

# A JOURNEY TO SYRIA

**With Canon Barry Wright**

23rd April - 2nd May 2010



**A nine-day tour featuring stays in Damascus, Palmyra, Lattakia and Aleppo**



**McCabe Pilgrimages**



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I invite you to join me in Syria in spring 2010 for a pilgrimage which will cover many of the significant religious and cultural sites.

*“As for Damascus, she is the Paradise of the Orient, and dawning place of her resplendent light ... and the bride of the cities which we have unveiled.”*

So said the traveller Ibn Battuta visiting Damascus in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Damascus claims to be the oldest continuously inhabited city in the world and Aleppo makes the same claim! Certainly both have long and fascinating histories. We spend three nights in Damascus, thoroughly exploring the ancient city; the vast Omayyad Mosque containing a shrine which reputedly holds the head of John the Baptist, Straight Street where St. Paul was lowered from the walls; the Azem's Palace and the Great Bazaar.

We also call at the picturesque Christian villages of Maaloula and Sednaya; both were early Christian centres and in Maaloula, until recently, Aramaic was spoken.

Palmyra, said to have been founded by King Solomon and ruled by the Assyrians and the Persians was part of Alexander the Great's empire and thrived on the Silk Route trade. Re-crossing the desert we will see the ancient water wheels of Hama and climb to the mountain top Crusader fortress of Crac des Chevaliers.

In Aleppo we stay in the lovely old traditional mansion of Dar Zamaria and from there visit the Citadel, mosque and stone vaulted bazaar. We see the 5<sup>th</sup> century church of St. Simeon Stylites who, for 38 years, lived on top of a pillar, preaching to pilgrims who flocked to the site.

The pilgrimage will mix the holy and the holiday - there will be times for worship and reflection but also for fun and relaxation. There will be time in both Damascus and Aleppo for exploring and shopping - as well as visiting many of the principal sites.

I do hope that you will come and be part of this fascinating pilgrimage.

*Barry Wright*



## TOUR INFORMATION

**The cost of this tour is £1,495.** Our hotels are a mix of three and four star local grade and are all of a very acceptable standard and chosen for their location or atmosphere. All rooms have private facilities. The tour is **full-board** and we have included all meals in the standard price with breakfast and dinner at our hotel and lunch at a convenient restaurant on each touring day. Flights are with British Midland between London Heathrow Airport and Damascus. Touring is in air-conditioned coaches and we will be accompanied throughout by a local guide. We have also included all entrance fees, all airport and departure taxes. A group visa is issued free of charge on arrival in Syria (we arrange this on your behalf prior to departure).

The only extras to budget for are the journeys to and from London Heathrow and travel insurance premium (if required) at £49. The group gratuity fund contribution is £40 (to be collected by your tour leader in Syria). Single rooms are available and the charge is £255. Please, however, see our note 'Travelling Alone' overleaf. Any special requests should be printed on the booking form. A deposit is payable now with the balance due eight weeks prior to departure. Final flight and accommodation details will be sent with your travel wallets, two weeks before departure.





# DAILY PROGRAMME

## Friday 23rd April TO SYRIA

We fly from London Heathrow to Damascus. Our British Midland flight BD943 departs at 1605 and arrives into Damascus at 2315. **On arrival, we transfer to the Omayyad Hotel in the city of Damascus for a four night stay.**



## Saturday INTRODUCTION TO DAMASCUS

We begin our two day exploration of Damascus. We drive to Kassioun Mountain for a view over the city. We then spend time in the National Museum and the Tekkiye Mosque complex. We lunch in the Old City and in the afternoon visit Azem's Palace, the Omayyad Mosque and the (nearby) Saladin's Tomb. We also have the opportunity to walk through the fascinating *souks* (bazaars) of the Old City and to appreciate the architecture.

## Sunday INTRODUCTION TO DAMASCUS

In the morning we return to the Old City. We follow "the Street called Straight" to the chapel of Ananias (Holy Communion). We also see St Paul's Chapel, built into the wall from which Paul was lowered in a basket. We also make a brief call at the evocative Hejaz railway station and have more free time to explore the bazaars.

## Monday MAALOULA & DAMASCUS

We journey from Damascus to the nearby village of Maaloula where we visit the Greek Catholic Mar Sarkis (St Sergius) Monastery and the very much alive Greek Orthodox convent of Mar Tekla. We also visit the convent in Sednaya, where an icon of the Virgin is said to have been painted by St Luke. We lunch in Maaloula. We return to Damascus where the rest of the afternoon is free to revisit sites of special interest.

## Tuesday PALMYRA

From Damascus we drive out into the desert and Palmyra. A highlight of our tour are the magnificent remains of this second century city of Queen Zenobia. Canaanites, Arameans, Romans and Arabs have all inhabited this oasis deep in the Syrian desert. We visit the City of the Dead, the underground burial chambers, the Great Colonnade and the Temple of Bel and view the theatre and agora. **We spend one night at the Zenobia Hotel.**

## Wednesday HAMA & CRAC DES CHEVALIERS

An early start as we drive to biblical Hama, with its ancient water wheels on the river Orontes. En route we call at Homs and the Church of St Elias and the Church of the Umm al-Zunnar (the Virgin's girdle). We continue to Hama where we have lunch. We then continue to Crac des Chevaliers, the greatest of all the Crusader castles. **We spend two nights at the coastal resort of Lattakia in the Afamia Rotana Resort Hotel.**



## Thursday FREE IN LATTAKIA

A free day to relax by the coast and to enjoy the hotel facilities.

## Friday ST SIMEON AND ALEPPO

We leave the coast and drive to St Simeon's monastery, where he preached from the top of a pillar for over thirty years. The area also has a number of Dead Cities, the collective name given to a group of historical sites dating from early Byzantine Christianity. **We spend two nights in Aleppo at the Dar Zamaria Martini Hotel.**



## Saturday ALEPPO

We spend a day touring Aleppo. The city is famous for its vast labyrinth of *souks* (bazaars) and a large Christian population, including many Armenians. We visit the Grand Mosque with Zechariah's tomb and a free-standing minaret dating back to 1090. Opposite the mosque is the Madrasa Halawiye (once St Helena's Cathedral). We may also see an example of one of the *khan* (merchants trading courtyards) and the *muristan* (hospital) al-Nuri. In the afternoon, there is opportunity to spend time in the famous *souks*.



## Sunday 2nd May HOMEWARD BOUND

We make the short journey to Aleppo Airport for the return flight BD944 (via Damascus) which departs at 0740, arriving into London Heathrow at 1300.



# TO MAKE A RESERVATION

To reserve your place on this tour please complete the enclosed booking form and send it, with a deposit of £100 per person plus £49 for the insurance premium (if required) to the tour leader.  
(Please make cheques payable to "McCabe Pilgrimages")

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## TRAVELLING ALONE

Many of our passengers travel alone and object to expensive single room supplements. McCabe Pilgrimages will accept individual bookings on a 'guaranteed share' basis. We charge the basic price and accommodate you with a person of the same sex also requesting shared accommodation. If we do not find someone to share with you, you will be accommodated in a single room at only 50% of the usual single room supplement. For single travellers who do require single accommodation this should be requested when booking and, if available, the normal supplement will be payable.

## PASSPORTS, VISAS AND HEALTH

A valid passport is necessary for all our tours. It must be a full ten year passport and valid for six months after your return to the UK. Check NOW that it is valid for the duration of your tour. If you need a new passport apply NOW as there can be considerable backlogs at the passport offices. A visa is issued free of charge on entering Syria. If you are holding a different passport, or require further advice, please consult the McCabe office. [Travellers to Syria must ensure that they do not have any Israeli stamps in their passports \(or evidence of having entered Israel from a neighbouring country by land\)](#). No inoculations are required. We, however, do advise you to consult your doctor regarding your own personal requirements.

## TRAVEL INSURANCE

McCabe will arrange comprehensive travel insurance cover for each passenger unless otherwise indicated on the booking form. We have negotiated the premium (see 'Tour Information' section inside for rate) which as well as offering full medical and baggage cover also gives cover against loss of deposits. Cover is arranged by Preferential Insurance Services Ltd and is underwritten by Optimum Underwriting Limited as underwriting agents for Groupama Insurance Company Limited – each aforementioned organisation is authorised and regulated by The Financial Services Authority (FSA). The policy wording sets out full details of cover and will be sent to you with your confirmation invoice. This document also acts as your insurance certificate so that your booking reference number is also your insurance policy number.

A special feature of the McCabe insurance is that there is no age limit. Please, however, note it is a requirement that all insured persons must adhere to the Medical Health Requirements section on page 5 of the Policy wording document (which we will send you with your confirmation invoice). If you answer yes to any of the questions asked within this section you must contact the [HELPLINE 0845 250 5220](tel:08452505220). This is a confidential service that will decide whether or not this insurance is appropriate for you. If they decline to offer cover, or if you are unhappy with any aspect of the cover, you can return the policy within 14 days of issue and receive a full refund. In cases of difficulty, we have specialist insurers we can introduce you to.

## AITO Quality Statement

McCabe Pilgrimages is a member of the Association of Independent Tour Operators. The Association represents Britain's leading independent tour operators and encourages high standards of quality and service. McCabe abides by the Association's Code of Conduct and adheres to the AITO Quality Charter which can be viewed on [www.aito.co.uk](http://www.aito.co.uk). Visit the website to find out more about the Association or call 020 8744 9280.

This pilgrimage is ATOL protected by the Civil Aviation Authority. The McCabe ATOL number is 2920.



## McCabe Pilgrimages

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