

Syria



The red is symbolic of the Hasemite dynasty and the struggle for independence.

The white is representative of the Umayyad dynasty and a bright future.

The green stars represent the Fatimid dynasty, with one star standing for Egypt and the other for Syria. The stars represent the previous union between these two countries.

Syria, officially the Syrian Arab Republic, is a country in Western Asia, bordering Lebanon, Israel, Turkey, Iraq and Jordan to the southwest.



- Syria is home to one of the oldest civilizations in the world, with a rich artistic and cultural heritage. Ebla, a city in Syria that's thought to have existed around 3,000 B.C. is one of the oldest settlements to be excavated.
- Damascus, the capital of Syria, is the oldest continuously lived-in city in the world, human habitation dates back to 9,000 BC.
- More than 18,389,000 people live in Syria, although many people have fled the country in recent years due to the civil war. Its official currency is Syrian pound (SYP).
- Throughout ancient times, Syria was occupied and ruled by several empires, including the Egyptians, Hittites, Sumerians, Mitanni, Assyrians, Babylonians, Canaanites, Phoenicians, Arameans, Amorites, Persians, Greeks, Romans, Ottoman Empire, France and finally the Arabics.

People in Syria **speak** Arabic, Armenian, Kurdish, Circassian, Kurdish, French and English.

Aleppo, in the North East, is the **Second** largest city in Syria and had a population of 2.1 million in 2012. Now is completely destroyed because of the war.



The highest point in Syria is **Mount Hermon** which is 2,814 meters high.



While there are over 2,000 mosques in the city and most of the residents are **Muslim**, at least 10% are **Christian** and there is even a small **Jewish** community.



Sports are very popular among Damascenes. **Soccer** is the number one pastime, accompanied by swimming, basketball, wrestling, boxing, and tennis.



The most refugees from any country come from Syria. This makes it the worst refugee situation since the genocide in Rwanda. More than half of the Syrian refugees are under 18 years old.

As of September 2013, over 1 million **children** have become refugees. They have fled the country and live in tents or makeshift shelters with other people. Conditions are crowded. They don't go to school and they often don't have enough to eat. Many children have died in the war.



The country is currently at **civil war**, since 15 March 2011, and more than 100,000 people have been killed.



The city has **125 monuments** from different periods of its history.

- One of the most spectacular is the **8th-century Great Mosque of the Umayyads**, built on the site of an Assyrian sanctuary. Located in Damascus, the Umayyad Mosque is one of the largest and oldest mosques in the world

- .After Alexander the Great's conquest in 333 BCE, Damascus became part of the Hellenistic world for almost a thousand years.

Altheimat, Damascus

- Many civilizations created the city: Hellenistic, Roman, Byzantine, and Islamic. In spite of Islam's prevailing influence, traces of earlier cultures particularly the Roman and Byzantine continue to be seen in the city to this day.

- After being part of the Ottoman Empire, Syria became a French protectorate, and there is a lot of French influence throughout the country. During the Middle Ages, the used the Chevaliers Castle as a base during their crusades against the Muslims, with evidence of this dating back to 1271. Today, this is one of the best-preserved medieval castles in the world.



Crusader Castle, Damascus

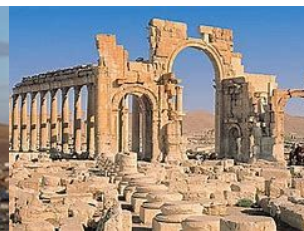


Damascus Gate

Umayyad Mosque is considered the fourth holiest place in the world by Muslims, and it is built on the site of a Christian church dedicated to Saint John the Baptist, recognized by both Christians and Muslims.



In the 3rd century AD, **Queen Zenobia** ruled over the **Palmyrene Empire** in Syria. She was a rival to Rome. She spoke several languages and was known as a fierce “warrior queen”. They were independent of the Roman Empire



A fun fact about Syria is that Damascus used to be a major stop on the “silk road” to and from Asia, the way that silk was imported into Europe. It also gives its name to the fibers known as “damask”.

The line of the walls of the old city forms the boundary of the property. **The heart of Damascus’s old city**, which contains most of the city’s historical monuments, is Hellenistic in origin, with significant Roman additions and modifications



It isn’t just Muslim architectural gems which can be found in Syria. The **Church of Saint Simeon Stylites** is the oldest surviving **Byzantine church** in the world and it dates back to the 5th century. It’s dedicated to a hermit who lived atop a pillar so that he would be alone from the world.



Also in Syria, the ancient city of **Bosra** (which is a **UNESCO** World Heritage site) is home to a very well-preserved Roman theater along with its stage buildings. It’s a massive theater which could seat 15,000 people and it’s been dated back to the 2nd century, an interesting fact about Syria.



The **fortified medieval palace** in the center of Aleppo is another **UNESCO** World Heritage site of Syria. The hill it’s situated on was inhabited back in 3000 BC, and then by the Greeks, Byzantines, Ayyubids and Mamluks. The construction we can admire today is from the Ayyubid period, one of the oldest and largest castles in the world.



Did you Know: There are only three places in the world where Western Aramaic is still spoken, all in Syria. This is the language which Jesus Christ spoke. You can find Aramaic speakers in Maaloula and two nearby villages.



Arts and Crafts from Syria

Syria **exports** a wide range of products including petroleum products, crude oil, minerals, cotton fiber, clothing, textiles, wheat, fruits and vegetables, live animals and meat.

Al-Aghabani- The art of making this handmade textile with its distinctive gold and silver embroideries originated in Damascus more than 150 years ago.



Damascene Brocade is a rich shuttle-woven fabric made from natural silk with gold and silver threads



Copper Engraving-

Damascene Jewish artisans were known for making the finest copper engraved vessels.



Mother of Pearl Marquetry

The Damascus school for mother of pearl marquetry is famous worldwide for producing the finest furniture and other decorative pieces.

The oak trees that were once abundant in the famous Orchards of Damascus together with oysters from the Euphrates river have over the centuries supplied Damascene artisans with all that they need for this handicraft.



Damascus Steel with its distinctive pattern and properties had been forged exclusively in Damascus since the 3rd century for use in swords and daggers



Glass Blowing - The art of glass blowing is a very interesting and enjoyable process to watch, as it involves a high level of skill and a beautiful finished product at the end. The process was developed by the Phoenicians in ancient Syria and has relatively remained unchanged throughout the ages.



The Damascene Oud

Wooden musical instruments have been known in Syria since the Phoenicians times.

In fact, the oldest historical musical notation was discovered in the ancient Phoenician city of Ugarit on the northern shores of the Syrian coastline.

The art of making these instruments kept evolving until the middle of the 19th century when the Damascene Oud took its present form.

Today, few Damascene artisans still make this highly sought after instrument, which is widely used in traditional Syrian and Arabic music.



Oriental Rugs

The Bedouins of the Syrian desert have historically used the most basic of looms to manually spin and weave rugs from cotton, wool and goat hair.

The skills of this craft were picked up by Damascene artisans who have revived the art of using the old wooden loom to make decorative rugs.



Food and deserts

Dolma (stuffed vine leaves)



Baklava



Kebab Halabi (grilled meat/kebab)



Basbousa (semolina cake)



Makdous (oil-cured eggplants)



Kubbeh.



Syrian cuisine mainly uses eggplant, zucchini, garlic, meat (mostly from lamb and sheep), sesame seeds, rice, chickpeas, fava beans, lentils, cabbage, cauliflower, vine leaves, pickled turnips, cucumbers, tomatoes, olive oil, lemon juice, mint, pistachios, honey and fruits.

Ballourieh (pistachio-filled Baklava)



History:

SYRIA is home to one of the oldest civilizations in the world, with a rich artistic and cultural heritage. From its ancient roots to its recent political instability and the Syrian Civil War, the country has a complex and, at times, tumultuous history.

ANCIENT SYRIA

Modern-day Syria, a country located in the Middle East on the shore of the Mediterranean Sea, is one of the most ancient inhabited regions on Earth.

The oldest human remains found in Syria date back to roughly 700,000 years ago. Archeologists have uncovered skeletons and bones of **Neanderthals** that lived in the region during this period.

Ebla, a city in Syria that's thought to have existed around 3,000 B.C., is one of the oldest settlements to be excavated. Throughout ancient times, Syria was occupied and ruled by several empires, including the Egyptians, Hittites, Sumerians, Mitanni, Assyrians, Babylonians, Canaanites, Phoenicians, Arameans, Amorites, Persians, Greeks and Romans.

Ancient Syria was a region referred to often in the Bible. In one well-known account, the apostle Paul cited the “road to Damascus”—the largest city in Syria—as the place where he had visions that led to his Christian conversion.

When the Roman Empire fell, Syria became part of the Eastern or Byzantine Empire.

The Byzantine Period

The Byzantine Period in Syria started in the 4th century with the division of the Roman Empire into the Latin-speaking Western Roman Empire and the Greek-speaking Eastern Byzantine Empire.

The Byzantine Period lasted until the middle of the 7th century, when the Arabs entered Damascus and established the Umayyad Empire.

During this Period, Syria was the front line defense of the Byzantine Empire against the Persians.

Continuous military pressure on this important defense line eventually led to a weakened grip which allowed the Arabs to take over Syria.

In 637 A.D., Muslim armies defeated the Byzantine Empire and took control of Syria. The Islamic religion spread quickly throughout the region, and its different factions rose to power.

The Umayyad Empire



The Umayyad Empire is the largest Empire the world has ever seen.

Under the banner of a new religion, Islam, Arab tribes took advantage of the Byzantines weakening grip over Syria and moved northwards from the Arabian Peninsula to take Damascus in 634.

The new rulers of Damascus worked with Syria's majority Christian population to establish a new empire.

At its peak, the Umayyad Empire stretched from the borders of China all the way to present day Spain with Damascus as its Capital.

Damascus eventually became the capital of the Islamic world, but was replaced by Baghdad in Iraq around **750 A.D.** This change led to economic decline in Syria, and for the next several centuries, the region became unstable and was ruled by various groups.

In **1516**, the **Ottoman Empire** conquered Syria and remained in power until 1918. This was considered a relatively peaceful and stable period in Syria's history.

During **World War I**, French and British diplomats secretly agreed to divide the Ottoman Empire into zones, as part of the Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916.

Under the Sykes-Picot Agreement, most Arab lands under the rule of the Ottoman Empire were divided into British or French spheres of influence with the conclusion of World War I.

British and Arab troops captured Damascus and Aleppo in 1918, and **the French took control of modern-day Syria and Lebanon in 1920**. These arrangements put an end to roughly 400 years of Ottoman rule in the region.

The French reign led to uprisings and revolts among the people in Syria. From 1925 to 1927, Syrians united against the French occupation in what's now known as the Great Syrian Revolt.

In 1936, France and Syria negotiated a treaty of independence, which allowed Syria to remain independent but gave France military and economic power.

During **World War II**, British and Free French troops occupied Syria—but shortly after the war ended, Syria officially became **an independent country in 1946**.

In 1961, Syria claimed independence from France. In 1970, **Hafez al-Assad** took power. His family has controlled Syria ever since. The country has continued to have conflicts internally, as well as with other countries, such as Israel and Lebanon.

