

# Syrian Automobile Club Notes for Short Term Visitors

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## Syria

**Area : 185.000 square kilometers**

**Population : 18 million**

**Capital : Damascus**

**President : Dr Bashar Al-Assad**

**Local Time : GMT + 2 hours (winter); GMT + 3 hours (summer)**

**Language : Arabic, English is widely spoken in Syria**

**Currency : Syrian Pound (100 piastres = 1 Syrian Pound)**

**£1= SP 85 (approx)**

**\$1= SP 47 (approx)**

**Euro= SP 66 (approx)**

## **Geography**

Syria is eastern end of the Mediterranean. It is bordered in the south-west by Lebanon and Palestine, in the south by Jordan, in the east by Iraq and in the north by Turkey. The major cities are the capital Damascus, Aleppo, Homs and Lattakia.

## **Climate**

The climate is Mediterranean with hot, dry summer and mild, wet winters close to the coast. Inland it gets progressively drier and less hospitable. In Damascus average temperatures in June to September: minimum 15°C to 42° C maximum, November to April: minimum 0°C to 20 ° C maximum.

## **Visas**

Most visitors entering Syria must obtain a visa, available at Syrian consulates outside the country. If the duration of the visit is two weeks or more it will be necessary to register at local police station.

## **Insurance**

Visitors are strongly recommended to take out insurance to cover personal affects and medical expenses.

## **Airport**

Most visitors arrive at Damascus Airport, about 30 Kms from the center of town. The airport has well-stocked and reasonably priced duty free shop that passengers can use on arrival or departure. Syrian currency is not accepted at duty free.

## **Arrival Formalities**

Upon arrival an entry card must be completed and handed to the Immigration Officer. The card will be stamped and returned. This should be retained and given to the Immigration Officer upon departure.

## **Airport Tax**

For non-Syrians there is an airport departure tax of SP1500 (35\$) normally included in the airline ticket price.

## **Passport**

The hotel will normally keep the passport in their safe. As a visitor a photocopy of the passport should be carried for identification purposes when outside of the hotel.

## **Currency**

The currency is the Syrian pound (SP) which is known locally as Lira. There are 100 Piasters to the 1 SP.

Foreign currency is now available at hotels and cash could be withdrawn from any ATM machine. Credit cards are accepted major hotels but not in regular shops.

### **Business hours**

Government offices and banks are open from 08.00 to 14.00 Saturday to Thursday. In the private sector, offices are usually open from 08.30 till 17.00 Saturday to Thursday.

### **Transport**

Taxis are the most convenient form of transport. Most taxis have meters and visitors should always ask driver about the cost of the journey beforehand. Taxis from hotels and the airport charge a premium. Cars may be hired using a valid international driving license.

### **Language**

Arabic is the mother tongue of most people in Syria although English is fairly widely understood and increasingly popular particularly in areas frequented by visitors.

### **Tipping and bargaining**

Tipping is expected in better restaurants. Bargaining is an integral part of buying in Syria especially in the souqs (markets) and bazaars. Prices will be inflated to allow for this.

### **Health**

It is advisable to be immunized against Cholera, Tetanus, Diphtheria, Typhoid and Hepatitis. Care should be taken over food and drink. It is advisable not to drink tap water. As a general rule, if a place looks clean, well run and appears to be

used by other visitors or locals then the food will probably be OK.

## **Crime**

Theft is rare in Syria and most visitors will find the general absence of crime refreshing. Syria is generally a safe place to travel in. visitors can walk around at any time of the day or night without encountering problems. Most Syrians are friendly and hospitable, However, as in anywhere in the world, sensible precautions should be taken to protect valuables.

## **Electricity**

The electric current in Syria is 220 volts AC, 50 HZ, and plugs are the round two-pin variety.

## **Hotels**

The large, international hotels accept credit cards but in the smaller hotels visitors will be required to pay in US\$ or Euro cash.

## **Newspapers**

English language newspapers and magazines can be bought from the main international hotels, and from certain kiosks and shops. The Syrian Times is published daily. Foreign newspapers can be purchased in many places.

## **Useful guidebooks**

Jordan and Syrian (Lonely Planet)

Damien Simonis & Hugh Finlay 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, 1997

Syria (The Rough Guide)

Andrew Beattie & Timothy Pepper 1<sup>st</sup> edition, 1998

Syria & Lebanon (Gadogan)

Michael Haag 1<sup>st</sup> edition. 1995

Syria Revealed (Boxer Puplicing)

Anthony king 1<sup>st</sup> edition, 1995 Jordan

Syria & Lebanon

Ivan Mannheim & Dave Winter      1<sup>st</sup> edition, 1998

Handbook (Footprint)

Monument of Syria, An Historical

Ross Burns 1<sup>st</sup> edition, 1994 Guide (I.B. Tauris)