



AUDLEY

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AN INTRODUCTION TO OUR SYRIAN CIVILISATIONS TOUR

Syria is a country slowly regaining its place as a major destination in the Middle East. Few countries can lay claim to a history as long and varied; and crucially for our purposes, one that has left such fantastic monuments and ruins for us to discover. As well as the renowned highlights, we've included places on the path less trodden, which might be missed on a shorter trip. So the must-sees are all covered here: ancient Damascus and Aleppo with their mosques, citadels and souqs, stunning Palmyra and legendary Crac Des Chevaliers. But we also venture to the Hellenistic fortresses and Arab castles of the Euphrates. We go out of our way to sights like Qalaat Marqab, a seldom visited castle that almost matches its neighbour, Crac Des Chevaliers. There are visits to isolated monasteries and the mysterious Byzantine Dead Cities.

This is a trip for those with a deep interest in the history and culture of the region. To see some of the more remote places we're staying in one or two towns that don't feature on most itineraries. The hotels are perfectly serviceable but not as polished as our usual standard: we feel it is definitely worth this compromise on quality in order to take advantage of the sights that become accessible. This tour does require a reasonable level of fitness. Many excursions are done on foot, the terrain can be uneven, and there are some steep paths to negotiate.

Syria never disappoints and can lay claim to being one of the most hospitable countries in the region. Lebanon meanwhile has even more recently recovered its status as one of the Middle East's most rewarding tourist destinations, after disruption during the conflict with Israel in 2006.

The city is again thriving, with a thrilling juxtaposition of vibrant modern shops, bars and hotels against a wealth of ancient and recent history. Nearby is Baalbek, one of the most inspiring and best preserved Roman sites in the region. Leptis Magna, El Jem, Bosra and Palmyra: Baalbek more than holds its own against any of them.



Climate

Spring is one of the best times of the year to visit Syria & Lebanon. Temperatures will generally be in the mid-to-late twenties Celsius and it's unlikely you'll see rain more than once or twice during your trip. A range of mountains runs north-south through Syria, while there are two scenic ranges in central and northern Lebanon. To the west is a fairly narrow strip of land where the climate is moderated by the Mediterranean, so it is never quite as cold, or as hot, as the land in eastern Syria, where a predominantly desert climate is to be found.

Our Syria Team

Harry Ring and Donna Piccini will be coordinating this tour, having recently returned from comprehensive visits to Syria & Lebanon, covering all the sights included in this itinerary.

Harry grew up in Oman, where his father helped to set up the veterinary services in the emerging Sultanate. He read Arabic and Spanish at Edinburgh University, before working for a time as an interpreter in Iraq. Six months studying in Egypt and recent research trips to Syria and Jordan have enhanced a comprehensive knowledge of the area.

Donna is an ex-tour leader who has spent a considerable amount of time in the Middle East. Her knowledge of what to see is encyclopaedic and she is able to give an honest assessment of the region's attractions. Highlights of recent travels include exploring the desert scenery of the Jebel Akakus in Libya, the Western desert circuit in Egypt, and two weeks exploring in Syria and Lebanon.



DAY BY DAY SUMMARY OF TRAVEL ARRANGEMENTS

DAY	DATE	ITINERARY IN BRIEF	ACCOMMODATION ARRANGEMENTS
1	Friday 01 October 2010	After your flight from London Heathrow to Damascus, you'll be met by our local agents and transferred to your hotel.	Dedeman Damascus Standard Room Breakfast is included
2	Saturday 02 October 2010	Your drive from Damascus to Palmyra first heads north into the hills to visit the Aramaic village of Ma'alula and the remote monastery of Deir Mar Musa, before heading east to Palmyra.	Zenobia Cham Palace, Palmyra Standard Breakfast is included
3	Sunday 03 October 2010	Today is a major highlight, with a full day tour of the ruins of Palmyra.	Zenobia Cham Palace, Palmyra Standard Breakfast is included
4	Monday 04 October 2010	Continuing on from Palmyra, you stop at the Roman site of Resafe and the castle at Qalaat Ja' aber. Arriving in Aleppo, your hotel will be your base for the next three nights.	Dar Zamaria Martini, Aleppo Standard Breakfast is included
5	Tuesday 05 October 2010	West of Aleppo, you visit the Basilica of St Simeon and the Dead City of Serjilla today.	Dar Zamaria Martini, Aleppo Standard Breakfast is included
6	Wednesday 06 October 2010	Your tour of Aleppo today will include the impressive Arab citadel, the Grand (or Umayyad) Mosque, the Aleppo museum and the covered souqs.	Dar Zamaria Martini, Aleppo Standard Breakfast is included
7	Thursday 07 October 2010	You head for the coastal town of Lattakia today, stopping en route at Qalaat Saladin, a crusader castle. Outside Lattakia you also visit the Phoenician ruins of Ugarit.	Afamia Rotana, Lattakia Standard Breakfast is included
8	Friday 08 October 2010	On the way to Hama this morning you'll pay a visit to the crusader castle of Qalaat Marqab and the Roman complex of Apamea. In Hama you can view the famous water wheels before retiring to your hotel for the night.	Orient House, Hama Standard Breakfast and dinner are included
9	Saturday 09 October 2010	Your drive south to Damascus takes in two final crusader castles, the white tower of Safita and the sheer walls of Crac Des Chevaliers, one of the real highlights of the trip. Back in Damascus you'll have four nights to discover the city.	Talisman II, Damascus Standard Breakfast and dinner are included
10	Sunday 10 October 2010	On foot you'll visit the Old City of Damascus today, covering the Umayyad Mosque, Straight Street, the Azem Palace, The Chapel of St Ananias and the souqs.	Talisman II, Damascus Standard Breakfast and dinner are included

DAY	DATE	ITINERARY IN BRIEF	ACCOMMODATION ARRANGEMENTS
11	Monday 11 October 2010	Your second foray into Damascus will include time spent at The National Museum and the Takkiyeh al-Suleiman complex and mosque.	Talisman II, Damascus Standard Breakfast and dinner are included
12	Tuesday 12 October 2010	Heading south from Damascus you visit Bosra today. Home to a fantastic amphitheatre in black basalt, there is also the extensive remains of the surrounding Roman city to explore as well.	Talisman II, Damascus Standard Breakfast and dinner are included
13	Wednesday 13 October 2010	After crossing the border into Lebanon you'll stop at the fantastic Roman site of Baalbek, one of the most extensive and best preserved in the Middle East. Next it's on to Beirut, where you'll spend two nights to finish off your tour.	Crowne Plaza, Beirut Standard Breakfast is included
14	Thursday 14 October 2010	A fascinating tour of Beirut today, with shopping, great food and intriguing history all part of the Lebanese experience.	Crowne Plaza, Beirut Standard Breakfast is included
15	Friday 15 October 2010	You will be transferred to the airport today for your flight back to London Heathrow.	



Baalbek, Lebanon



Basilica of St Simeon, Syria

TOUR PRICE

Arrangements as specified per person	£3,195
Single supplement	£795
Per person deposit required to confirm these arrangements	£480

AUDLEY PRICE POLICY

We are confident that we offer excellent value for money and constantly monitor our prices to make sure we remain competitive. We may not be the cheapest but our specialist knowledge and close working relationships with our experienced partners overseas ensures we provide a high level of service without charging an exorbitant price. If another tour operator quotes what appears to be a lower price then we are happy to review our price with you, however in our experience when we examine alternative quotations we invariably find differences in the arrangements. These may be subtle or more fundamental but the impact these can have on your enjoyment is considerable. If you are able to provide a copy of the other proposal (with the name of the tour operator omitted if you prefer) we will compare the arrangements and forward a detailed reply to you.

NOT INCLUDED IN THE PRICE

- Meals are not normally included unless otherwise stated within your Itinerary
- Local airport departure taxes - payable locally on each departure.
- Optional excess reduction on car hire, where applicable.
- Locally payable car hire related charges. Please see detailed itinerary for more information.
- Items of a personal nature such as laundry, drinks, etc.
- Tips for your guide and driver (discretionary).
- Any camera or video fees at any sites.
- Entrance fees and other costs when on 'free time'
- Future Fuel Surcharges.
- Travel Insurance

TOUR HEALTH & FITNESS REQUIREMENTS

To ensure that all participants get the most out of the tour, it is important that you are fully aware of the level of activity and fitness and medical health required to successfully complete this itinerary. Please read this dossier carefully prior to confirming your place on the tour, and having established the facts, it is your responsibility to contact us with any concerns regarding individual levels of fitness, health or ability. Please be aware that our tour leaders have the right to exclude customers from the tour if they feel they are not sufficiently fit, healthy or able to complete the tour without affecting its safety, comfort or smooth progress. If you would like to discuss any of these issues further please call Harry on 01993 838 428 to discuss in more detail.

ACTIVITY LEVEL – MEDIUM:

The tour involves a lot of walking around the cities and archaeological sites, often over uneven or broken ground; there are some long journeys, with short stretches of unmade road; some of the accommodation outside Damascus is of a more basic nature.

HOW TO BOOK

If you are happy with the arrangements outlined within this itinerary and would like to book, please forward your completed booking form and the deposit specified above. If you would like to revise the itinerary, feel free to contact me and I can prepare another version which will hopefully match your requirements. The deposit is either £200 or 15% of the total cost, whichever is the greater, plus any applicable insurance premium and can be paid by cheque, bank transfer or credit / debit card.

PAYMENT BY CREDIT CARD

Please note, we do not charge a credit card fee on deposits, however, a credit card fee is charged on the balance of the price of your current trip or if full payment is made. Credit card fees are detailed within the enclosed information booklet. Please note we charge a credit card fee due to the high fees charged to tour operators by the credit card companies. We have chosen to make this transparent rather than including it within the trip price. You may therefore wish to pay the balance by bank transfer, debit card or personal cheque.



Crac des Chevaliers, Syria

Departure Tax

Most of the time, departure tax is included in your flight ticket but in some countries this is not possible and you will need to put aside some money for this requirement. We have indicated below, current amounts although these can change at any time.

Country	Departure Tax
Syria	SYP 1500.00 equivalent to approx £20 per person plus a new departure tax at the borders which is SYP 500.00 equivalent to approx £7 per person. These border and airport taxes are subject to change without prior notice.

Visas

British passport holders can obtain a free tourist visa on arrival in Syria. Passport details have to be sent ahead of your arrival, and you need to have the original form we fax over to Syria in your possession - this will be sent out with your final documentation.

Visas will be denied to holders of a passport with an Israeli stamp of any border with Israel (i.e. Taba stamp).

Press clients holding journalist passports, or anyone who has a profession in their passport whatsoever related to the information business should obtain a visa directly through the Syrian Embassy abroad.

The immigration at airports and borders are now asking for copy of a passenger's passport, so please make sure that you take a copy to hand over to our representative upon arrival.

WHY TRAVEL WITH US?

PERSONAL SERVICE

We are committed to offering you a very personal service, with all your arrangements being handled by one country specialist. They will remain your one point of contact and will take responsibility for the smooth operation of your trip. In turn, they are supported by an experienced, professional administration and management team.

REPUTATION & QUALITY

Well over 80% of our clients have travelled with us in the past or have had Audley recommended to them. Repeat business and recommendations are an essential part of our business. When booking with us you are assured of quality arrangements if only for the fact that our excellent reputation is something we simply cannot afford to put at stake.

COMPREHENSIVE SERVICE

In the vast majority of cases we handle our clients' arrangements from start to finish. Your visas will be processed well in advance of travel and air tickets are typically issued 2-3 weeks before travel. We are used to dealing with problems from minor flight time alterations to more fundamental changes. When problems occur we will rapidly rearrange your itinerary to make best use of your time given the changed circumstances, not simply cancel part of your trip or leave you sitting in an airport waiting for hours for a rescheduled flight. Importantly, in these situations we will do everything possible to minimise any additional costs involved – in the vast majority of cases no extra charges will be made.

QUALITY LOCAL REPRESENTATION & SUPPORT

We take a good deal of care when choosing our local agents, taking into account their quality of service and vehicles. We have built up many longstanding relationships with these agents, ensuring that they deliver the level of service demanded by Audley clients. Our local guides and drivers where appropriate, are the people you will meet. In many cases we know them personally, in all cases we ensure that they are of the highest calibre. They are there to do much more than show you specific sights and provide factual information. They will be able to tell you about local life, culture, cuisines and customs; and, where applicable, act as translator. In certain parts of the world a specialist guide is more appropriate, for example, a wildlife expert.

EXPERIENCE & ACCURACY

From the moment you contact us, we are here to answer any questions about the specific arrangements or more general queries you may have about the region. We have spent many years leading group tours, researching new trips and travelling privately. The benefit of this experience is yours throughout. When we do not know the answer to a question we will endeavour to find out and get back to you as soon as possible.

HONESTY

The travel industry generally has a bad reputation when it comes to the provision of accurate and clear advice. Our specialisation and extensive on the ground experience means that advice given to you over the telephone and in our pre-departure literature is as up-to-date, accurate and relevant as it can be.

DETAILED ITINERARIES

We work hard to prevent problems occurring in destinations that may be very difficult to deal with and make a point of highlighting any irritations you could experience en-route such as flight delays. Our itineraries are designed to be comprehensive and clear whilst the level of detail within this itinerary is intended to allow you to make an informed choice about the journey and to have a clear understanding of what is and is not included in the price.

MISHAPS EN-ROUTE

If a problem does occur while you are travelling you can contact us on our 24 hour number. We will do everything in our power to rectify the problem immediately rather than allow it to spoil your trip.

LEGAL LIABILITY

We are a UK company and hence must fully comply with UK law. When booking with us you can rest assured that your arrangements are carefully planned as we have a reputation to maintain and are legally liable for any omissions or negligent acts.

RESPONSIBLE TOURISM

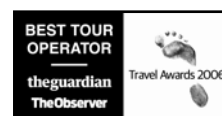
As an extension of the passion we have for the countries we specialise in, we have a firm commitment to the principles of Responsible Tourism. We have been awarded AITO Responsible Tourism 3 star status (the highest achievable) and continue to work with AITO and a wide variety of other bodies to improve our policy. We try to include a wide range of RT initiatives in our itineraries, from homestays and craft shops to locally owned hotels and eco-lodges, to ensure the sustainability of tourism in the destinations we operate in. For more details, please refer to our website, where you will find details of our RT policy and also our Travellers' Code. If you are particularly interested in these issues and wish to incorporate them into your itinerary, please do not hesitate to contact your country specialist: sarah.whatman@audleytravel.com



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RECOGNITION

Audley were named Best Tour Operator by readers of the Guardian and Observer in their 2006 Travel Awards, and readers of Wanderlust magazine have ranked us in their Top 10 Tour Operators for the last three years. We hold AITO's highest Three Stars rating in recognition of our responsible tourism policies and are listed among the Sunday Times 100 Best Small Companies To Work For.



YOUR ITINERARY IN DETAIL



Bara, near Serjilla

**Friday, 01
October 2010**

Syria Introduction

Syria has an ancient history and rich cultural heritage thanks to its location at the heart of the Middle East, and at the crossroads of Asia, Africa and Europe. This geographical location lent distinction to the country as a trade and caravan route and also as a melting pot of ideas, beliefs and talents. Syria was among the very early centres of civilisation and by 3000BC, Mari on the Euphrates and Palmyra were already powerful trading cities on the Silk Route, whilst in the 7th Century AD Damascus was the centre of the Arab Empire under the Umayyad Dynasty. For many years Syria has been one of the least visited Middle Eastern countries, but as it comes out from the cold, more and more people are now discovering the wonderful Crusader castles, Roman ruins, traditional towns and amazing people, who are among the friendliest and most hospitable in the Middle East.

The immigration at airports and borders are now asking for copy of a passenger's passport, so please make sure that you take a copy to hand over to our representative upon arrival, complete with the visa form that we have sent you over. Your guide will be holding a photocopied version of this, and it will be essential for creating your visa.

You may well notice when travelling through Syria that one of the less charming aspects of this wonderful country is the attitude towards litter, which can be seen across the country. While we cannot change this ourselves, our agents, Syriana, have policies in place to ensure that their drivers and guides make no further contribution to this and adopt a responsible attitude towards any litter created during the course of your travels around the country. If you see any area in which they can make further improvements then do let them know, and mention it to us upon your return.

Damascus Introduction

Claimed by many to be the oldest continuously inhabited city in the world, Damascus was the site of an urban settlement as long ago as 5000BC. Later as a Persian capital, it fell to Alexander the Great, became a Greek centre and then a major Roman city. In 635AD, Damascus fell to the Muslims and rose to primacy in the rapidly expanding Muslim Arab Empire. For a century, Damascus was the centre of the youthful Islamic Empire, which came to stretch from the shores of the Atlantic and the Pyrenees in the west, to China in the east. Following the fall of the Umayyads, the first ruling family of Islamic Arabia, Damascus went through a period of neglect and decline but has remained throughout history as a significant and important cultural and political centre in the Arab world. It was sacked by the Mongols in 1200AD and endured centuries of decline under the Ottomans and the Mamlukes before eventually passing to the French mandate and finally achieving its independence.

Today Damascus is a thriving modern capital with a population of six million, and a fascinating city of contrasts. Those who have visited other cities in the Middle East, particularly Cairo, will be relieved to see that the traffic, pollution and general bustle of Damascus are quite light by comparison. Most of the sights for the tourist are located in the old city, which is surrounded by what was initially a Roman wall. The most famous landmarks are the Citadel and the Umayyad Mosque which dominate the heart of the old city, and on almost every corner you will see Koranic schools, Mausoleums, ancient chapels and hammams, whilst open doors offer tantalising glimpses of peaceful courtyards and beautiful gardens. What draws many people back to the old city time and time again are the souqs, a vast network of interlinked quarters, each focusing on a separate trade, such as carpentry, metalworking, textiles and spices. Wandering through the narrow avenues ringing to the sound of manufacture and packed with the finished products being expertly sold to you is an experience not to be missed by any visitor to Damascus, not least because the souqs are genuinely used by local people, with tourists making up the numerical minority much of the time.

For a capital city, Damascus is remarkably compact and like the rest of the country extremely safe, with crime almost non-existent. So if you do have energy in the evenings then a stroll through and around the old city is a fine idea. Indeed, this is often a good way to experience not just the atmosphere of an ancient yet thriving city, but also a chance to sample the genuinely warm hospitality offered by its charming inhabitants.

Damascus is a living museum spanning thousands of years and is one of the most fascinating and exciting cities in the Middle East.



Azem Palace, Damascus

DAMASCUS INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT TO DAMASCUS HOTEL

transfer by private vehicle with driver and guide

You will be met on arrival and transferred to your hotel.

 **Dedeman Damascus, Damascus**
Breakfast is included

**Saturday, 02
October 2010**

DAMASCUS TO PALMYRA VIA MA'ALULA AND DEIR MAR MUSA.

transfer by private vehicle with driver only

The journey from Damascus to Palmyra will take you from the hustle and bustle of Damascus through the Syrian Desert to the incredible and beautiful oasis town of Palmyra, known in Arabic as 'Tadmor' which literally means 'City of Palms'. En-route to Palmyra you will visit Ma'alula and Deir Mar Musa.

Nestled in a harsh landscape, 58km from the Damascene city bustle, Ma'alula is the most enchanting town in Syria, its attractive pastel coloured houses gripping the slopes of a dramatic escarpment rising out of the desert on an epic scale. The combination of the landscape and the pretty houses, as well as the refreshingly cool air make it one of the most relaxing and aesthetically pleasing destinations in Syria. Ma'alula is also well known as being an extraordinary pocket of Christianity, for not only is this small settlement packed with tiny churches, as well as housing a large monastery and convent, but it is also one of the very few places in the world where Aramaic - the language that Jesus used - is still spoken.

In Ma'alula you have the opportunity to visit the Church of St Sergius and the Convent of St Taqla. The Church of St Sergius is accessed via a distinctive low doorway through a small Greek Orthodox monastery. You pass through the courtyard and into the church which contains icons dating back to the thirteenth century. An intimate fourth - century structure, the church is built on the site of a pagan temple. The church's unusual early Christian central and northern altars both have rims around them, reflecting the traditional form of a pagan altar; the rim would have been used to prevent the loss of blood during sacrifice.

Following this, you continue into the town to visit the Convent of St Taqla. The convent building is modern in style, snugly located under a cliff. Stairways inside the convent lead up to a grotto, where sacred water trickles from the ceiling. In this grotto there are several icons and the views over the valley are superb.

The walk to the convent is through a narrow mountain pass, though it should not present any difficulties.

Deir Mar Musa is a Monastery dating back to the 6th Century when Byzantine Christianity was at its height. The location of the Monastery is incredible, set amidst rocky hills and terrain off the beaten track, and only approachable by walking up a great amount of steps or along a rocky path! The Monastery, used today as a guesthouse as well as a place of pilgrimage, is an extremely friendly place with tiny doors and fantastic frescoes, and you cannot fail to be impressed with the beautiful and ancient church which, along with its location, make Deir Mar Musa a truly magnificent place.

The views across the plains from the top of the Monastery are magnificent, though the walk up to the site from the road is quite long and steep, taking a good 15 minutes at least.

Following your visit to Ma'alula and Deir Mar Musa you continue to Palmyra.



View from Deir Mar Musa monastery

Palmyra Introduction

The essence of Palmyra's attraction to those who visit it lies in its sheer improbability. It was hundreds of kilometres from the nearest big town and partitioned by expanses of desert, the oasis town grew to be hugely opulent and prospered in its independence. Although Palmyra was ruled at one stage by the Greeks, by the time of their decline in the first century BC they found themselves between the Roman and Parthian Empires to the west and east. The allegiance struck up with the Romans allowed Palmyra to retain independence, levy taxes, and develop as a strategic trade route from as far as modern-day North Africa and Western Europe on one hand to China and its silk on the other. Palmyra's best-known character is Queen Zenobia, who rose up at the end of the third century to expand and create a Palmyran Empire across most of Syria, before being suppressed by the Roman Emperor Aurelian.

The architecture of Palmyra is quite unique - although Roman engineers were sought to help its construction, it retains its own identity, and is quarried from local stone.

 **Zenobia Cham Palace, Palmyra**
Breakfast is included

**Sunday, 03
October 2010**

FULL-DAY CITY TOUR OF PALMYRA

Private excursion with English speaking guide

Today you have a full day tour of Palmyra. You will have to start early in order to see the Tombs, Temple of Bel and Palmyra Museum. After your tour you have the option of visiting the Arabian Castle of Qala'at Ibn Maan to view the city from the castle on the hill above!

Palmyra impresses any visitor and you can spend hours wandering around the city. Originally Palmyra was a stop off on the caravan route between the Mediterranean, Mesopotamia and Arabia. Palmyra's links to the Silk Route from China and India to Europe also allowed the town to grow and prosper.

Palmyra was mentioned in texts dating back to the 2nd Millennium BC, and through the ages has been occupied by the Assyrians, Persians and Seleucids. During the continuing expansion of the Roman Empire during the 1st and 2nd centuries AD, the Seleucid dynasty weakened and failed, Rome's influence grew and Palmyra became a key city of the Empire. The Palmyrenes continued to have independence and Palmyra was named as a 'free city' in AD 130 by Hadrian, which gave Palmyra the opportunity to set and collect its own taxes. This connection to Rome and yet also it's independence to set and collect its own taxes allowed Palmyra to flourish and enjoy the best of both worlds, and with this the city was expanded with more great buildings and became a Roman colony under the emperor Caracalla in 212.

When internal power began to weaken Rome, Palmyra increased its independence and a local man by the name of Odainat defeated the Sassanian's who were a long time rival of Rome, the defeat led Odainat to name himself 'King' of Palmyra. In 256 the emperor Valerian named Odainat as 'Corrector of the East' and all Roman forces in the region were under his control.

In 267, after 11 years as 'King' of Palmyra, Odainat was assassinated, and his second wife, Zenobia who was suspected of being involved in her husband's murder, took control, Rome were unhappy with this and an army was set on her, however, she defeated it and led her own army to Bosra, the capital of the Province of Arabia at the time, and then continued on to Egypt which she invaded successfully.

With so much power and defeat, Zenobia declared her independence from Rome and had coins made with an image of her son, Vabalathus inscribed on them. Vabalathus went on to become Emperor of Palmyra.

Aurelian, the Roman emperor, defeated Zenobia at Antioch and Emesa in 271 and besieged Palmyra. Zenobia fought to the end, declining all surrender terms that Aurelian suggested, and tried to escape to Persia, but was captured by Roman cavalry and taken back to Rome in 272, and from there Palmyra's glory and era began to decline.

Palmyra is full of history, and walking around the ruins and imagining all of the history occurring really brings the city to life.



Theatre, Palmyra

 **Zenobia Cham Palace, Palmyra**
Breakfast is included

**Monday, 04
October 2010**

PALMYRA TO ALEPPO VIA RESAFE AND QALAAAT JA' ABER

transfer by private vehicle with driver and guide

Your drive today takes you north-east across the desert to the Euphrates Valley. Along the way, your first stop is at the ruins of Resafe.

Resafe is one of the best reasons to venture into the north east of Syria. The site is around thirty minutes from the Euphrates in the desert, and while it was later under control of the Abbasids, it rose to fame as a Roman fortification defending the border from the neighbouring Sasanians. Later it would become known as Sergiopolis after Sergius, an early Roman soldier and martyr whose life was venerated by a charming basilica. This, in conjunction with the Episcopal Church is one of Resafe's jewels; it is very well preserved within the centre of the fortification's walls. Elsewhere, there are some echoing water cisterns, a remarkable work of construction which ensured the well-being of all who stayed here. The visit climaxes at the Northern Gate, where the exterior wall reveals an ornately designed marble façade, featuring intricate decoration and remarkable craftsmanship.

Qalaat Ja'abar originally occupied a strategic knoll overlooking a Euphrates crossing point. The creation of Lake Assad behind the Euphrates Dam bought the water lapping up to its base, leaving the castle atop an island linked to the shore by a narrow causeway. It is a pleasing sight, and the walls are largely intact. In common with many fortifications in the region, it was originally built around a plug of hard rock and the walls make best use of the contours for defence. Built by the Arabs, it was only briefly held by the crusaders, so in contrast to castles like Crac Des Chevaliers, it shows purely Arab design influences.

From Qalaat Ja'abar, you continue your journey to Aleppo.

Aleppo Introduction

Aleppo is Syria's second city with a population of about three million, and since Roman times has been a flourishing trading centre between Asia and the Mediterranean. The city's 2000 year mercantile tradition has given the city a cosmopolitan air, and the city has a large Christian population, mainly comprised of Armenian refugees from Turkey and traders from the ex Soviet Union.

The city is essentially comprised of two parts; the New City, with wide avenues, open parklands and tree lined streets reminiscent of Europe, and Old City famous for its fascinating covered souqs, medieval khans, mosques and imposing citadel.



The Rooftops Of Old Aleppo And The Citadel

 **Dar Zamaria Martini, Aleppo**
Breakfast is included

**Tuesday, 05
October 2010**

FULL DAY VISITING ST SIMEON AND THE DEAD CITIES (SERJILLA)

private excursion with your driver and guide

Today you explore the Dead Cities to the west and south of Aleppo, as well as the Basilica of St Simeon.

The church complex of Qalaat Semaan (St Simeon), which dates from the fifth century is an interesting day trip from Aleppo. The scale of the complex never fails to take visitors aback, and the finesse of the carvings makes this one of the most awesome set of remains in Syria.


St Simeon joined the community of monks in the settlement of Telanissos - the present day village of Derir Semaan - in the early fifth century. Feeling that monastic retreat had not separated him enough from the temptations of everyday life, he took to a cave in the hillside. However pious ascetics were all the rage in the early Christian world, and even in his cave he began to receive a steady stream of visitors. So he resorted to living atop ever higher pillars to escape. His final pillar was 18m high and he was chained by a collar to a railing that went round the top of the pillar. From here he would preach sermons to the faithful, although he never addresses women. Simeon Stylites (the name for pillar-dwellers) was arguably the most famous person in the Christian world on his death, and there was an unseemly scrap for his remains when he dies - holy relics being the most prized possessions of the day. A huge basilica and church complex sprung up around his pillar, and it is the remains of these you visit. Of his pillar there is but a stub remaining, the rest having disappeared with hundreds of years of relic hunters.

Serjilla is one of the more remarkable so-called "Dead Cities". These are a cluster of Roman / Byzantine cities to the south-west of Aleppo that just appear to have been spontaneously deserted by their inhabitants. One theory is that, as the Byzantine world gave way to the Arab world, trade routes changed through the region and consequently these cities lost their raison d'etre: the inhabitants moved to other settlements that were faring better in the new world order.

The beauty of Serjilla is that it is not a grand provincial capital or a vast former metropolis, but the remains of a fairly small settlement abounding in simple, everyday structures like houses, taverns and public baths. These are in an amazing state of preservation, especially given that little restoration work has taken place. So one is able to wonder around and get a real sense of what life was like for the ordinary merchant or farmer who did not inhabit one of the great civic centres of the Classical world.



St Simeon's

 **Dar Zamaria Martini, Aleppo**
Breakfast is included

**Wednesday, 06
October 2010**

FULL DAY TOUR OF ALEPPO *private excursion with your guide*

During your tour of Aleppo, you will visit the citadel which sits 50 metres above the city, the covered souqs, the Great Mosque and the Aleppo Museum. Most of your city tour will be done on foot, as the majority of the tour takes place in the Old City.

The citadel dominates Aleppo's skyline and was the defensive and administrative centre of the city for almost 800 years. The citadel's fortified entrance is a marvellous example of Arab military architecture, with its ring of walls atop a steep glacis, and great towers rising above the moat on the north and south sides. The moat is spanned by a bridge on the southern side, and this leads to the 12th century fortified gate through which you will enter the complex. Once inside, the flat windy summit of the citadel mound is crossed by a central paved path which runs by the north wall. On the right are the remains of the Ayyubid palace, which was built in 1230 and destroyed by later Mongol invasions, and further along you will see the recently restored bath complex from the fourteenth century. Further along is the Mosque of Abraham, which is dated to 1167 and following this you will come to the Mosque of the Citadel. Both of these mosques are beautiful in their austerity. You have the opportunity to ascend the minaret, which is 21m in height, and which commands breathtaking views of Aleppo. Inside the citadel, there is also a small museum containing relics uncovered during restoration and reconstruction.

At the rear of the complex is a café which serves very average food, but from which you can see fabulous views over the domes, minarets, walled courtyards and rooftop gardens of central Aleppo.

Following your visit to the citadel, you cross the road to the Great (or Umayyad) Mosque, which was founded in 715 by the Caliph al-Walid I, and which provides a peaceful respite from the bustle of the Old City. There are entrances to the mosque on all four sides, from the souqs on the south and east, from a public square on the north and from a small lane on the west, which is the entrance for non Muslims. The main places of interest within the mosque are the 47m high minaret, which was built in 1092 and which is adorned on each side with ornate wooden carvings, Kufic script and inlaid stonework. Inside the prayer hall is a shrine adorned with embroidered cloth, which is said to contain the head of Zacharias, father of John the Baptist.

The covered souqs of Aleppo which stretch for over ten miles are among the most striking in any Islamic city and are a key stop on any visit to Aleppo. Centred on a 13th century caravanserai where traders could find accommodation as well as space to sell their wares, they are named after the various crafts and goods which they sell. The area is a warren of passages and alleyways, and some of the walls hide second streets that mirror those outside, except they run along the first floor of the buildings. Each souq or quarter will contain shops, warehouses and workshops dedicated to a particular trade: gold, ironmongery, perfume, spices, cotton and so on. Many of the souqs date back to the 15th century, and as such are living museums. You will also see many beautiful entrances and facades, with high arches and fortified wooden doors. These are known as khans, and were used for accommodation for traders and their goods.

The Aleppo Museum is home to a good number of monuments and collections from various eras of Syrian history, and showcases the finds from some of the places you may well encounter during your trip. The first visit takes you to the prehistoric era, with the skeleton of a Neanderthal boy discovered in the caves at Dederiyah during excavations, illustrating the long history of mankind in the region. Later through the museum you come to some extraordinary figures from Mari - some are replicas, but give you a real sense of the artwork of what must have been a fascinating culture. Subsequently there are also insights into the other civilisations of the Euphrates valley, a small Roman section, and an Islamic Arts section which is currently undergoing renovation.

Between the various shop fronts are cafés where it is possible to sit for a while sipping a mint tea and smoking an aromatic nargileh (water pipe) whilst watching the world pass you by or admiring the backgammon skills of the café regulars.

A city tour of Aleppo offers a wonderful insight to the city and is a fantastic introduction to the history and character of the Old City. Your guide will also be able to point out wonderful little restaurants and cafes that you might wish to revisit later in your stay.



Worshipper at Aleppo mosque

 Dar Zamaria Martini, Aleppo
Breakfast is included

**Thursday, 07
October 2010**

ALEPPO TO LATTAKIA VIA QALAAAT SALADIN AND UGARIT

transfer by private vehicle

On the way from Aleppo to Lattakia you'll stop at Qalaat Saladin. Like many castles in the area, its early history is uncertain, but we know it fell into the hands of the crusaders on their march to Jerusalem. The defining feature of the castle is the 28m deep moat, cut through the bedrock by the builders to isolate the castle on a steep knoll. A needle-like pillar was left standing to help support the drawbridge. The crusaders held the castle for less than a century before Saladin captured it in 1188, giving it its present name.

Paired with Crac Des Chevaliers, Qalaat Saladin is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Just outside Lattakia you'll visit the ruins of Ugarit. Only partially excavated, Ugarit is not Syria's most impressive sight. It does have a very important place in human history however, as it was here that the earliest known examples of the first written alphabet were found on clay tablets. A huge array of tablets have been uncovered in Ugarit demonstrating that at one time there were at least seven different alphabets in use in the city: testimony to its importance as a centre of Mediterranean trade.

After concluding your visit to Ugarit, you will continue to your hotel in Lattakia.



Salah al-Din's castle

Lattakia Introduction

Lattakia's history goes back as far as the reign of Seleucus I in the third century BC - it was one of the many cities which he founded in the region, and took its name from his mother. Sadly, the evidence of its pomp during the Greek and Roman eras now boils down to little more than a row of four columns and an imposing Arch of Triumph which sit incongruously beside the newly built constructions. Today's Lattakia tends to be a coastal destination for the Syrians and the Jordanians, but it can prove a practical place to stay should you wish to explore the plentiful historical spots in the area, with history of settlements spanning several millennia.

 **Afamia Rotana, Lattakia**
Breakfast is included

**Friday, 08
October 2010**

LATTAKIA TO HAMA VIA APAMEA AND QALAAAT MARQAB

transfer by private vehicle with driver and guide

Your drive from Lattakia to Hama today will go via Apamea and Qalaat Marqab.

Apamea, like Palmyra, was a desert trading post of the Roman Empire. At times it surpassed the importance of Palmyra, as is evident from the *cardo maximus* which is longer than the principal thoroughfares of either Roman Palmyra or Damascus. It is one of the signature sights of Syria, perfectly aligned north-to-south, flanked by tall, ornate colonnades. Chariot wheel ruts score the paving stones and what were the ancient doorways through to shops and residences now give out onto partially excavated fields, where the odd mosaic has been uncovered and restored to its original glory.

Qalaat Marqab somehow gets missed off the list of highlights in Syria, which is a mystery as it is one of the most impressive castles in the country and bears comparison with Crac Des Chevaliers. This relative lack of attention means that restoration work is on-going and it is not quite as "polished" as other sites; it also means that you are quite likely to have the vast site to yourself. The majority of the fortifications were built whilst the castle was a stronghold of the Hospitaller military order, and it was one of the few castles that the crusaders held in the face of Saladin's onslaughts. Built from black basaltic rock, quarried from the volcanic plug on which it is sited, it is a vast, imposing edifice and well worth your time.

After your visits you continue on to Hama.

SYRIAN CIVILISATIONS GROUP TOUR OCTOBER 2010


Hama Introduction

The city of Hama is the fourth biggest in the country after Damascus, Aleppo and Homs. Its history is colourful and long, and its geography is engaging; nurtured by the Orontes River, and not far from agricultural lands at the foot of the nearby mountains which grow the fruits which provide some of Hama's wonderful fresh juices. Visitors are captivated by the waterwheels whirring through summer to harness the water from the Orontes. Today's Hama has been much restructured since the city's uprising in 1982 - an event completely at odds with the warm welcome one can expect nowadays when passing through the city.

Just like many other places you will stay in Syria, Hama is a particularly good place to take an evening stroll if you are so inclined. A walk past the Noria and through the old town is certainly quite charming, and if you can handle the bustle then the souqs between Salah al Din St and Ibrahim Hanan St are alive with energy.

The main mosque is across the road from Hama's centre of Christian worship; a compound containing two churches and accommodation for priests. Recognizable by the large cross on top of the newer church which stands on the site of one destroyed in 1982, it can be quite interesting to stick your nose around the door and see if anyone is there to show you around, as your guide may well not know the site well enough to do so himself.

Tourists can be quite thin on the ground in Hama, meaning that you are quite likely to be the source of polite questions and well-meaning interest instead of the target of hassle and unoriginal sales patter.

 **Orient House, Hama**
Breakfast and dinner are included

**Saturday, 09
October 2010**

HAMA TO DAMASCUS VIA SAFITA AND CRAC DES CHEVALIERS *transfer by private vehicle with driver and guide*

Setting off from Hama this morning you head into the mountains that separate the interior of the country from the littoral. Here you will visit two Crusader castles.

Safita was known as Chastel Blanc to the crusaders. This refers to the white tower, which is all that is left today. It is a conspicuous and hefty presence in the town, and the ground floor is a crusader chapel. Steps lead right to the top of the tower, where the view from the battlements reaches as far as Crac Des Chevaliers.



Crac des Chevaliers

Situated on a high, wind-swept ledge above a rocky valley, with amazing views across the mountains in every direction, Crac des Chevaliers is an essential stop for anybody travelling in Syria. It is probably the best preserved Crusader castle anywhere - it's still as formidable today as it must have been the day the Knights Hospitallers gained control of the castle in 1144, and looks almost exactly as it would have done 800 years ago.

Archaeological evidence suggests the site may have been occupied by the Egyptians in around 1285BC. In 1031 the Emir of Homs built a new fortification here and it was still a prime defensive position when the Crusaders arrived on the scene in the early 12th century. The Knights Hospitallers gained control of the castle in 1144, completely rebuilding it and fortifying it so well that it survived two major Arab assaults in the late twelfth century. In 1271, Sultan Baibars began a siege of the castle, managing to breach the outer walls but finding the inner defences impossible to penetrate. To resolve the stalemate he forged a letter from the Grand Commander for the Order in Tripoli, urging surrender, and the depleted and dejected Hospitaller garrison accepted the Sultan's offer of safe conduct to the sea. The castle remained in use during the Mamluke period but as the foreign threat disappeared its strategic importance diminished.

The plan of the castle is that of an inner and outer line of defences, each strengthened by towers. The inner wall was raised upon a large, smooth artificial slope, making it much higher than the outer wall and therefore a formidable obstacle to anyone who had managed to breach the outer wall.

The entrance is on the eastern side of the castle, through a dark sloping passageway which was wide enough to allow horses to enter. On the left are the remains of Arab baths, while the castle's reservoir lies to the right. Stairs lead up from this passage to the roof, from where you can gain access to the three towers that line the southern outer wall. The inner part of the castle contains a large courtyard and a graceful thirteenth century corridor, through which you enter the banqueting hall. There is also a large chamber which would have held all of the provisions and stocks, as well as housing the kitchen and bakery. You can also see the remains of a large oven, and on the right there are twelve medieval toilets. Across the courtyard there is a simple, twelfth century chapel and a staircase beside the chapel leads up to the tower of the king's daughter, which now houses a restaurant. Finally, you cross over to the southern ramparts, which being the tallest parts of the castle, offer spectacular views over the surrounding countryside.

Your visit to Safita will be fairly brief, your time at Crac Des Chevaliers much longer, after which you return to the main highway back to Damascus.

 **Talisman II, Damascus**
Breakfast and dinner are included

**Sunday, 10
October 2010**

GROUP TOUR, FIRST DAMASCUS EXCURSION

private excursion with your guide

You will be met at your hotel this morning by your guide for the tour of Damascus, most of which will be done on foot. Today's tour includes the Umayyad Mosque, the Azem Palace and caravanserai, the Chapel of St Ananias, Straight Street and the souqs.

Built in 705AD on the site of ancient temples and a Christian cathedral, the Umayyad Mosque was designed to be the greatest ever built - perhaps best evinced by the fact that it took the ten years of all the Islamic state at the time to finance the building. Despite several disasters including a huge fire that completely gutted it last century, the mosque is still undoubtedly one of Islam's finest monuments. You enter the mosque through the northern gate, the Bab al-Amara, where the remains of the arcade that once connected the outer and inner walls of the Roman arcade can be seen. From here you enter the impressive marble-covered central courtyard facing the magnificent façade of the prayer hall; on the right is a small octagonal building, elevated on eight columns and adorned with beautiful mosaics thought to date back to the thirteenth century. In the centre of the courtyard is the ablution fountain, which is said to mark the mid-point between Istanbul and Mecca, while on the eastern side of this is another domed pavilion, known as the Dome of the Clocks and dating back to the eighteenth century. After removing your shoes, you enter the awesome prayer hall; the sheer scale of which is extremely impressive. Worth seeing is the lavish marble monument at the northern end of the hall, which commemorates the burial site of the head of John the Baptist, who is revered by Muslims as one of the prophets. Today wailing pilgrims shove money, prayer requests and candles into any crack they can find in the edifice.



Umayyad mosque, Damascus

In the small garden north of the mosque's walls is the Mausoleum of Salah al-Din, the resting place of one of the greatest heroes in Arab history.

The Ottoman governor of Damascus, As'ad Pasha al-Azem, left his mark on a city already teeming with character, by building an elaborate and elegant Palace in the middle of the eighteenth century in the heart of the city, a short walk south from the Umayyad Mosque. The simple black and white blocks of the palace belie the complexity of the interiors and the intricacy of the rooms. Replete with furnishings in wood and mother of pearl, and carefully decorated ceilings, the rooms constitute a museum telling the story of popular traditions and arts within Syria during that time.

The Azem Palace is based around a quite beautiful courtyard, but it can often grow busy as curious visitors explore the environs and settle to enjoy the courtyard. Azem's Caravanserai, situated just a short walk away from the Palace, is the perfect tonic. Built at the same time as the Palace itself, the Caravanserai provided a haven to those travelling through Damascus, with rooms set around a central courtyard with a water fountain at its focal point. Upstairs the views are still more impressive and airy, with a selection of empty rooms to wander through. From here the Chapel of St Ananias, who restored Saul's sight after he was struck on the road to Damascus, is a short walk away.



Stallholders at night, Damascus

Biblical history is a major part of Damascus, and is heavily tied up with St Paul. It was famously on the road to Damascus that he had his epiphany, and once he arrived in the city he was baptised by Ananias. We visit the house of Ananias on the tour today, now a chapel. Below ground level, it is a very simple structure and is the only 1st Century Christian church left in the city.

Ananias found Saul, struck blind, in a house on "the street called Straight", and this street remains today as the main thoroughfare from the eastern wall to the heart of the old city. Along the way it passes the Hamidiyah Souq, the name for the collected souqs of the old city.

The city streets of the old quarter are everything that one might imagine - narrow, decrepit, labyrinthine and indescribably charming. They only ever feel too busy when a clutch of cars meet all at once and find themselves with nowhere to go; witnessing the negotiations between the drivers can be one of the more informative introductions to daily life in the Middle East. Some walk through the roads, some take to their bicycles, while children can be found using the space as goalposts. The souqs are divided up into different quarters, each distinguished by the craft practised there. In the Dyer's Souq you will walk under billowing sheets of cotton, freshly dyed and drying out, whilst the Carpenter's Souq is redolent with the smell of freshly cut wood, being turned into intricate furniture before your eyes and the Metal Souq resounds to the sound of hammers and bellows as lamps, tables and benches are coerced into shape. Your guide will help you to navigate the souqs, stopping at various places to point out beautiful historic doorways, and old khans, hammams and other places of interest.

Your city tour of Damascus will give you a real taster of the city and is essential in introducing you to navigate the maze of streets and alleyways. The tour is also unusual in that the vast majority is done on foot - you cannot get a vehicle into the streets of the old Medina.

 **Talisman II, Damascus**
Breakfast and dinner are included

**Monday, 11
October 2010**

GROUP TOUR, SECOND DAMASCUS EXCURSION

private excursion with your guide

Your second excursion into the city of Damascus is today, and your guide will meet you at the hotel in the morning. Today includes visits to the National Museum, the Takkiyeh al-Suleiman complex and the Ottoman Mosque.

The National Museum in Damascus is an excellent site, with several gems throughout the wide-ranging rooms. The breadth of the exhibits is a reflection of the absorbing and colourful history of Syria. The gardens are well worth strolling around before diving into the museum, with abundant statues and columns filling the lush green precinct. The museum's opening gambit is most impressive - the façade reveals the Qasr al-Hayr al-Gharbi, an Umayyad Castle transported and rebuilt piece by piece. Items moved in their entirety form some of the most striking displays - the Hypogeum of Iarhai, lifted from Palmyra, is one such site and elucidates the funereal customs and artistry of the desert oasis town, while the murals of the Jewish synagogue at Dura Europos seems incongruously beautiful, dominating the room and making for a memorable experience. Elsewhere, the collections are extremely informative; the explanation of Palmyra as a trade centre is reinforced with the displays of precious silks from as far afield as China, while the Ugarit collection provides insight into the culture and civilisation responsible for the first known alphabet from some of the many objects recovered from archaeological excavations.

The Takkiyeh al-Suleiman was built by the renowned architect Sinan. Sinan was responsible for over three hundred buildings, creating a style that became synonymous with the Ottoman Empire and including the legendary Suleiman Mosque in Istanbul. The Takkiyeh was built in honour of the same Ottoman Sultan, Suleiman the Magnificent, and was a gathering place for pilgrims about to set off on the Hajj to Mecca. The alternate bands of colours and the pencil-thin minarets of the mosque are classic Sinan, and the courtyard is framed by an attractive arcade of domes.

 **Talisman II, Damascus**
Breakfast and dinner are included

**Tuesday, 12
October 2010**

PRIVATE TOUR OF BOSRA

To the south of Damascus is the city of Bosra, a city built with Black Basalt Rock and with one of the most impressive amphitheatres in the world.

The ancient town of Bosra has been inhabited since the early Bronze Age, but the town rose to prominence in the late 1st century AD when the last King of the Nabateans moved his capital from Petra to here, where it was better placed to take advantage of changing international trade routes. When the Romans established direct control of the region, Bosra was made capital of the Roman province of Arabia. The local black basalt out of which the town is built gives it a strangely sooty complexion, and the density of the stone has allowed it to last astonishingly well: the old Roman bath complex still boasts its roof, shops on the main thoroughfare are still capable of being used today, and the first sight of the huge theatre, which is brilliantly preserved within the citadel, is one of the most memorable in Syria.



Amphitheatre at Bosra

You enter the citadel by a bridge over the moat which surrounds the whole structure, and enter a maze of dimly lit passages and stairways, and it is through this that you enter the theatre. The stage, backed by a long gallery is 100m wide, and there are some 37 tiers of seats, making this one of the largest Roman theatres in the Roman world, with a capacity for an estimated fifteen thousand spectators. The theatre is remarkably intact, and the acoustics are excellent.

There is a small café in the upper part of the ramparts, and on the terrace are a collection of Roman carved statues. From the ramparts you will also see the outline of a hippodrome, where chariot races would once have taken place.

During your tour you will also see the remains of the Roman bath complex, the Roman marketplace, the remains of a fountain and a large monumental arch. The western gate is another well preserved monument that would once have been adorned with statuary and the Roman road underneath is still used today.

Bosra is approximately 1.5 hours from Damascus if accessed via the motorway. However your guide may suggest that you take the more scenic route through the hill side towns of Suweida and Shahba. This road will take slightly longer but the two towns are definitely worth a stop - especially Shahba which has a small museum housing some very impressive mosaics from the 4th century AD.

 **Talisman II, Damascus**
Breakfast and dinner are included

**Wednesday, 13
October 2010**

DAMASCUS TO BEIRUT VIA BAALBEK

private transfer with driver only

Today you shall travel from Damascus (you will be assisted in crossing the border) to Beirut and visit Baalbek en-route.

Once known as Heliopolis under Alexander the Great's conquest the 'sun city' of the ancient world is Lebanon's key historical sight. Its Roman ruins impress any visitor, with temples often outshining those of Rome.

Originally a Phoenician sight, Baalbek's foundations date back to the 3rd Century BC. During Julius Caesar's leadership from 47BC, Baalbek became the key city in Roman Syria due to its central location between Palmyra and Lebanon's coast.



Baalbek

Lebanon Introduction

For such a small country, Lebanon is a wonderfully diverse place to visit, offering a unique blend of ultra modern chic with the traditions of the Middle East. Vibrant restaurants, cafes and bars contribute to some of the most fashionable cities in the region, while ancient Roman ruins and rolling vineyards offer fascinating escapes from the hustle and bustle.

Most of the world's great civilisations have been in Lebanon at some point or another, from the Phoenicians to the Egyptians, Greeks, Romans, Byzantines, Arabs, Ottoman Turks and Crusaders. Each have left their mark, with a wealth of ruins, temples and castles to explore.

In recent times Lebanon has been more widely known for the savage civil war that raged in the country for 16 years until 1991, and the brief Israeli bombing campaign of 2006. The country was torn apart by the fighting and suffered physically, financially, culturally and psychologically during this period, with many Lebanese fleeing the country to Europe, America and Australia. While graphic reminders of the war and the bombing are still visible throughout the country, especially in Beirut, the energy and enthusiasm with which Lebanon is being rebuilt is amazing. There is an air of optimism in the people, with a real feeling of enthusiasm and infectious energy for the future.

Geographically, you would be hard pressed to find a more diverse range of environments in such a small area. The Lebanese are extremely fond of saying that it's one of the only countries in the world where it's possible to go skiing in the morning and laze on the beach in the afternoon. The scenery is stunning, from a coastal plain replete with ancient historical sites and quaint little fishing villages to the soaring Mount Lebanon and Anti Lebanon mountain ranges, with their popular ski resorts, deep gorges and valleys.

Lebanon is only just re-establishing itself on the tourist map, but our specialists have travelled there recently and can answer any questions or concerns you might have about visiting this wonderful, widely misunderstood country.

Beirut Introduction

With a population of just over a million, the capital of Lebanon is a city of contrasts, cosmopolitan and glitzy in parts and a bombed out shell of its former self in others. Beirut suffered severely from the sixteen years of fighting in the civil war, when whole neighbourhoods, including much of the city centre were destroyed. After the war, the Solidaire project was responsible for the rehabilitation of the city's infrastructure, transforming the centre into a vibrant, cosmopolitan and stylish area, with upmarket shops and bars jostling for space alongside the Houses of Parliament and the major banks and offices.

Much of this progress was threatened or outright destroyed in the Israeli bombing campaign of 2006, but Lebanon is nothing if not resilient, and Beirut is once again thriving. There are wonderful shopping areas, vying for space with top class hotels, restaurants and night clubs in the ultra cool Gemmayzeh area. What really makes Beirut fascinating is that you don't have to travel far from here to get to the notorious Green Line area, where there are buildings which are mere empty shells, peppered with bullet holes. The combination is edgy and exhilarating, putting Beirut right at the top of many people's list of cities to visit in the new decade.

One positive thing to come out of all the destruction is that many archaeological finds have been uncovered from Phoenician and classical times, which otherwise would never have been found.



Beirut

 [Crowne Plaza, Beirut](#)
Breakfast is included

**Thursday, 14
October 2010**

HALF DAY CITY TOUR OF BEIRUT

private guided tour with driver and guide

Today your destination is downtown Beirut. Your sightseeing includes the National Museum and the Solidaire Restoration Project. As you drive to the National Museum, you pass the Green Line, which was the scene of the heaviest fighting during the civil war. Looking on both sides of the road, it is still possible to see the scars of the war, with many buildings still ruined and potted with bullet holes.

During the last years of the civil war, the museum was right in the middle of the furious battles. When peace was restored, the museum underwent substantial rebuilding and restoration work. The first part of your visit to the museum includes a video presentation on the careful reconstruction of the building, and shows the ingenious ways in which the museum contents were protected (many were encased in concrete for the duration of the war). The museum comprises three floors and offers a panorama of Lebanese history, from the prehistoric period, through Greek and Roman times, to the Byzantine period. Many of the finds come from Byblos, Sidon, Tyre and Baalbek.

Following this, you continue to the newly restored city centre to see the results of the Solidaire Project. This multi-million dollar project has completely restored the city centre and the result is astounding. There have also been significant archaeological finds in downtown Beirut, which were discovered when certain buildings that were beyond repair were pulled down to be rebuilt,

 **Crowne Plaza, Beirut**
Breakfast is included

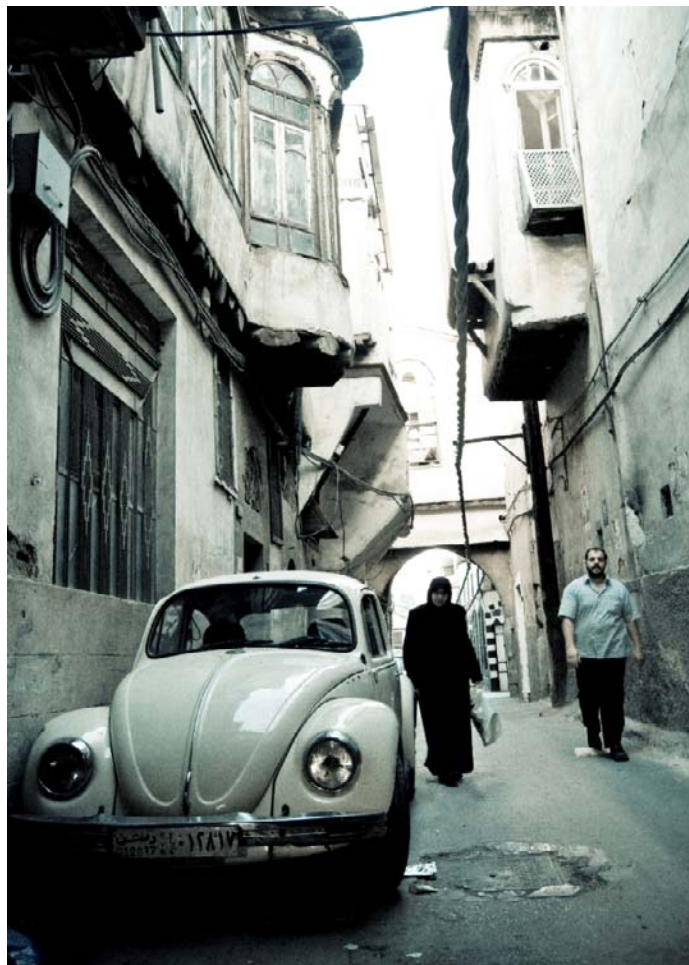
**Friday, 15
October 2010**

BEIRUT HOTEL TO BEIRUT INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT *transfer by private vehicle with driver only*

You are collected from your hotel and transferred to Beirut International Airport.

IMPORTANT NOTES

- Flight times and the daily order of sightseeing are subject to change.
- Where specified aircraft types are for indication only and are subject to change without notice.
- Transfer times are approximate and subject to local conditions at the time of travel.
- All flight times are local.



Damascus street scene

ACCOMMODATION INFORMATION

Your accommodation is described below, if you require further information about any guest house or hotel please call. Upgraded (or simpler) hotels and rooms are available in many places, particularly in the main towns and cities. All rooms are standard class with air-conditioning and en-suite facilities unless otherwise stated. Where available we enclose (or have previously enclosed) individual hotel brochures.

HOTEL, RESORT & GUEST HOUSE GRADINGS

Basic: Very primitive accommodation where we are not aware of anything better.

Simple: Clean and simple but limited facilities.

Medium: A good standard of accommodation, reasonable range of facilities.

First Class: A high standard of accommodation with a wide range of facilities.

Deluxe: Superb accommodation with facilities and service to match.

Opulent: The world's most unashamedly luxurious hotels and resorts.

- 'Plus' indicates that the accommodation is classified as between the rating given and the next rating up.
- The above classifications are for your guidance only, they are the opinions of our staff and are quite subjective.

DEDEMAN DAMASCUS

Medium

The Dedeman is located at the edge of the museum district near the historical area of Old Damascus. There are 370 rooms and suites, offering the usual comforts you would associate with a modern, five star international hotel. With a range of dining options, some boutique shops, a gym, and a swimming pool, there is plenty to keep you occupied, but you'll definitely want to venture out to explore the city, with the Hamedieh Souk and the National Museum among the attractions within close walking distance.



Standard Room, Dedeman Damascus



Dedeman Damascus

ZENOBIA CHAM PALACE, PALMYRA

Simple

With thirty two rooms, and a setting to cherish, the Zenobia Cham Palace has some wonderful benefits for staying in Palmyra. The airy lobby and pleasant restaurant, serving buffet food, look out to the site, just a handful of metres away from the desert columns. 5 of the bedrooms have been renovated to a good standard however the remainder are diminutive and do not match the charm of their surroundings.

Our opinion: Although not the highest quality hotel that Palmyra can offer, the Zenobia Cham Palace's location and facilities go a dramatic way towards making up for this.



Zenobia Cham Palace, Palmyra



Standard, Zenobia Cham Palace, Palmyra

DAR ZAMARIA MARTINI, ALEPPO

Medium

The Martini has proven over recent years to be one of the most accomplished converted houses in Aleppo, and such has been its success that it has expanded over several houses in the Jdaydeh quarter of the old town, under the names of Dar Zamaria and the Orient House. Decoration and styling is typical and well thought out, gifting its visitors a taste of Aleppine hospitality and style, replete with pearl-inlaid furniture, traditional textiles and oriental carpets. At present, the fifty rooms are stretched over three houses, all linked by the same narrow tract of street. In the first courtyard is a large restaurant, while in the other two houses' courtyards the atmosphere is quiet and open with a range of comfortable chairs.



Restaurant, Dar Zamaria Martini, Aleppo



Dar Zamaria Martini, Aleppo

AFAMIA ROTANA, LATTAKIA

Medium

The Afamia Rotana opened in May 2008. This is a large hotel with over 300 rooms, two swimming pools and a private, man made beach. The rooms are fresh, modern and comfortable and all have balconies overlooking the coast line. It is a little uninspiring in comparison to the traditional town houses of Damascus and Aleppo but it does make for a very convenient base for exploring the many surrounding sites.

Our opinion: This hotel lacks some of the charm evident in other properties in Syria, however it is very comfortable and makes convenient overnight stop when exploring the surrounding castles and towns.



Standard Room, Afamia Rotana, Lattakia



Afamia Rotana, Lattakia

ORIENT HOUSE, HAMA

Medium

The Orient House is conspicuously different from the alternatives in the Hama region by being a property converted from an old house in the area. The open areas exude personality and a friendly welcome is given by the hotel staff. The twenty four rooms do not quite match the courtyard for style and comfort, but they are pleasant and the facilities are as good as those found anywhere else in the city. The intimacy of the Orient House makes it a good option for a place to stay as you pass through Hama on your way through the country.



Orient House, Hama



Standard, Orient House, Hama

TALISMAN II, DAMASCUS

Medium

The Talisman II is a new conversion project by the owners of the successful Talisman hotel elsewhere within the winding streets of the old city. The wooden door opens to tell of a wonderful building, painted with rich reds and dark stone enshrining a turquoise water feature. The twelve rooms looking over the two courtyards are elegantly furnished and bastions of tranquility within a bustling city.



Talisman II, Damascus



Talisman II, Damascus

CROWNE PLAZA, BEIRUT

Medium

Although not boasting a massive amount of character, the Crowne Plaza has everything you'd need from a contemporary city centre hotel. The 198 guest rooms are comfortable, spacious and modern, while the rooftop restaurant offers excellent views out to the Mediterranean. Best of all is the location, right in the middle of the fashionable, up and coming Hamra District, with its assortment of shops, bars and restaurants. For a change of scene, you are within walking distance of the Corniche and the Downtown area, where you'll find Martyr's Square and the notorious Green Line.



Standard Room, Crowne Plaza, Beirut



Crowne Plaza, Beirut

GENERAL INFORMATION



FINANCIAL SECURITY

We are fully bonded with the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) who have issued us with an Air Tour Operator's License (ATOL) which means that your money is 100% safe when you book. Our ATOL bonding protects all your arrangements beginning with your flight from the UK. If your arrangements do not begin in the UK or are accommodation and/or ground arrangements only i.e. no international flights then you are covered by our ABTA membership. More details on both methods of financial protection can be found below. If you would like to discuss financial protection, please call us and we will be happy to explain how either scheme operates.

Air Tour Operator License

The air inclusive holidays (where the flight element originates from the UK) in our brochures are ATOL protected, since we hold an Air Travel Operator's License granted by the Civil Aviation Authority. Our ATOL number is 4817. In the unlikely event of our insolvency, the CAA will ensure that you are not stranded abroad and will arrange to refund any money you have paid to us for an advance booking. For further information contact: ATOL, Consumer Protection Group, Civil Aviation Authority, CAA House, 45-59 Kingsway, London WC2B 6TE. Telephone 020 7453 6424. You can also visit their website at www.atol.org.uk

ABTA Membership

For all holidays which do not begin in the UK or which are accommodation and/or ground arrangements only. i.e. no international flights have been booked by Audley, your monies are protected as part of our ABTA membership. In the unlikely event of our insolvency this ABTA membership will provide a refund of any monies you have paid to us for an advance booking and/or your repatriation to the place where your holiday arrangements with us commenced.

HEALTH

It is essential that you see your GP or a travel clinic before travelling to make sure that you have taken all the necessary health precautions. Some vaccinations require more than one visit with a period of weeks between injections. You should visit your GP at least six weeks before departure. For up to date medical advice you may wish to call the Medical Advisory Service for Travellers Abroad (MASTA).

MASTA Traveller's Health Line

Before travelling abroad, you can telephone 0906 550 1402 (premium rate call 60p/minute) to obtain a 'Health Brief' specifically tailored to your journey. Your brief will give information about immunisation and malaria as well as any Foreign Office advice and the latest health news. Their lines are open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. MASTA, 52 Margaret Street, London W1W 8SQ. Internet: www.masta.org.

Deep vein thrombosis (DVT)

The issue of DVT on long haul flights has received much recent attention. The majority of international airlines now issue advice on how to lessen the risk of this, however, if you have any concerns, we recommend that you consult your doctor.

Pre-existing medical conditions/Disabled passengers

It is essential that you advise us before booking if you have any disability or pre-existing medical conditions that you feel may be relevant. The nature of many of the destinations featured within our brochures means that in the majority of cases they are unsuitable for those who are wheelchair bound or have a lack of mobility. We will be delighted to discuss the feasibility of creating a tailor-made itinerary for you that takes into consideration your level of mobility. On our escorted group tours the Tour Manager is, unfortunately, unable to offer additional assistance to passengers with limited mobility as this may compromise the level of attention they would be able to offer the rest of the group. We may request that you provide a letter from your doctor confirming your fitness to travel.

High altitude

Your itinerary may include sections where the altitude exceeds 10,000 feet. If you suffer from circulation, heart or respiratory problems we advise that you consult with your doctor before confirming your booking.

Smoking

Most airlines do not permit smoking on the aircraft. At the request of the majority of our passengers we do not allow smoking on any form of transport used for our escorted group tours. Stops are regularly made where you will be able to smoke. For smokers travelling on a tailor-made tour we request that you check with your driver or guide whether smoking is permitted in the vehicle.

Health and safety standards

Each country has its own regulations and enforcement levels relating to health and safety standards. These do not always match the very high standards we are used to in the UK. Please note, as health and safety standards may not match UK levels we recommend that you follow a few precautionary safety procedures. Always check where the nearest fire exit is and how to raise the fire alarm. Do not enter a swimming pool before checking the water depth first.

TRAVEL ADVICE

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office Travel Advice Unit monitors all overseas destinations and offers safety advice to British travellers. You can contact the service on 0870 6060 290. Internet: www.fco.gov.uk/travel.

PASSPORT AND VISA INFORMATION FOR BRITISH CITIZENS

Passengers must hold a passport which is valid for at least six months following the return date of your holiday. British passport holders (full British Citizens) currently require visas for the following destinations featured in our brochures: Australia, Bhutan, Cambodia, China, India, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Laos, Mongolia, Mozambique, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Russia, Tajikistan, Tanzania, Tibet, Turkmenistan, Uganda, Uzbekistan and Vietnam. We are able to obtain visas on your behalf, please ask for details at the time of booking. **Non-British passport holders should check with the relevant embassies as visa requirements may be different to that of British passport holders.**

FLIGHTS AND AIRLINES

The difference between a direct flight and a non-stop flight can cause confusion. To clarify, on a direct flight no change of aircraft is required but touchdowns will be made en-route either to refuel or to board or disembark. On non-stop flights no change of aircraft is required and no stops are made en-route. Virtually all of the flights that we use are direct and many are non-stop. Exact details will be given with your itinerary.

Premium Economy, Business and First Class

If you require Business or First Class flights, these can be arranged on most airlines at very competitive rates. Premium Economy can be arranged on certain airlines, please call us for details.

Specific seat requests

Specific seat requests are normally accepted by the airline but they cannot be guaranteed, we will do all we can to secure a specific seat. Please note that policies do vary by airline.

Flight amendments

We generally use special 'inclusive tour' fares when we purchase your air tickets from the airlines. While these fares are very good value they are inflexible in terms of changes and offer no refunds on tickets once issued. Once your flight is confirmed the airlines will charge an amendment fee or insist on the purchase of a completely new ticket if you make changes.

Internal flights

Smaller local airlines are often more likely to change their schedule at short notice. We will endeavour to inform you of any changes in advance of travelling but this may not always be possible.

Frequent Flyer Clubs

If you collect points through any of the airline frequent flyer clubs please provide your membership details on the Booking Form and we will ensure that these are recorded against your flight reservation. Please note that on some of our specially negotiated 'inclusive tour' fares, points are not always awarded.

HOTEL INFORMATION

There is frequently confusion over the terminology used for bed arrangements in hotel rooms. A 'double' is recognized as meaning a room with a double bed, this may be two single beds pushed together. A 'twin' is a room with two single beds. Please note that all rooms are allocated at the discretion of the hotel and cannot be guaranteed.

Single rooms

Single rooms tend to be smaller than double or twin rooms, however, many hotels do not have single rooms, in which case you will be allocated a twin or double room.

BROCHURE AND ITINERARY ACCURACY

We thoroughly check all the information that is included within our brochures and individual tour itineraries, however, changes do occur. Airlines may change their schedules, roads may close and government regulations may alter. Should there be any changes to the holiday on which you are booked we will do our best to keep you informed of the situation prior to departure.

DATA PROTECTION ACT

We will hold your name, address and any other details you supply us with on our database. This information will be used to make your travel arrangements and to send you information about Audley Travel. In order to make your travel arrangements we will need to pass your details to companies and individuals outside of the EC where less stringent data protection controls may be in place. We will not pass on your details to third parties that are not responsible for your travel arrangements.

SPECIAL DIETARY REQUIREMENTS

Special diets should be requested on the booking form, however, it is unrealistic to expect special diets to be catered for in some of the destinations we feature. We will advise the hotels and airlines of your request but we cannot guarantee their availability.

UK AIRPORT HOTELS, CAR PARKING AND LOUNGES

We are able to arrange airport hotel accommodation, car parking and airport lounge access in the UK. To arrange any of these services please call Sonia Bullin on 01993 838 070 or Sarah McGarry on 01993 838 065.

TRAVEL IN THE DEVELOPING WORLD

Many of our destinations are in the developing world where attitudes, infrastructure, priorities, lifestyles and cultures are very different from our own. This is often the very reason to visit the destination but certain aspects may be frustrating. We always advise that the first thing you should pack is your sense of humour. This can prove invaluable when travelling over rougher roads, waiting for a delayed aircraft and communicating with hotel staff whose first language is not English.

AITO QUALITY CHARTER

THE ASSOCIATION OF INDEPENDENT TOUR OPERATORS

AITO is the association for independent and specialist holiday companies. Our member companies, usually owner-managed, strive to create overseas holidays with high levels of professionalism and a shared concern for quality and personal service. The Association encourages the highest standards in all aspects of tour operating.

EXCLUSIVE MEMBERSHIP

AITO sets criteria regarding ownership, finance and quality which must be satisfied before new companies are admitted to membership. All members are required to adhere to a Code of Business Practice which encourages high operational standards and conduct.

FINANCIAL SECURITY

An AITO member is required to protect money paid by customers to the member for any holiday sold under the AITO logo. This protection applies to customers who are in the UK at the time of booking or to overseas customers who have booked directly with the member. Members have to comply with UK Government Regulations in this respect. Members submit details of their bonding and guarantee arrangements to the Association on a regular basis

ACCURATE BROCHURES AND WEB SITES

All members do their utmost to ensure that all their brochures and other publications, print or electronic, clearly and accurately describe the holidays and services offered.

PROFESSIONAL SERVICE AND CONTINUAL IMPROVEMENTS

All members are committed to high standards of service and believe in regular and thorough training of employees. Members continually seek to review and improve their holidays. They listen to their customers and always welcome suggestions for improving standards.

MONITORING STANDARDS

AITO endeavours to monitor quality standards regularly. All customers should receive a post-holiday questionnaire the results of which are scrutinised by the Association.

RESPONSIBLE TOURISM

All members acknowledge the importance of AITO's Responsible Tourism guidelines, which recognise the social, economic and environmental responsibilities of tour operating. Those demonstrating their achievements beyond the pure acceptance of this principle are recognised by the award of 2 or 3 star status.

CUSTOMER RELATIONS

All members endeavour to deal swiftly and fairly with any issues their customers may raise. In the unlikely event that a dispute between an AITO member and a customer cannot be settled amicably, AITO's low-cost Independent Dispute Settlement Service may be called upon by either side to bring the matter to a speedy and acceptable conclusion.

Audley is a member of the Association of Independent Tour Operators. To contact the Association, visit www.aito.co.uk or call 020 8744 9280.