local guide or operator for travel beyond Damascus: they know which sites are open, arrange drivers and accommodation, and smooth any paperwork along the way.

