

# Syria Directory

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## ACCOMMODATION

Throughout this book we've listed accommodation prices for Syria using both the Syrian pound (£) and US dollars (US\$)

### BOOK ACCOMMODATION ONLINE

For more accommodation reviews and recommendations by Lonely Planet authors, check out the online booking service at [www.lonelyplanet.com](http://www.lonelyplanet.com). You'll find the true, insider lowdown on the best places to stay. Reviews are thorough and independent. Best of all, you can book online.

## PRACTICALITIES

### Electricity

- You'll need the European **two-round-pin plug** to connect to the region's electricity supply (220VAC, 50Hz).

### Newspapers & Magazines

- Syria's only English-language daily newspaper is the government-owned **Syria Times** ([www.syriatimes.tishreen.info](http://www.syriatimes.tishreen.info))
- **Syria Today** ([www.syria-today.com](http://www.syria-today.com)) is the country's first independently produced English-language magazine and covers economic, political and social development.

### Radio

- In Damascus you can listen to the **BBC World Service** on AM 1323.

### Weights & Measures

- Syria uses the **metric system**. Basic conversion charts are given on the inside front cover of this book.

as quoted by hotels and hostels. Note that in some top-end hotels they will insist that you pay with US dollars.

Throughout this book we have divided accommodation into budget, midrange and top-end categories; the corresponding price ranges are detailed below.

A budget double room will cost under S£1785 (US\$35), a midrange hotel room S£1785 to S£5100 (US\$35 to US\$100), and top-end hotels over S£5100 (US\$100).

Rooms in cheap hotels are often let on a share basis and will have two to four beds. If you want the room to yourself you may have to pay for all beds, or an intermediate sum – try to bargain.

It's worth knowing that during the low season (December to March) and outside the peak holiday seasons (around major religious festivals, such as Eid al-Adha), big discounts are frequently available in Syrian hotels and it's always worth asking about special offers. Prices in some midrange and

top-end hotels also go up by as much as 40% during the Islamic religious holidays due to an influx of Gulf Arabs; see Holidays (p231) for more details. In Damascus, note that religious tourism (mainly from Iran) sees some decent budget and midrange hotels booked up well in advance.

For more details on planning your trip see Itineraries (p17).

## Camping

Official camping opportunities in Syria are limited – apart from camping on the roof of a backpacker hostel. If you do decide to camp ‘freelance’, especially in remote areas, be aware that temperatures can drop quite low in the winter months, wild dogs can cause you some concerns and the locals will think you’re nuts.

## Hotels

### BUDGET

The quality of budget hotel options across Syria is uneven. Some cities have numerous budget lodgings, such as Aleppo, while others that probably should be on the tourist trail have limited options. Considering this, it’s worth planning day trips to sights from places such as Damascus, Aleppo, Homs and Palmyra.

One of the biggest drawbacks with budget accommodation in Syria is that rooms often open onto common rooms with blaring TVs, or overlook busy streets. One word: earplugs! Another drawback is bathroom and toilet facilities that are either inadequate or inoperable. During the hotter months, if there isn’t a ceiling fan, you should be able to borrow a floor-standing fan.

### MIDRANGE

Some properties in Syria that should be charging budget rates just scrape into the midrange level – but because they offer decent facilities or service they are worth reviewing. As it stands, midrange hotels vary wildly in terms of facilities; some extras to look for include air-con, satellite TV and a fridge (handy if you’re self-catering).

### TOP END

The top end of Syria’s accommodation has improved in both Damascus and Aleppo, with both new boutique and five-star properties having opened their doors. Top-end

## POPULATION DATA

The population data in this book is based on the best resource material available, but due to the fluctuation of population numbers in both Syria and Lebanon, the figures may not be accurate at the time of your visit. The figures will, however, will be enough to tell you if a destination is a village or a metropolis.

hotels generally have air-con, satellite TV, minibar, and a restaurant or hotel bar. Many have health clubs and swimming pools. International chain hotels tend to have better facilities and staff.

The countrywide chain of state-owned five-stars, the Cham Palaces (pronounced ‘sham’) get the tour buses, but are of little interest to independent travellers. The notable exception is the Cham Palace in Damascus (p105).

Credit cards are accepted at all top-end hotels.

## Rental Accommodation

The best way to find long-term rental apartments in Syria is to ask around. Foreign students living in Damascus recommend **House of Damascus** ([www.houseofdamsacus.com](http://www.houseofdamsacus.com)) for finding rooms to rent.

## ACTIVITIES

### Cycling

The big cities of Syria are filled with anarchic traffic, poor surfaces and high noise levels, but away from urban areas the mountains and deserts are excellent for cycle touring. In particular, the Dead Cities (p198) and the areas around Palmyra (p201) and Qala’at al-Hosn (Krak des Chevaliers; see p136) are super for cycling.

If you decide to bring your own bicycle, remember that as well as being reckless, Syrian drivers are not used to bicycles. Be extremely careful and don’t assume that you have been spotted. Also keep in mind that bicycle shops are almost nonexistent outside the capital cities, so you need to bring everything you are likely to need, including spare spokes, chain, cables, tubes and tyres. On the flipside, you’ll be warmly welcomed wherever you go – and will probably have trouble getting away each morning! A