

# SYRIA - UNIQUE AND ANCIENT



of this Muslim country.

Syria is a very charming country with welcoming people, striking culture and long history. Unfortunately, ever since 9/11, most tourists chose to visit other destinations, as the potentiality of a terrorist threat is supposedly quite high here. Nevertheless, history enthusiasts who come here claim to never feel endangered and tourists who visit Damascus, Syria's tourist gem, speak very highly

Its history is very puzzling. Initially, the state was settled in 2100 BC by the Amorites. However, as the years passed, Syria passed to the hands of Hittites, Assyrians, Persians, Greeks, Romans...and many others. Even though frequent invasions were very painful for the country and its folk, the cultural treasures left behind amaze present-day tourists. The Romans built spectacular amphitheatres and great temples; majestic castles were - on the other hand - the domain of the crusaders who rummaged Syria for a very long time as well. Thus, visiting this country may feel like walking through the past, almost to the beginning of our civilization.

Damascus is a great start. This city is the oldest continuously inhabited area in the world. Its major attraction is the Umayyad mosque. Many locals claim that those who cannot make it to Mekka come here instead - so powerful and important is this mosque. Originally, the Arameans founded a temple here, dedicated to Hadad, their god of thunder - more than 3000 years ago. Later, Romans built a temple for Jupiter on the same sacred spot. Eventually, Muslims chose this place to build a grand mosque and devoted ten years to its creation. It is a true spectacle well worth visiting.

Once in Syria, each tourist is obliged to visit any of the local "souks", or markets. The tourists ought to breathe in the charming atmosphere and try not to get lost in the mess and noise of its crooked paths. The most famous of Syria's souks is in Aleppo, near Damascus.

A must-see spot nearby is Palmyra, with its famous Roman ruins, or Bosra with one of the finest Roman amphitheatres. A very interesting spot is Krak des Chevaliers, a fortress-like crusader castle which is 800 years old. There are many places to visit in Syria and since the tourists linger to come here, those who dare visit it enjoy the atmosphere undisturbed.

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