



SYRIA

CASTLES, CARAVANS, AND ANCIENT CITIES

October 08 - October 17, 2024
Led by Tour Guide and Lecturer Ghiath Abdallah

Above the layers of antiquity lies a land of mesmerizing beauty and contrasts. Syria is a county of fertile plains, high mountains, and deserts. It is also home to diverse ethnic and religious groups, including Syrian Arabs, Jews, Greeks, Armenians, Assyrians, Kurds, Circassians, Mandeans, and Turks. Begin your tour in Lebanon, a country well-deserving the title of "Switzerland of the East," then cross into Syria to Damascus, one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world. Leaving Damascus, you'll head east site of Palmyra, an oasis in the Syrian Desert, containing the monumental ruins of a great city that was one of the most important cultural centers of the ancient world. Continue north to Syria's second-largest city, Aleppo. Complete your circular route with stops in Hama and Ma'aloula as you return to Damascus. Experience the warmth of the people, the tastes of the cuisine, the aromas of the souks, and the majesty of the past, and explore some of the best-preserved Roman cities in the Near East as well as Byzantine gems and Islamic jewels!

Ihab Zaki
Managing Director

Tuesday, October 08

Arrive in Beirut (LEBANON)



Upon arrival in Beirut, the capital of Lebanon, and considered one of the oldest cities in the world with a history dating back over 5,000 years. After passing through customs at the airport, meet and transfer to *Rouche Arjann by Rotana* or similar for check-in and overnight.

Wednesday, October 09

Beirut - Damascus (SYRIA)



Begin the day with a drive to the **Lebanese Syrian borders**; after the formalities, continue the drive to Damascus, and walk through the famous **Souk al Hamidieh** of Damascus, built during the Ottoman days on the Documanus Maximus. Start the day by visiting the **Umayyad Mosque**, also known as the Great Mosque of Damascus, in the heart of the old city. The mosque was built on the location of Temple Haddad during the Aramaic era, which Jupiter replaced in the Roman days, and converted into a church in the Christian dynasty. Head to visit the **Saladin tomb**, and in the afternoon, walk along "**the Straight Street**," the famous street mentioned in the bible. Have dinner at a traditional Damascene house in the old city and then transfer to *Beit Zamman Hotel* or similar for check-in and overnight. **(B,L,D)**

Thursday, October 10

Damascus



Begin the day by visiting **St. Paul's window**, which is believed to be where St. Paul lowered in a basket and escaped the city. Continue to visit the **National Museum** to learn about the history of Syria and see its fantastic collection of artifacts. Then head to **Tekkiah Sulyamanieh**, built during the time of Suliman the Magnificent. Continue to visit **Azem Palace**, built by the governor of Damascus in the 18th century. It has all the characteristics that elaborate the style of the Damascene houses. In the afternoon, walk through **Qaimayrieh**

Street and continue the walk along "the Straight Street," the famous street mentioned in the bible. Later, we visit **Anania's house**. Ananias was the disciple who heeled St. Paul when he came to Damascus. Enjoy dinner at a traditional Damascene house in the city and then head back to the *Hotel* for overnight. **(B,L,D)**

Friday, October 11

Damascus - Palmyra - Homs - Hama



Begin the day with a long drive to the **Syrian Steppe** and visit the ruins of one of the most famous cities in the Middle East, **Palmyra**. In ancient times, it was the home of Queen Zenobia. At the end of the 3rd century AD, she defied the Romans and was consequently destroyed by them. One of Syria's most magnificent ancient sites, Palmyra spreads over many acres and has an abundance of entire edifices from the 2nd century AD. In the late afternoon, Continue the drive to Hama and, upon arrival, transfer to *Apamea Cham Palace Hotel* or similar for check-in, dinner, and overnight. **(B,L,D)**

Saturday, October 12

Hama - Aleppo



Begin the day by visiting the vast iconic **Waterwheels** (called **Norias**) used in medieval times to water the city's gardens. The largest of them measures close to 70 feet in diameter. Continue the drive to **Aleppo**, one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world. Spend the afternoon walking through the **Old City** along its narrow alleyways and past its large mansions and ancient caravanserais. In the afternoon, visit the **souks** of Aleppo, parts of which have been demolished in the war, but some sections are still the same as it was in the past - lively and crowded and very colorful. Enjoy dinner at a traditional Aleppo restaurant and then transfer to *Arman Hotel* or similar for check-in and overnight. **(B,L,D)**

Sunday, October 13

Aleppo



Spend the day exploring Aleppo, the second largest city in Syria, beginning with a visit to the newly renovated

Archaeological Museum to learn more about Syria's archeology. Explore the 13th-century **Citadel of Aleppo**, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, considered one of the world's oldest and largest medieval castles. Also, walk through the **Armenian Quarter**, known for its narrow alleyways, finely decorated churches, and mansions. Enjoy dinner at a traditional Aleppo restaurant, then return to the *Hotel* for overnight. **(B,L,D)**

Monday, October 14

Aleppo - Krak Des Chevaliers - Christian Valley 

Begin the day with a visit to one of the most spectacular crusader castles in the world, **Krak des Chevaliers**, built during the First Crusade in a strategically important spot in Syria's Al Ansariyah Mountains. In the afternoon, continue the drive towards the **Christian Valley**, stopping in Homs to visit **Saint George Monastery**, built over the remains of a 6th-century AD structure considered the original monastery. The monastery was built with Byzantine stone and contained images depicting scenes of the life of the famous St. George and other ancient artifacts such as books and crosses. Dinner will be at a typical restaurant in the Christian Valley, then transfer to *Al Wadi Hotel* or similar for check-in and overnight. **(B,L,D)**

Tuesday, October 15

Christian Valley - Ma'aloula - Damascus 

After breakfast, drive back to Damascus via **Ma'aloula**, a small village built into the rugged mountainside at an altitude of more than 4,500 feet. It is known as one of three remaining villages where the ancient Aramaic language is still spoken. Ma'aloula has two Christian sites dating back to the early days of Christianity - Saint Takla Shrine and Saints Sergius and Bacchus Monastery. **St. Takla** is a beautiful convent built into the side of a mountain. **Saints Sergius (St. Sarkis) and Bacchus** is one of the oldest monasteries in Syria that still retains its historic character. Upon arrival in Damascus, transfer to *Beit Zamman Hotel* or similar for check-in, then head out and enjoy a farewell dinner at one of the prominent restaurants in the city, then return to the *Hotel* for overnight. **(B,L,D)**

Wednesday, October 16

Damascus - Beirut (LEBANON) 

Enjoy a free morning at leisure, and then after lunch, drive back to Beirut and transfer to *Rouche Arjann by Rotana Hotel* or similar for check-in, dinner, and overnight. **(B,L,D)**

Thursday, October 17

Beirut - USA 

Transfer to the airport for your flight back to the US. **(B)**

"We reserve the right to change the order of activities/visits or sites due to unexpected events such as flight cancellations or changes of schedule, or any other reasons beyond our control. We will do our best to ensure that any necessary changes when/if needed to meet the needs of our clients".

Special Trip Remarks:

An Israeli visa or stamp or stamps from self-ruled territories, used or unused / valid or invalid, or stamps of neighboring countries to Israel from which you may have passed to Israel (via Jordan or Egypt) will lead to an immediate entry refusal at all Syrian/Lebanese ports of entry, even if the traveler is carrying a valid entry visa.

Rates are subject to change without any prior notice due to any sudden increase in fuel, government taxes, hotels rates, or entrance fees. We have the full right to exercise any caution in visiting particular sites in Syria and if security concerns dictate that we alter the program and delete or substitute sites, we will do so.

Currently, the situation in Syria is calm and safe but if things flair up for any reason and we need to alter the itinerary, you will be notified of the pertinent adjustments to the program.



Tour Cost (Land Only): \$4,995.00

Per person sharing in double occupancy

Single Supplement: \$650.00

Price based on group size minimum of 6 participants and maximum of 14 participants

Trip Grade: II Lodging Level: ****

archeology, and culture earned him the title of a certified licensed guide. Ghiath moved to the United States and settled in New York. There, he earned an MBA. He is fluent in English and Arabic, and taught Arabic in a private college. His professionalism, charm, compassion, and kindness have never failed to deeply touch the hearts of our clients who are always very vocal in their praise for him!

About your tour Guide...Ghiath Abdallah, he has been our guide, lecturer, and tour manager at Spiekermann Travel since 1994. He has guided most of our groups, as well as many of our esteemed individual guests. He is passionate about the history, culture, and food of the Middle East. He is a native of Damascus where his family still lives in the Christian Quarter of the Old City. He earned his degree in American and English Literature from the University of Damascus and his additional study of the history,



Tour Includes:

- Airport /Hotel/Airport Transfers.
- Hotel accommodation as per the itinerary based on combination of boutique properties and 4* hotels (best available in each small city.)
- Meals as mentioned in the itinerary (B: Breakfast, L: Lunch, D: Dinner) - lunches at local restaurants & dinners at Damascene houses & restaurants.
- Qualified English-speaking guides.
- Entrance fees to all museums, citadels, and archeological sites as per the itinerary.
- Water with lunches and dinners.
- A cocktail at one of the Damascene houses that host a gallery of the famous Syrian artists and sculptor.
- Visa approval for Syria - apply 45 days before departure.
- Departure tax.

Tour does not include:

- International air USA/Beirut/USA.
- Lebanon visa - free at present time on arrival for US citizens.
- Syrian visa (currently \$160.00 to be paid in CASH at the border - subject to change).
Your passport must NOT include any Israeli stamps.
- Beverages or any alcoholic drinks with or without meals.
- Transfers if not arriving/departing on tour dates or needing extra days.
- Tips & gratuities to drivers, guides, restaurant staff, etc.,
- Items of personal nature (camera fees at sites, laundry, phone calls, emails, excess luggage, etc.).
- Dayroom/overnights necessitated by changes in airline schedules or early arrival.
- Trip surcharge to operate below required minimum participants.
- Travel protection insurance (HIGHLY RECOMMENDED).

Trip Grade

II Active - Some hikes over gravel or on sandy sites and few walks at/or to sites on uneven terrain, few elevations, several winding mountain drives, and comfortable, but busy schedule of touring days.

Lodging Level:

****** Superior** - 4-star hotels with western style service and comfort level acceptable to western standards.

