

# Country Profile: Syria



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## GEOGRAPHY

**SIZE:** Syria is located in the Middle East. It is bordered by Jordan and Israel to the South, Iraq to the East, Lebanon and the Mediterranean Sea to the West, and Turkey to the North.

The country is divided into four topographical regions. There are fertile coastal lands in the Northeast, mountains in the west, deserts to the South, and plains in the Central area.

### Major Cities:

**Damascus:** The World oldest continuously inhabited city. Famous with Mosques, Churches, markets and historical architectural structures.

**Aleppo:** 220 Miles north of Damascus, its history goes back to the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BC. Dominated the trade routes connecting East and West. Still plays a key economic roll.

**Hama:** 90 Miles South of Aleppo. Famed with its waterwheels & Apamea, the ancient Hellenistic Roman City built 300B.C.

**Lattakia:** Syria's best sea port of entry, and best summer resort. Built 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C.

**Maloula:** 37 Miles from Damascus. Famous with its houses built into the sides of cliffs.

**Saidnaiya:** 20 Miles from Damascus built in the 6<sup>th</sup> century AD. It is the home of The Virgin Mary Icon attributed to St. Luke.

**CLIMATE:** The climate within Syria will range from very hot Mediterranean-type summer to rainy warm winter. The majority of the rainfall is received during the winter months of December through March.

The best time to visit the country is between April and June, or September and November

## PEOPLE

**NATIONALITY:** Syrian(s)

**POPULATION:** 17,000.00

### MAJOR METROPOLITAN AREAS:

Damascus	2,400.000
Aleppo	1,900.000
Homs	347.000
Lattakia	554,000

**LANGUAGE:** The official language is Arabic. French and English are also used.

**EDUCATION:** Public education is free. Available schools include private religious, private secular schools, and, and traditional public schools. Compulsory education 6-12 years.

The literary rate is approximately 65%. Four universities are located in Damascus, Aleppo, Lattakia, and Homs. The institute of Petroleum & Chemical Engineering is in Homs.

**RELIGION:** Over 70% of the population are Sunni Muslim. Another 19% consist of Islamic groups including the Alawites, Durze, and Shiites. 11% follow the Christian beliefs of the Greek Orthodox, Armenian Orthodox, Syrian Catholic & Orthodox, Syrian Catholic & Orthodox, and Maronites.

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## GOVERNMENT

**OFFICIAL ANME:** Syrian Arab Republic

**NATIONAL CAPITAL:** Damascus

**TYPE OF GOVERNMENT:** Republic

**BUSINESS MATTERS**  
CURRENCY: Syrian Pounds  
Coins: 1, 5, 10, 25  
Bills: 5, 10, 25, 50, 100, 500

**BUSINESS HOURS:** Saturday to Thursday  
Banks: 8:00a.m.-2:00p.m.  
Government: 8:00a.m.-2:00p.m.  
Business & Shops: 8:00a.m.-1:50p.m.  
And 4:30a.m.-8:00p.m.

**PRACTICES:** Men should wear a suit and tie when conducting business. Women should wear a dress or skirt and blouse.

Appointments are required, and punctuality is expected.

Business cards should be given freely.

Although the French and English languages are common in the business world, a translator may be required. If so, contact the local embassy, and they will provide you with information relative to notarized translator for hire.

It is polite to inquire about one's health prior to conducting business.

Do not be surprised if your business contact has invited numerous fellow professionals to participate in your meeting.

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### **COMMUNICATION**

TIME: EST +7 - GMT +2

WEIGHTS/MEASURES: Kgs – Metric

TELEPHONES: The telephone service is reliable. Long distance service is available.

MAIL: The postal system is good in Syria. There are post offices located in nearly every town. They are open from 8:00am – 2:00pm. Mail to Europe or the United

States will take approximately two (2) weeks.

**PUBLICATIONS:** The majority of the media services are government owned and/or controlled. The local papers, which are most important to the citizens, are the Al-Baath, Tishrin, and Al-Thawrah. The local English language newspaper is the Syrian Times. Other publications are imported.

**RADIO/TELEVISION:** Radio programs are broadcast twenty-one (21) hours each day. Facilities shut down between 2:30 a.m. and 5:30a.m. only. The majority of the presentations are transmitted in Arabic. Programs are also presented on FM and short wave radio in Turkish, English, French, German, Hebrew, and Spanish.

Television shows are broadcast from 10:00a.m, until 12:30am

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### **GETTING INTO SYRIA**

**PERSONAL DOCUMENTS:** A valid passport will be required of anyone wishing to enter Syria. A visa will be required from the Syrian Embassies and consulates overseas.

**HEALTH REQUIREMENTS:** There are no health certifications required at this time, unless an individual is arriving from an infected area.

**CURRENCY RESTRICTIONS:** There is no limit on the import and export of foreign currency. The only requirement is that the amount be declared at the time of entry & exit.

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### **GETTING AROUND IN SYRIA**

**AIR/RAIL TRANSPORTATION:** Direct flights are available from New York to Syria via Pakistan International Airlines. Most connections into the country are made

through Europe. An average flight from London to Damascus will take approximately five hours.

Syria maintains four (4) major airports. Two of them are international, Damascus & Aleppo. The national airline is Syrian Arab Airlines.

Domestic air service is available and is offered at a reasonable fee.

Although rail service is limited, passenger service is available. Travel via rail can be made into Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey. The service is adequate; the trains are slow.

**TAXI/BUS TRANSPORTATION:** Taxi services are available and not expensive. Fares are metered (in Syrian Pounds) and drivers expect a tip in addition to the fee. If the meter is not working get out of the taxi. A ride from the airport to downtown Damascus cost around US \$10.

Mini Busses (private) are very adequate to transport within the city, they have set routes, and the fare is very cheap.

Long distance travel is recommended with the buses as every 15 minutes there is a bus to the main cities. The buses are air conditioned, with television, hostesses, and comfortable seats (private companies). Reservations are required. The fare range from US \$3 to 7. The buses are new and punctual.

**CARS:** The import of vehicles into Syria is not permitted for Syrian Nationals and permitted for Foreign Diplomat. Foreign Experts are permitted to import private car if customs permit is obtained through the contracting company and the car must be less than two (2) years old.

Diesel engines are not permitted.

**CAR RENTALS:** A car may be rented by anyone possessing a valid International driver's license. The cars are new and

insured. Check the condition of the car before signing the contract. Check the mileage and the permitted mileage per day. Do not rent a car without insurance. You can rent a car with driver for a small addition charges. The rates vary from US \$30 – US\$150 per day.

**DRIVING:** An international drivers permit will be required to drive on Syrian streets. Insurance is required by law.

All the main roads are in good conditions. Four lane highways and roads connect Syria to Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan. Road signs are marked in Arabic and English or French.

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## LIVING IN SYRIA

**HOUSING:** Housing is available in the cities. A small two (2) bedroom, unfurnished apartment will rent for approximately \$400.00 per month in a suburban neighborhood like Dummar. The same apartment in Malki will rent for as high as \$1,000.00 per month.

A three (3) bedroom, unfurnished apartment in Dummar will lease for an estimated US\$500.00 while the same apartment in Malki will rent for approx. US\$2,500.00 per month.

The normal term of lease for foreigner s is one (1) year. And Six (6) months for Syrians.

Utilities will vary depending on the size of the family, and amount of services used. An average family of four (4) will consume and estimated US\$3.00 per month in water, US\$25.00 per month in electricity, US\$20.00 per month for domestic telephone services, and US \$2.50 per three (3) week period for gas.

**HOUSEHOLD HELP:** Household help is easily located. Be aware, however, that

Muslim employees will expect to receive Friday as a day off. They will also expect Muslim holidays off. Likewise, Christian employees will expect Sundays and related Christian holidays off.

Benefits are negotiated between the employee and the employer. They may include vacation time off with pay, transportation, living quarters, bonus pay, and meals.

A live in maid will charge an estimated \$100.00 to \$200.00 US per month; a nanny will ask for between \$100.00 and \$200.00 US per month; a driver will expect to receive between \$150.00 and \$200.00 US per month; and a gardener collects between \$100.00 and \$150.00 US per month.

**FURNISHINGS:** Numerous items can be purchased locally for the home. Precious handicrafts made from Mother of Pearl are available as are beautifully woven rugs, embroidered linens, leather goods, and olive wood articles, hand-blown glass, copper ware, straw goods, brassware, and many other items. The cost of major appliances will vary dramatically depending on the size, make, and model. An idea of what the average costs are in US dollars follows:

Refrigerator.....	\$500.00 and up
Television(14").....	\$300.00 and up
Radio.....	\$50.00 and up
Bedroom Set.....	\$1000.00 and up
Dining Room Set.....	\$600.00 and up
Living Room Set.....	\$700.00 and up

**CLOTHING:** Men and women wear Western style clothing.

Clothing should always be conservative. Shorts are worn by children and men only.

A variety of high quality clothing is available at reasonable prices. You can get good buys on clothing such as cotton clothes, leather, diamonds, and jewelry.

**ELECTRICAL MATTERS:** A.C., 50Cycle, 220/240 Volts, 1.3 phases, 2,3 wires. Wall plugs are the round two-prong European type.

**TAXES:** Syrians pay a tax based on the income per household. The amount will vary between 25% and 60%

**HEALTH/MEDICAL CONCERNS:** The medical facilities in the major cities are fair. Overall there are approximately two hundred (200) hospitals which provide an average of twelve hundred (1200) beds throughout the country. An estimated fourteen thousand (14000) doctors, many English speaking, offer care as best they can.

Care is offered free of charge at the Governmental Hospitals.

Life expectancy is approximately sixty-six (66) years of age, and the infant mortality rate is forty-five per every one thousand (45/1000)

**DINING:** The Syrian diet is full of variety. They enjoy meat dishes (both raw and cooked), okra, eggplant, pickles, olives, and breads. Lamb and chicken are the most common meats. Sweets are thoroughly enjoyed as well.

Some of the favored local recipes include:

Ouzi...a pastry filled with meat and rice  
Yabrak..... leaf filled with rice and meat  
Kubbeh..... meat balls with onion meat and nuts  
Waraqinah..... rice and raisin dish  
Farouge..... roast chicken  
Burgol..... dish made with boiled wheat  
Shawarma... like a gyros with roasted mutton  
Shish taouk... chicken on a skewer

The drinking water is safe. If a person has an easily troubled stomach, it is a good idea to drink only bottled water, which is available throughout Syria.

Alcoholic beverages are served in most of the restaurant. Muslims are forbidden to partake of pork or alcoholic beverages.

TIPPING: A 10% tip is considered fair for most services. Tips are not required, but they are greatly appreciated.

SAFETY CONCERNS: Syria has one of the lowest crime rates in the world. The streets are safe at night. Use common sense.

Women should not converse with taxi drivers or vendors as they may interpret this as being too friendly.

GESTURES: Women will often kiss one another on the cheek twice when they meet. Men will shake hands when they meet. Never point the bottom of the foot at another individual.

MORE: It is wise to avoid political discussions.

Always ask permission before you smoke. Share your cigarettes. (Smoking is forbidden in all public transport and governmental departments)

Always inquire about another's health when greeting them.

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Acknowledgements:

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**The information presented herein is based on customs data available at the time of printing and is frequently subject to change without notice. It is the responsibility of the owner or importer of the household goods to comply with the current customs restrictions, regulations, and duties of the country to which the goods are imported. We strongly advise customers to contact the consulate or embassy of the destination country for the most current information on customs regulations, restrictions and duties for importing household goods, personal effects and vehicles.**