



## DAMASCUS | TO EXPLORE HIDDEN RICHES

Damascus, the oldest continuously inhabited city in the world, is a maze of tiny alleyways, simple mud-colored walls decorated with bright patches and ancient doorways, behind which its people, Muslim, Christian, and Jewish alike live quiet, simple lives in harmony. Follow the faithful through this ancient city of architectural wonders and a long-maintained mystique.

### DAY 1

#### IN TRANSIT

16:15

Arrive Damascus  
Transfer to Beit Al Mamlouka  
Check in & chill out

19:00

Dinner @ Naranj

*Located under the Roman Arch, Naranj serves excellent mezze including mekanek, tender sausages soaked in a light lemon broth.*

Stay

BEIT AL MAMLOUKA

Tucked into a windy cobblestone street in the Christian quarter of the old city, this luxury 17<sup>th</sup> century boutique hotel boasts only 8 bedrooms. A 230-year-old fresco adorns the ceiling and citrus trees line the courtyard. The heart of Damascus lies just outside of Beit's heavy wooden door.



#### SUGGESTED ROUTE

New York [JFK]— Cairo, Egypt [CAI]  
Cairo [CAI]— Damascus, Syria [DAM]

### DAY 2

#### DAMASCUS

09:00

Breakfast

Enjoy a delicious Middle Eastern breakfast

10:00

Meander with Mohammed

*Spend the day with our own local expert boasts a flowing Islamic robe, skillfully tied turban, a wispy beard, a wealth of Arabic wisdom . . . and an Oxford-perfect accent. Mohammed will introduce you to his Damascus.*

11:00

Hamiddiya Souq

*Weave through the alleyways of the Arab Quarter to the Hamiddiya Souq, the largest souk in Syria. Taste the nuts and candies, smell the spices, marvel at the antiquities and delicate textiles.*

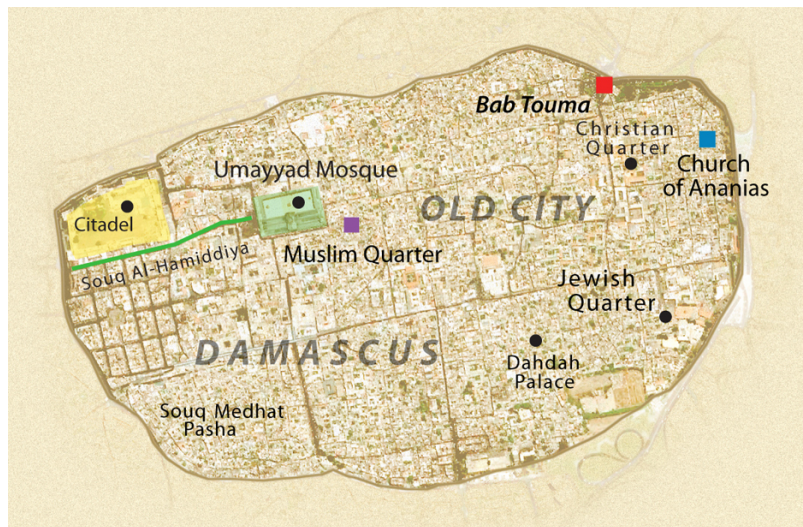
12:00 Lunch  
*Let Mohammad take you to Beit Jabri, a TO favorite located near the souk. This casual café, housed in the lovely courtyard of a splendid old Damascene house, serves up Syrian standards like mezze and kebabs, alongside international dishes.*

14:00 Umayyad Mosque  
*Find your way to Umayyad Mosque in the late afternoon and stay to observe afternoon prayers. The spiritual and historical heart of the Old City, the mosque was once a Roman temple and a church.*

16:00 Bid adieu to Mohammad

18:30 Dinner @ Leila's Restaurant & Terrace  
*Just outside of the mosque, climb up a narrow staircase and dine at Leila's Restaurant & Terrace. Overlooking Umayyad Mosque, this restaurant has arguably the best view in Damascus.*

Stay BEIT AL MAMLOUKA



**DAY 3 SEDNAYA**

09:00 Breakfast

10:00 Drive to Sednaya  
*Spread out over a hilltop & surrounded by vineyards and olive groves, Sednaya, located just 17 miles north of the city of Damascus, has long held it as the site where the grave of Abel, slain brother of Cain, lies.*

10:30 Convent of Virgin Mary  
*The world's second most popular pilgrimage site after Jerusalem.*

13:00 Baghdad Café  
 Stop by this café for lunch & a glass of chai

19:00 Dinner @ Il Circo  
*Enjoy an authentic Italian dinner at this venue of choice for the social set in the city.*

21:00 Cham Mahal Art Café  
*Grab a bottle of the Chateau Ksara, a terrific Lebanese wine, and listen to some live jazz*

Stay BEIT AL MAMLOUKA

**DAY 4****DAMASCUS**

09:00

Breakfast

10:00

Tekkiye Mosque

*This mosque & bazaar complex are some of the finest example of Ottoman architecture in Damascus.*

11:00

Nabatean Ruins

13:00

Lunch @ Grape Leaves Cafe

*Two guys, six tables and some good ol' sheikh al mahsh. This simple Middle Eastern home cooking is well worth the wait.*

15:00

Gallery Tour

Discover the intricacies of Syrian art with a gallery tour of Straight Street and Al Amin Street, and meet with local artists.

19:00

Al Halabi

*Experience the best of the Aleppo cuisine of Northern Syria, at Al Halabi with.*

21:00

Z Bar

*Check out the rooftop bar at the Omayyad Hotel after dinner. This Damascus institution is a favorite among locals and a great place to grab a drink.*

Stay

BEIT AL MAMLOUKA

**DAY 5****IN TRANSIT**



**to: get ready**

U.S. citizens with passports must obtain a visa from the Syrian Embassy prior to travel. Visas are \$131 and are valid for three months from the date of issuance. Guide books are available by several companies catering to both the backpacking crowd as well as the higher end traveler. Very few banks will change traveler's checks so it's best to leave them at home, bring US dollars, and withdraw cash using your ATM card.

**to: pack**

Located in the high desert, Damascus has quite varied seasons—summers are hot and winters cold. Packing will depend on season, however, for any time of year, nice casual attire and comfortable walking shoes are a must. Women must wear long trousers or skirts and cover their shoulders. Pick up inexpensive brightly colored scarves locally as most mosques require women to cover their hair for entry. Even in the summer, a light sweater or jacket in the evenings might be necessary.

**to: get there**

Most people enter Syria by air—flights arrive at the Damascus International Airport (26km outside of town) from many connections in Europe and the Middle East. It is also possible to cross by land from neighboring Turkey, Lebanon or Jordan. From Al-Samariyeh terminal in central Damascus, private bus companies have frequent services to Beirut (approx \$4.50 and 46 hours), departing every hour, plus several buses daily to Amman (approx. \$9 and 5-7 hours, depending on border formalities). Travel by “service-taxi,” a shared taxi with three to four other passengers, is considerably faster for border formalities.

**to: get around**

Once in the Aeolians, inter-island travel is all by boat—ferries depart regularly between islands, and private yacht hires are available through travel agents or high-end hotels. A car is rarely necessary. Most of the islands are quite small and compact. Rentals are available on the larger islands of Lipari and Salina; however, if you want your own wheels, scooters are more readily available. Panarea is car-free. Small motorboats can also be rented directly from the islands' fishermen to explore the stunning coastlines and tiny islets surrounding Panarea and Filicudi.

**to: stay there**

Accommodation in Damascus is as varied as the city. The best large hotels lie outside of the Old City, near chic shopping and café district, and the National Museum. Of those, the Four Seasons stands out with excellent views, service, comfort and spa. The Omayyad Hotel is a more traditional Damascus

institution and still very popular. The rooftop Z Bar is one of the hottest spots in the city and the Omayyad a favorite place for weddings on the weekends—be careful of the top two floors as the festivities will keep you awake until the wee hours. Another options is to try one of the new boutique hotels popping up in the Old City. Built in traditional Damascene homes, these hotels are atmospheric, though lacking some of the amenities of larger properties. Hotel Talisman, [www.hoteltalisman.net](http://www.hoteltalisman.net), and Beit Al Mamlouka, [www.almamlouka.com](http://www.almamlouka.com), are top of this list.

**to: eat and drink**

Damascus is full of culinary delights—people always seem to be snacking in the city. A walk through the souq can fill one’s belly with roasted almonds and cashews, pomegranate juice, fresh bread baked with sesame seeds, zaatar (an oregano spice blend) or tomato sauce, and falafel sandwiches. While restaurants span from traditional locations in old Damascene houses and buffet-style with sufi dancing to fancy hilltop places with sweeping views. Some standouts are Jabri House, popular with locals and tourists alike, a casual café serving up Syrian mezze in the lovely courtyard of a splendid old Damascene house—the fresh juices are delicious; Leila's Restaurant, the best place for sunset mint-lemonade, overlooking Umayyad Mosque; Elissar for high-end dining; and any of the restaurants overlooking Damascus from Qassioun Hill.

**to: see and do**

Damascus is a city to get lost in. While full of religious sites to visit and a few notable museums, Damascus’ most valuable treasure is its people. Be sure not to miss an opportunity to linger in a shop chatting with the owner or have coffee in someone’s home. Sites not to miss are ancient Umayyad Mosque, the Damascus Citadel, the Church of St. Paul, Hamidiyya Souq, Azem Palace (a typical Damascene house), Historical Museum of Damascus located just outside of the old city in a house with eight richly decorated rooms off a central courtyard, and the National Museum.

**to: take home**

It may come as a surprise to many, but Damascus is a shopper’s paradise. The Old City is full of antique stores brimming with carpets, textiles, Bedouin jewelery, silver, gold, Damascene furniture inlaid with mother of pearl, embroidered table furnishings, and more. All at low, low prices with vendors ready to bargain.

**to: learn more**

Guidebooks are available by several companies catering to the backpacking crowd as well as the higher end traveler. The Syrian Embassy ([www.syrianembassy.us](http://www.syrianembassy.us)) has quite a bit of useful background and information on its website. Many books have been written on different periods of Syrian history; however, *Syria—A Historical and Cultural Guide*, by Warwick Ball, and *Monuments of Syria—An Historical Guide*, by Ross Burns, will give you a good overview.