

SYRIA, LEBANON & JORDAN: GROUP TRAVEL PROGRAMS - 2

CLASSICAL SYRIA AND LEBANON

14 nights: Arrive Damascus, 4 nights; drive to Lattakia, 1 night; drive to Aleppo, 2 nights; drive to Palmyra, 2 nights; drive to Damascus, 1 night; drive to Lebanon via Baalbek to Beirut, 4 nights; depart Beirut.

Day 1, Sunday: Arrive Damascus

Arrive Damascus, the oldest continually inhabited city in the world! Transfer to the Cham Palace, a luxury hotel with excellent rooms and restaurants, very centrally located. Take the rest of the day at leisure.

D

Day 2, Monday: Damascus

Morning, visit the National Museum of Syria to see a fine collection of Roman and Greek sculptures, archeological artifacts, a fragment of the oldest known alphabet in the world, and an 1800 year-old synagogue transported from Dura Europos on the Euphrates River. Also visit a craft market to view a colorful display of boxes, jewelry, oriental carpets, and more. Afternoon, see a section of the original Roman fortress wall, and visit a souq - a bustling covered bazaar that fills the senses with colors and life. Then, visit Salahadin's mausoleum, and Ummayyad Mosque, the largest in the world, with gold-embossed motifs, and contains the tomb of John the Baptist.

B, D

Day 3, Tuesday: Damascus

This morning, visit Al Azim Palace, once a luxurious home of the Ottoman governor, now a museum of Turkish lifestyles. Then, walk through Straight Street, the Christian quarter with its charming alleyways and handicraft shops, St. Annanias Chapel, and Chapel of St. Paul, built at the place where Paul was lowered in a basket to escape Roman soldiers. The afternoon is free for independent activities.

B, D

Day 4, Wednesday: Damascus

Today, we will drive south to visit the historic towns of Bosra, Qanawat and Shabha. At Bosra, visit the large and impressive Roman theater, exceptionally intact and famed for its acoustics. Lunch at Cham hotel. Then, visit the citadel, walk through the ruins of a Roman town, see the ruins of Ommayad Grand Mosque, shrine of monk Bahira, a cathedral, Nabatean gateway, and Al Sweid museum. At Qanawat, see the Seaglio temple and temple of Zeus. At Shabha, see an amphitheater and museum with Roman mosaics. On return to Damascus, see the gold-domed Lady Zainab Mosque.

B, L, D

Day 5, Thursday: Damascus - Lattakia

Depart Damascus in an air conditioned coach, heading north, visiting en route the towns of Seydnaya and Mallula with its picturesque views and Christian heritage. Drive on to Crac de Chevaliers, where we will enjoy our lunch at a restaurant with a view of the castle. Then, visit the magnificent medieval castle of Crac de Chevaliers, built by the Crusaders in the 12th century. Recount battles of valor as you explore a maze of towers, tunnels, living rooms, stables and a chapel. Drive to the coast, visit a cathedral museum at Tartus, and arrive at the pretty coastal town of Lattakia. Stay at Cote d'Azur de Cham Resort, with a splendid beach on the Mediterranean Coast.

B, L, D

Day 6, Friday: Lattakia - Aleppo

Take the morning at leisure. Visit Ugarit, a kingdom between the 16th and 13th centuries BC that excelled in administration, education, diplomacy, law and economics, and gave the world its first alphabet. Early afternoon, visit Salahadin's Castle built on a rocky spur, the most impregnable crusader fortress. Continue across the Al Ghab mountain range to Aleppo in northern Syria. Stay at Chahba Cham Palace Aleppo, a 5 star luxury hotel with excellent facilities, and very central.

B, D

Day 7, Saturday: Aleppo

This morning, visit the citadel, an impregnable fortress and fine example of Arab architecture, standing high above the city on a hill, above layers of civilization dating as far back as the Hittites. Explore the largest souq in the world, with 8 miles of covered lanes filled with colorful shops and wares. Then, walk through the Christian quarter, see the Grand Ommayad Mosque, and small but well laid out National Museum. In the afternoon, drive to the outskirts of the city to visit the fascinating Church of St. Simeon perched on a hill with pines, and 6th C Byzantine church at Mushabak.

B, D

Day 8, Sunday: Aleppo - Palmyra

We leave Aleppo heading south. En route, visit a museum at Maarat Al Numan, with ancient pottery, mosaics, coins and sculptures. Also visit the dead city of Serjilla, with remains of a Byzantine settlement, including houses, a church, baths, tombs and sarcophagi. Then, visit the Roman ruin city of Apamea, with a mile-long columned street intact. Continue south to Hama, where we will have lunch at the Apamee Cham Palace hotel, and see functioning water wheels built by the French 200 years ago. We then drive via Homs eastwards, through the desert to Palmyra - the bird of the desert - an oasis town on the crossroads of ancient trade routes. Stay at Palmyra Cham Palace; first class, pretty location.

B, L, D

Day 9, Monday: Palmyra

Morning, visit the Temple of Bel, the valley of tombs (tower and underground tombs) with frescoes and stone carvings, a Greco-Roman museum with interesting exhibits, and an Ethological museum depicting lifestyles of Bedouins. Afternoon, visit the impressive Temple of Bal Shaman, built in 130 AD, the Nebo temple, Roman theater, triumphal arch, colonnade with 150 pillars still standing, and forum. Then, drive uphill to the castle of Ibn Maan and watch a spectacular sunset.

B, D

Day 10, Tuesday: Palmyra - Damascus

A pleasant drive on a desert road takes us back to Damascus. Stay at Cham Palace hotel. Take the afternoon at leisure, with free time for independent activities.

B, D

Day 11, Wednesday: Damascus - Baalbek - Beirut

Drive to the Lebanon-Beirut border, complete immigration documentation, and continue to Baalbek, one of the world's greatest historical sites, the most gigantic complex of Roman temples ever built; its columns are the tallest ever erected, its stones the largest ever used. The Acropolis of Baalbek is the largest and best preserved corpus of Roman architecture. Its temples, dedicated to Jupiter, Venus and Bacchus (larger than Parthenon in Athens) present a majestic ensemble. Also visit the museum at Baalbek. Lunch at/near Baalbek. Continue to Beirut. Stay at Le Meridien Commodore/Hazmah Rotana hotel.

B, L

Day 12, Thursday: Beirut

Take a tour to explore Beirut city; the destroyed town center is charming, and once again active. Visit the Roman baths with remnants of brick vaults and columns, and the trendy central district, which has been beautifully restored. Also visit Alam mosque, Mansoor mosque, Martyr's Square, St. John's Church, and St. George Maronite Church. Afternoon, visit the national museum, now

fully restored, with antiquities and treasures from all over Lebanon, dating from prehistoric times through the Ottoman period.

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Day 13, Friday: Beirut

Take a full day trip to Sidon and Tyre. First, drive to Cana where Jesus performed a miracle, and visit the site of a church cave and stone figures. Drive to Tyre, a historian and archaeologist's delight. Here, visit sites of Roman columns and ruins, baths, Al Baas archway and Roman cemetery, and hippodrome – the largest in the world! Lunch at Tyre. Drive to Sidon. Visit the crusader's castle, old city, souqs, soap museum and caravan sarai. Return to Beirut.

B, L

Day 14, Saturday: Beirut

This morning, drive north to Byblos, stopping en route at Junieh to see the Church of St. Paul with its gold dome, and Our Lady of Lebanon, Harissa, statue and chapel, situated on a hill overlooking the Mediterranean. Continue to Byblos, said to date back 7000 years! Visit the Byblos castle and museum, Roman columns, temple, and amphitheater. Also visit the 12th century Cathedral of St. John built by the Crusaders. Return to Beirut. The afternoon is at leisure for independent activities.

B

Day 15, Sunday: Depart Beirut

Morning, at leisure. Transfer to international airport for flight back home.

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