



Syria and Lebanon - History and Culture

TRIP DESCRIPTION

If you can read these lines, this means not only that you are on the website of Penguin Travel, but that you have set off to this journey across Syria and Lebanon long time ago! How?! In a very exceptional way – the Phoenicians inhabited these ancient lands, have made the first alphabet, which gave origin to the Greek and Latin alphabets, and even to the Cyrillic. That's why, as amazing it may sound to you, your relation to Levant, part of which are both countries, is much closer than determined by the geographical distance! There is hardly any other place on earth, illustrating in such a clear way the whole human history – from the first Neolithic towns, through Bible times and Antiquity, past early Christianity, Islam and the Crusades, till present. And each people, having passed through these lands, have sowed its fertile seed in this incubator of human culture. Many civilizations, one after another, have left their unique imprints on the face of this territory – the ruins of Palmyra, Bosra and Baalbek, Crack des Chevaliers Fortress and Saladin Fortress, Omayyad Mosque, the footsteps of Paul the Apostle and the witnesses of millennia Maaloula and Byblos are the stones along the long way of humanity.

HIGHLIGHTS:

Damascus-Syria's capital with ab. 1,5 million inhabitants, is mentioned in the

Egyptian annals in the middle of the 2nd millennium BC. The old town is under UNESCO's protection.

Palmyra- the city is under UNESCO's protection and it was one of the richest towns in the Orient as it was located along the way of the caravans transporting goods between Persia and Mediterranean harbors. The numerous ruins of temples, palaces and theaters is one of the business cards of Syria's rich historical past.

Aleppo-Syria's largest city. It was populated from prehistoric times and witnesses of its long history are its fortress, mosques, covered bazaar and many churches in the Armenian and Christian neighborhoods. The old town is under UNESCO's protection.

Maaloula-beside that there is a monastery from 3rd c. the fame of this small village is owed to the incredible fact that the population here speaks Aramaic – the language of Jesus!

Baalbek-known also as Heliopolis, Sun's city, was an important town in the Roman Empire. Here there were built some of the largest temples of the Ancient times. It is under UNESCO's protection.

Beirut-Lebanon's capital is a mix of cultures, who have participated in its establishment – Greek, Roman, Arab.

Byblos-the Greek name of the Phoenician city Gebal, one of the oldest still populated cities in the world – it was founded about 7 thousand years ago. And this city is not only mentioned in the

Bible but it gives the

name to the Bible! With its ancient temples, churches and the fortress Byblos is the most important tourist sight in Lebanon, under UNESCO's protection.

ITINERARY:

Day 1: Departure

Departure from your home country to Damascus.

Day 2: Arrival at the airport in Damascus, Syria. Early check in at the hotel. After short rest - breakfast. Sightseeing in Damascus – National Museum, Hamidiyah Bazaar, Omayyad Mosque – one of the largest and oldest mosques in the world, where it is believed that John the Baptist's head is kept. Saladin Tomb lies also in the mosque. We will also see the Spice Market, St. Ananias Church, St. Paul's window, panoramic view from the Qassioun Mountain. Dinner and overnight in Damascus.

Day 3: Breakfast. Transfer to Palmyra. Sightseeing in Palmyra – Bell Temple, Valley of the tombs, Arch of triumph, Colonnade, Bath of Queen Zenobia, Theatre, Agora. Dinner and overnight in Palmyra.

Day 4: Breakfast. On the way to Aleppo visit of the Hama Water Wheels. Visit of Apamea. Dinner and overnight in Aleppo

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Day 5: Breakfast. In the morning tour to St. Simeon Monastery – named after the first hermit, who spent his life on a column. In the afternoon sightseeing in Aleppo – Citadel, Grand Mosque, Covered Bazaar, churches of the Christian and Armenian quarters. Dinner and overnight in Aleppo.

Day 6: Breakfast. Free time in Aleppo in the morning. On the way to Lattakia visit of Saladin Fortress. Dinner and overnight in Lattakia.

Day 7: Breakfast. On the way to Damascus visit of Crack des Chevaliers – one of the most important historic fortresses and one of the best preserved. It played a significant part in the defense system of the crusaders and had withstood numerous sieges and attacks. It is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. We continue to Maaloula. Dinner and overnight in Damascus.

Day 8: Breakfast. In the morning tour to Bosra. Bosra is another archaeological object under the protection of UNESCO. The place was inhabited already in 2nd millennium B.C. It reached its climax during the Roman times and played an important role in prophet Mohamed's life. In the afternoon free time for walking and shopping in Damascus. Dinner and overnight in Damascus.

Day 9: Breakfast. Departure from Damascus to Lebanon. After we cross the border we will visit Baalbek (the Temples of Bacchus and Jupiter) and Ksara wine caves. Overnight in Beirut.

Day 10: Breakfast. Visit of Byblos and the oldest harbor in the world. On the way back to Beirut we will stop for a visit of Jeita Grotto - the 9-km long cave is a finalist in the New 7 Wonders of Nature competition. Panoramic tour in Beirut with photo stop at Pigeon Rocks. Overnight in Beirut.

Day 11: Breakfast and transfer to the airport.

FOOD AND ACCOMMODATION:

Accommodation is in 3 and 4-star hotels with breakfast, dinners in Syria. Drinks are ordered and paid for on spot. Please note: the categorization of the hotels in many Arab countries is rather different than that we are used to in Europe. Besides it happens often that the local tourist agencies or internet websites advertise same hotels with different categorization. In this tour we use hotels, whose categorization is in the way it is

specified by our partner.

GUIDES:

There is a Penguin tour leader and an English speaking local guide.

TIPS:

It is a normal practice tips to be given to the local guide and driver and the hotel staff, which are not included in the price. The tips amount to about 4 USD per day per person.

TOUR DIFFICULTY:

This is a roundtrip in a minibus. You should be in normal health and be able to spend hours in a bus. During the city tours you might have to walk for a few hours.

BEST PERIOD AND TEMPERATURES:

Spring and autumn are considered the best period for travelling to both countries in order to avoid the summer heats. The average temperatures in October during the day are about 24-27°C, up to 30°C in Beirut.

CLOTHING:

Male and female visitors can wear whatever they normally wear in their home countries, unless it is extra short or over-revealing. Contrary to what many Westerners believe, it is very possible for women to wear T-shirts. When entering places of worship, you have to be modestly dressed, that would mean long trousers and avoiding tank tops or anything see through. Women may also be required to cover their hair at some mosques.

PRACTICAL INFORMATION:

Please, note that some minor changes in the program are possible. Mineral water can be bought along the way. Generally you can drink water from the tap in Syria. Cell phone coverage is good in the cities, but not so good in the desert. Electricity: Syria 220 V, Lebanon 110 and 200 V; the contacts are the same as in most European countries. Bring with you sunscreen lotion, lip balm, first aid kit with at least aspirin and imodium (or another medicine for problems with the stomach), copy of all your important documents. Avoid discussing politics with the local population. In Syria it is against the law to insult the President and his family. Avoid also places where a lot of people are gathered.

VISA:

Please be sure that you don't have an Israeli stamp or visa in your passport. All western citizens must hold a valid

passport and visa to both countries. We get both visas upon arrival provided you send us a good scanned copy in advance – at Damascus Airport, and when crossing the border between Syria and Lebanon. Syrian visa is included in the prices provided you arrive at the same time as the main group and if you are entitled to a visa at the border. Lebanese tourist visa is free of charge (subject to change). In Syria you have to pay a tax when leaving the country, which is about 12 USD (per November 2010)

CURRENCY:

We recommend that you check the actual exchange rate before departure on www.xe.com. The Lebanese currency is called pound or lira (LBP). The Syrian currency is also called pound or lira (SYP). USD is widely accepted - some fees have to be paid in USD, and you can do some shopping as well. Credit cards can be used in some large cities, where you can also find ATMs. Beware that Syria is under sanctions imposed by USA, and you can have some difficulties using some credit cards.

1 EUR = ca. 60 SYP; 1 800 LBP

1 USD = ca. 45 SYP; 1 500 LBP

Some approximate prices:

Syria: shawarma – 35-50 SYP; lunch at a fair restaurant – 450-500 SYP; 1,5 l water – 15-25 SYP; beer – 35-50 SYP; local wine – 150-250 SYP

Lebanon: lunch at a restaurant – 18000-23000 LBP; shawarma – 8-10000 LBP

TIME ZONE:

Winter: GMT + 3 hours

Summer: GMT + 2 hours

YOU CAN READ MORE HERE:

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Syria>

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lebanon>

Lonely Planet – Syria & Lebanon

FACTS ABOUT SYRIA:

Area: 185 800 km²

Population: ab. 19, 5 million people

Capital: Damascus

Language: Arab

Religion: Muslims

State Government: Presidential Republic

FACTS ABOUT LEBANON:

Area: 10 452 km²

Population: ab. 4, 4 million people

Capital: Beirut

Language: Arab

Religion: Muslims, Christians

State Government: Republic

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