

SYRIA

Syria officially the **Syrian Arab Republic** is an Arab country in Southwest Asia, bordering Lebanon and the Mediterranean Sea to the west, Israel to the southwest, Jordan to the south, Iraq to the east, and Turkey to the north.

The name Syria, formerly comprised the entire region of the Levant, while the modern state encompasses the site of several ancient kingdoms and empires, including the Eblan civilization of the third millennium BC. In the Islamic era, its capital city, Damascus, was the seat of the Umayyad Empire and a provincial capital of the Mamluk Empire. Damascus is widely regarded as one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world.

History

Following the breakup of the Ottoman Empire during World War I, France administered Syria until its independence in 1946. The country lacked political stability, however, and experienced a series of military coups during its first decades. Syria united with Egypt in February 1958 to form the United Arab Republic. In September 1961, the two entities separated, and the Syrian Arab Republic was reestablished. In November 1970, Hafiz al-ASAD, a member of the Socialist Ba'th Party and the minority Alawite sect, seized power in a bloodless coup and brought political stability to the country. In the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, Syria lost the Golan Heights to Israel. During the 1990s, Syria and Israel held occasional peace talks over its return. Following the death of President al-ASAD, his son, Bashar al-ASAD, was approved as president by popular referendum in July 2000. Syrian troops - stationed in Lebanon since 1976 in an ostensible peacekeeping role - were withdrawn in April 2005. During the July-August 2006 conflict between Israel and Hizballah, Syria placed its military forces on alert but did not intervene directly on behalf of its ally Hizballah.

Geography

Syria consists mostly of arid plateau, although the northwest part of the country bordering the Mediterranean is fairly green. The Northeast of the country "Al Jazira" and the South "Hawran" are important agricultural areas. The Euphrates, Syria's most important river, crosses the country in the east. It is considered to be one of the fifteen states that comprise the so-called "Cradle of Civilization".

The climate in Syria is dry and hot, and winters are mild. Because of the country's elevation, snowfall does occasionally occur during winter. Petroleum in commercial quantities was first discovered in the northeast in 1956.

Many aspects of the economy including refining, ports operation, air transportation, power generation, and water distribution, remain firmly controlled by the government

Climate

Syria has a Mediterranean climate with hot, dry summers (June to August) and mild, wet winters (December to February) close to the coast. Inland it gets progressively drier and more inhospitable. On the coast, average daily temperatures range from 29°C in summer to 10°C in winter and the annual rainfall is about 760mm. On the cultivated steppe area, temperatures average 35°C in summer and 12°C in winter.

Population: 20,178,485

note: in addition, about 40,000 people live in the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights - 20,000 Arabs and about 20,000 Israeli settlers

Currency: Syrian pounds (SYP)

Getting there and around

Syria's main international airport is just outside Damascus and has regular connections to other cities in the Middle East, Europe, Africa and Asia on a variety of European- and Middle East-based airlines. There are other international airports at **Aleppo** and Lattakia,

The Syrian railway system was neglected for many decades, but is improving due to recent government investment, including the purchase of new French-made locomotives. That said, buses are still usually the better option for getting around the country

Syria has a well-developed road network, and bus transport is frequent and cheap. Distances are short, so journeys rarely take more than a few hours. Minibuses operate on many of the shorter routes.

You'll need an International Driving Permit (IDP) if you decide to drive in Syria. Traffic runs on the right-hand side of the road.

More information

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