

Syria Summer Tour 2022

May 30th – June 7th

The Fellow Traveller Tour



INTRODUCTION:

Beginning and ending in Lebanon's vibrant capital, Beirut, this tour is your opportunity to see Syria at a unique point in its history. Until the recent war, the only thing most people knew about Syria was Palmyra, and now Syria's famous but for all the wrong reasons. But guess what – there's a lot more to it than you'd expect! Starting with the buzzing old town of Damascus, the streets of which are lined with cool bars and cafes, we'll make our way to the war-torn old town of Aleppo, stopping on the way at charming coffee stands and destroyed villages. Shrouded in a coat of destruction, we'll then visit Palmyra, which now requires special permission to get into, but despite its tragic recent history, is still a breath-taking site. A visit to the beach resort of Latakia, an afternoon relaxing in a hammam, and no doubt some genuine Syrian hospitality later, we'll return to Damascus, before ending the tour in Beirut.

HIGHLIGHTS:

Explore the vibrant old city of **Damascus**

Take in the spectacular ancient site of **Palmyra**

See how Syrians relax at the beach resort of **Latakia**

Get a first hand view of how Syria is rebuilding after the civil war

Excited? Come with SAIGA to Syria

Travel to the 'Stans and beyond

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Tour Details:

DATES: May 30th - June 7th 2022

PRICE: \$1495 USD (twin share)
Single Supplement \$250 USD



INCLUSIONS:

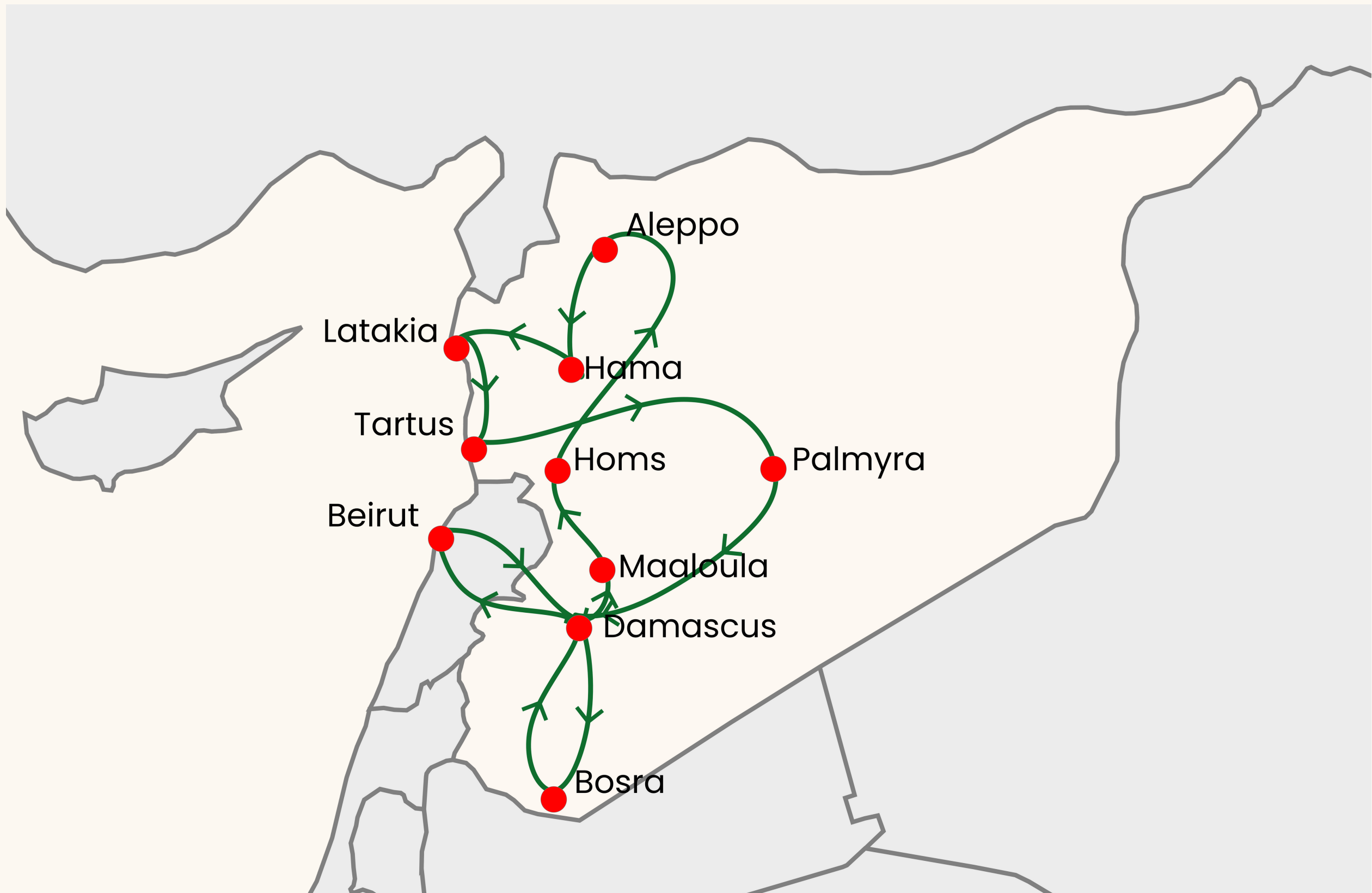
- Visa approval
- Accommodation in twin share at roughly 3 star hotels/guesthouses, breakfast included
- Transport, beginning and ending in Beirut
- Entrance fees to all sites mentioned in the itinerary, except hammam
- SAIGA guide and local guides

EXCLUSIONS:

- Visa fee (paid at the border on arrival)
- Departure tax (approx. \$5, paid at the border)
- Hammam (approx. \$10 per person)
- Meals other than breakfast
- Transport to and from Beirut
- Accommodation and any other services in Lebanon
- Personal expenses such as souvenirs or any optional activities
- PCR Test in Damascus to re-enter Lebanon (approx. \$50 per person)

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Day 1	Beirut - Damascus
Day 2	Damascus
Day 3	Damascus - Aleppo
Day 4	Aleppo
Day 5	Aleppo - Latakia
Day 6	Latakia
Day 7	Latakia - Homs
Day 8	Homs - Palmyra - Damascus
Day 9	Damascus - Bosra - Beirut

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Itinerary:

Day 1: Beirut - Damascus - Monday May 30th

- Meet in Beirut at 8:00. Meeting point to be advised closer to the time.
- Begin the drive to the Syrian border, which will take about two hours. We'll stop on the way for a quick breakfast and to buy any Lebanese snacks you might want.
- Cross the border, with a stop at Duty Free in No Man's Land, for some of the cheapest alcohol you've ever experienced.
- The whole border crossing will take around 1.5 hours.
- After clearing Syrian Customs and Immigration, we'll continue our drive to Damascus, another hour.
- Check into the hotel and have a short rest before our walking tour of the old part of the city.
- In the afternoon we'll explore Damascus' old town, bazaar, shopping areas and bar/restaurant street. You might like to try some local ice-cream or have a shawarma, and shisha is available just about everywhere.
- We'll also visit Ananias Church, Damascus' oldest church which happens to be underground, and Omayad Mosque, the main mosque in the centre of the city.
- Free time in the evening to enjoy Damascus' vibrant night-life.

Day 2: Damascus - Tuesday May 31st

- Leaving the centre of town, we'll drive to the outskirts of the city and you'll get your first glimpses of the destruction caused by the recent conflict, on our way to the October War Museum, dedicated to the war against Israel.
- We'll visit Kim Il Sung Park for some great photo opportunities. Syria and DPRK have had a long history of friendship and recently the Syrian Government decided to dedicate a park to the founding leader of DPRK, Kim Il Sung.
- Returning to the centre of town we'll visit the National Museum in the afternoon, followed by the Souk Al-Hamidiye and El-Azem Palace.
- One of the staples of any Middle Eastern destination, it's time to experience a hammam. Anyone who doesn't want to join in can either hang out with a shisha or a cup of tea inside the hammam's "albrani", translated into English as the "outside section", which is the first room of the hammam.
- It's a very cool experience for anyone, but especially for females it's a great way to see how Syrian women enjoy themselves free of headscarves and social pressures. There will be women of all ages, and they really make a day of it. Children, grandmothers and everyone in between take in snacks and drinks and stay there for hours smoking shishas, listening to music and relaxing.
- If you prefer you can return to the hotel or have free time around the bazaar.

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Day 3: Damascus - Maaloula - Aleppo - Wednesday June 1st

- Our first stop today will be at Maaloula, a small Christian town that was almost completely decimated by ISIS in 2014.
- We will visit a Greek Catholic church which was destroyed but has already largely been rebuilt.
- This will be your first opportunity to properly explore the destruction that is now so commonplace in Syria, at the Safir Hotel. Until 2014 it was a 4 star hotel with plenty of international guests, but is now a shell filled with rubble. There are still “do not disturb” signs, menus, folders of guest information, time sheets, crockery and all sorts of other things amongst the debris.
- We’ll walk through a canyon to the St Sergious and Bakhous Monastery where you’ll have the chance to meet nuns who were kidnapped and held hostage for several years.
- Homs, another of the worst affected places during the Syrian war.
- Stop on the way at the ruins of one of the many villages of “beehive houses” that are smattered across the Syrian desert. Built in the shape of beehives, the conical houses are made of mud and straw and are designed to keep the inhabitants cool in summer and warm in winter.
- We’ll stop at the St. Mary Church of the Holy Belt, the Seat of the Syriac Orthodox Church, where the Virgin Mary’s belt was kept until shortly before the war. Fortunately the belt was already removed before the church was looted and all the icons and artwork were burnt or stolen.
- Visit the grave of Frans van der Lugt, a Dutch Jesuit priest who established a community centre and farm in Homs where he worked with the homeless, disabled, sick and hungry, as well as for harmony between Christians and Muslims. Greatly respected by locals, he was then shot dead in the garden in 2014 by members of the Al-Nusra Front, and it is now a memorial to him and his work.
- Continue the drive to Aleppo with a couple of stops along the way, arriving in the early evening.
- Free time for dinner and the rest of the evening, however if you want to join us, we can take you for the best falafel in Syria.

Day 4: Aleppo - Thursday June 2nd

- Aleppo was arguably one of the worst affected cities during the Syrian war. Here you’ll get the chance to see some of the terrible destruction as well as the opportunity to witness the early stages of rebuilding that Syrians are now doing as they slowly return to their homes.
- Our first stop in the morning will be the famous Aleppo Castle. On the way in and out of the castle you’ll also be able to see the destroyed souk.
- There will be time to explore the souk and do some shopping if you like, or if you prefer, you can just enjoy a shisha or a coffee.
- We’ll then drive into the old town, one of the areas that was the worst affected by the war.
- Visit a shop which will satisfy all your Syrian souvenir desires – flags, tshirts, keyrings and Assad branded everything.

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Day 5: Aleppo - Hama - Latakia - Friday June 3rd

- Leaving Aleppo, today we'll drive to Latakia, with our first stop being in Hama where we'll visit the waterwheel there.
- Our next stop will be Ugarit, which became famous thanks to the discovery of tablets depicting the oldest consonantal alphabet known to date.
- Next we'll stop at Krak de Chaveliers. One of the most famous medieval Crusader castles first built by Kurds in the 11th Century, it's changed hands many times, but most recently was damaged in the Syrian civil war. Recaptured by the Syrian government in 2014 it's now safe and possible for us to visit the castle and the surrounding village of al-Husn, which is now mostly abandoned.
- Arriving in Latakia, we'll settle into the hotel before heading out for dinner and to enjoy some of the beach atmosphere in the evening.

Day 6: Salah al-Din Citadel - Latakia - Saturday June 4th

- One of the iconic Crusader castles, we'll visit the Citadel of Salah al-Din, a short drive from Latakia.
- Built on top of a rocky peak in the middle of the forest, the castle itself was built by the Franks, but the spot had been a fortified stronghold for the Phoenicians, Alexander the Great and the Byzantines.
- We'll return to Latakia for another fun night at the beach.

Day 7: Latakia - Tartus - Safita Tower - Homs - Sunday June 5th

- Head to Amrit, the classical Marathus, a Phoenician fort near Tartous.
- We'll stop at Safita Tower (Chastel Blanc), another Crusader castle, which we'll climb to the top of to get amazing views over the surrounding region, all the way from the Mediterranean Sea, to the snow covered mountains of Lebanon, and you can even see the city of Tripoli in Northern Lebanon.
- In the evening we'll head to Homs and spend the night there.

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Day 8: Homs - Palmyra - Damascus - Monday June 6th

- Today we'll visit Palmyra, probably Syria's most famous site.
- Once a lush city on the Silk Road, Palmyra was even briefly its own empire in the 3rd Century, stretching from Turkey to Egypt. Although the old city was ruined, it was famously in spectacular condition and exceptionally well preserved. Sadly though in 2015 it fell under the control of ISIS, and a lot of the buildings were razed to the ground.
- Until recently it wasn't possible to visit the ancient site, however it is now possible, providing you have the correct permission.
- Leaving Palmyra, we'll drive back to Damascus.
- Arrive in Damascus in the late afternoon and free time for the rest of the day.
- Overnight in Damascus.

Day 9: Damascus - Bosra - Beirut - Tuesday June 7th

- In the morning we'll do some last minute exploring of Damascus, including a stop at the iconic "I love Damascus" sign and a drive past the Presidential Palace.
- Farewelling Damascus, we'll head back towards the Lebanese border. Including the border crossing and a few stops, we'll arrive back in Beirut in the early evening.
- Anyone catching a flight this evening can be taken directly to the airport, otherwise we'll be dropped off back in the centre of Beirut.

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