

# Syria – Crusader Castles and Desert Cities

Tour Code SY

## Departing 29 October 2009

A detailed and comprehensive journey through Syria, part of ancient Mesopotamia with the world's oldest capital and an unrivalled concentration of archaeological remains. The fabulous classical ruins of Palmyra and Bosra give testament to the rise of the great civilisations of the Ancient world. Damascus, the oldest continually inhabited city, and Aleppo, with the largest known medieval citadel, are fine examples of the great architectural wonders of the Islamic period whilst Crac des Chevaliers is the finest Crusader castle in the medieval world. The tour is designed to allow for plenty of time to soak up the atmosphere and absorb the vibrancy of one of the Near East's most alluring, yet still traditional destinations.



Funerary Tombs, Palmyra  
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## ITINERARY

### Day 1 Fly to Damascus – Thursday 29 October

Morning departure from Heathrow Terminal 2 on Syrian Arab Air arriving directly into Damascus in the afternoon. Three nights stay at the centrally located Semiramis hotel. Dinner in the hotel (D)

### Day 2 In Damascus – Friday 30 October

Our hotel is close to the unrivalled National Museum which houses a vast collection of antiquities from sites throughout the country, many of which the tour will visit. We walk into the old city to see the stunning Azem Palace, a wonderful example of Damascene architecture and stroll down the Street called Straight to view the serene church of St Ananias. In the late afternoon we take a short drive to Qassioun Mountain for panoramic views across the city. Dinner tonight is in a typical Damascene restaurant (B,D)

### Day 3 In Damascus – Saturday 31 October

This morning we have a walking tour of the Old City starting along the Souq al Hamidiyeh and include visits to the famous Omayyad or Great Mosque and to the Tomb of Saladin. The afternoon is left free to further explore this marvellous ancient city of civilisations. Dinner in a quality local restaurant (B,D)

### Day 4 Visit Crac Des Chevaliers and Marqab Castle – Sunday 1 November

Leaving the capital we head north to the magnificent Crac Des Chevaliers, the best preserved of all Crusader castles. We spend the morning visiting this magnificently located complex before continuing on to Marqab castle, though much smaller in size, unique in construction with a commanding view across the Mediterranean. We drive to Lattakia and overnight at the Riviera hotel with dinner (B,D)

### Day 5 Visit Ugarit, Saladin's Castle and Apamea – Monday 2 November

Our first visit of the day is to Ugarit, once the most important city on the coast and famous for the Ugaritic alphabet before continuing east to the wonderful castle of Salah ad-Din set in an idyllic setting and with breathtaking architecture. In the afternoon we drive into the fertile Orontes valley to Roman Apamea. We walk the kilometre long colonnaded street with its fluted columns and fabulous views across the plains before continuing to Hama and overnight at the Orient hotel with dinner (B,D)

### Day 6 Visit Hama, Serjilla and Ebla – Tuesday 3 November

We start the day at the famous Roman waterwheels (*Norias*) at Hama. We continue on our journey to the extraordinarily well preserved early Christian ruins at Serjilla, part of the Dead Cities complex found in this region. In the afternoon we drive north to stop at Ebla, Syria's most important bronze age city. We continue to Aleppo for three nights at the Ramsis hotel located in the heart of the city. Dinner at the hotel (B,D)

**Patrick Syder Travel**

Escorted Cultural Tours – Zenobia House, 23 Bowmans Close, Steyning, West Sussex BN44 3SR  
Tel/Fax: +44 (0)1903 879737 email: info@sydertravel.com www.sydertravel.com

**Day 7 In Aleppo – Wednesday 4 November**

We have a full day to discover historic Aleppo. We visit the vast Citadel that dominates the city, the Grand Mosque and neighbouring madressah and the fabulous authentic covered bazaar. We dine at a local restaurant to enjoy typical Aleppo dishes (B,D)

**Day 8 In Aleppo. Visit St Simeon Monastery – Thursday 5 November**

A morning at leisure perhaps to shop in the old city souk or enjoy a drink at the famous old Baron hotel frequented by Agatha Christie and Lawrence of Arabia. In the afternoon we drive out to see the fabulous Byzantine Monastery of St. Simeon, superbly located with breathtaking views that stretch to Turkey and perfectly illuminated by the late afternoon sun. Dinner tonight is in a wonderfully restored 18<sup>th</sup> Century Ottoman house (B,D)

**Day 9 Visit Rasafa and Qasr Al Heir. Drive to Palmyra – Friday 6 November**

We journey east this morning following the Euphrates River before a short turn south into the Syrian desert to Rasafa. Built of gypsum, this once vast trading city is now an eerie half-buried ruin. We also pause at the startling Ummayyad Place of Qasr Al Heir before continuing to the ancient oasis city of Palmyra; Syria's archaeological highlight. Two nights at the Zenobia Cham hotel located near to the ruins of the Roman city with dinner (B,D)

**Day 10 In Palmyra – Saturday 7 November**

We have a full day to marvel at the sun-baked temples and triumphal arches that make up this stunning site. We also include a visit to the intriguing Tomb complex and museum with its unrivalled collection of Palmyrene artefacts. After a break for lunch we continue our visit with Bel Temple before ascending to the Arab castle to witness a fabulous sunset over the ruins, the climax of a splendid day (B,D)

**Day 11 In Palmyra. Drive to Damascus – Sunday 8 November**

We are able to return into the site for some free time to wander through the ruins at our own leisure. We visit the excellent local museum with a stunning array of artefacts excavated from the Roman city before our journey after lunch back to Damascus. Two nights at the Semiramis hotel. Dinner at the hotel (B,D)

**Day 12 Visit Maaloula and Seidnaya. In Damascus – Monday 9 November**

Driving out of the city into the foothills of the Anti-Lebanon mountain range and set into the cliffs is the beautiful village of Maaloula - an important centre of Christianity and where Aramaic is still heard, the language spoken by Jesus. We will visit the Monastery of St. Sergius and Convent of St. Thecla. We continue to Seidnaya and its Greek Orthodox convent, the site of one of the most important places of Christian pilgrimage in the Middle East before returning to Damascus for some free time in the afternoon to return to the Old city for further exploration. Dinner in a quality Old city restaurant (B,D)

**Day 13 Visit Shaba and Suweida. Drive to Bosra – Tuesday 10 November**

Leaving Damascus for the last time we head south into the Druze populated area of Hawran with a fertile volcanic landscape. Here we visit Shaba (Roman Philippopolis) and Suweida to discover some wonderful Roman mosaics in the local museums. We continue to Bosra to visit the wonderful Roman basalt theatre in the late afternoon. Overnight at the Bosra Cham hotel with dinner (B,D)

**Day 14 In Bosra. Drive to Damascus airport. Fly London – Wednesday 11 November**

The old town of Bosra is a living museum and wandering through it reveals a fascinating collection of ancient buildings including the great Citadel. After a break for lunch we drive to Damascus airport centre to the south of the capital for our return flight to London arriving into Heathrow Terminal 2 in the evening (B)

**Cost £1645.00** per person in a twin room (excludes international flights)    Single supplement charge £300.00



**Price includes –**

- ▶ Tour accompanied from London by Patrick Syder
- ▶ Specialist Syrian guide for the duration of the tour
- ▶ All transportation – private a/c coach
- ▶ Full sightseeing programme including entrance fees
- ▶ Four star grade hotels on a half board dinner and breakfast basis plus Damascus and Aleppo dinners at good quality restaurants
- ▶ Syrian visa fees
- ▶ All airport transfers
- ▶ Porter, hotel and restaurant staff gratuities

Not included – travel insurance, departure taxes, lunches, drinks, guide and driver gratuities, Syrian Arab Air international return flight (cost from £350.00 with Polani Travel, ATOL 5311)

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