



KORYO TOURS

Travel Syria's Historic Lands

Beirut to Damascus, Aleppo,
Palmyra, Homs, Hama, Maloula,
Lattakia, Bosra, and more!

9 nights in Syria + 2 nights in Beirut (4 & 5 hotels)*





INTRODUCTION

If you've ever dreamed of **travelling through the lands where civilisation began** - crossing from ancient Mesopotamia to the heart of the Levant - this special **Iraq and Syria Christmas Tour** is for you.

Over two incredible weeks, our Iraq group tour and Syria group tour combine to bring you face to face with the region's **history, culture**, and unmatched **hospitality**. Guided by experts who bring context, safety, and connection to every stop, you'll celebrate **Christmas in Damascus** and walk ancient cities and streets, retracing the footsteps of prophets, poets, and kings.

Iraq Tour

Our journey begins in Iraq, the land of ancient **Mesopotamia**.

From the capital **Baghdad**, we explore a city where tradition and modern life meet. Through book markets, riverside cafés, and the treasures of the National Museum.

We travel south to the holy cities of **Karbala** and **Najaf**, where millions of pilgrims gather each year, and walk through the ruins of **Babylon, Ur**, and **Uruk**. The very places where writing and cities were born!

In the far south, we glide through the **Marshes of Mesopotamia**, meeting families who still live in reed houses on the water, before reaching **Basra**, Iraq's gateway to the Gulf.

Lebanon & Syria

We then go to **Lebanon**, where you will have a couple of days to explore and prepare to cross into Syria.

From Beirut, we drive to **Damascus**, one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities on Earth.

We'll wander along **Straight Street**, visit the **Umayyad Mosque** and **Ananias Church**, and share tea with locals at **Al Nofara Café**, where the city's legendary storyteller still performs.

We continue south to **Bosra**, home to the world's **best-preserved Roman theatre**, then north through mountain landscapes to **Mar Musa Monastery, Homs**, and **Aleppo**.

In **Aleppo**, we explore the grand **citadel**, restored souks, and the traditional **soap** factories the city is famous for.

We'll visit the mighty **Krak des Chevaliers**, sample local **wines** in the Homs countryside, and spend a night in the picturesque Christian village of **Al Mishtaya**.

Our journey ends in **Palmyra**, once a jewel of the Silk Road and the seat of Queen Zenobia's empire.



HIGHLIGHTS

- **3 Countries, 1 Tour!** | Visit 3 incredible countries hassle-free, and enjoy the highlights in a short period of time, all in the company of new friends - over **Christmas** time!
- **Capitals Baghdad, Beirut, and Damascus** | Three incredible, historic capital cities of 3 countries full of culture.
- **Historic and Religious Sites** | Uruk and Ur, Babylon, Busra, Palmyra, Karbala and Najaf. Places you read about in the history books!

INCLUSIONS

- All accommodation in Iraq, Syria, and Beirut
- Iraq visa support.
- Local tour guides in Iraq and Syria.
- Expert Koryo Tours tour leader throughout the trip.
- All transportation within Iraq and Syria.
- Airport pick up & drop off
- All entrance tickets and activities listed.
- All meals listed.
- Water throughout the day.

EXCLUSIONS

- Travel to Iraq.
- Iraq & Syria visa.
- Travel insurance (mandatory).
- Tips for local guides.
- Souvenirs.
- Extra drinks/snacks.
- Single supplement rooming (55 USD per night)
- Flights from Baghdad - Lebanon (around 200 - 350 USD).
- Airport pick-up and drop-off in Lebanon.



NOTES

- All items on this itinerary are subject to change or cancellation depending on the security situation and availability. Koryo Tours takes safety on our tours extremely seriously and it will be prioritised above all else.
- The Iraq visa is an e-visa application. We will provide supporting documents and help you make the visa application. The visa (including for VOA) ranges from \$160-190 USD.
- The Syria visa is a visa on arrival.
- For Lebanon, most countries can enter visa-free. Check your visa requirements before travel.
- On both of the trips, we aim to see as much as possible in a very short amount of time. Iraq has a lot of history on offer, so of course we want to make the most out of this trip. Because of that, the days may be long and it involves a lot of driving as we make our way from south to north.



ITINERARY

DAY 1 | December 14 | Saturday

Arrival Day in Baghdad

Arrival & airport pick-up

- Arrive at Baghdad International Airport (BGW).
- Meet your driver and guide and transfer to the hotel.
- Rest and meet the group for a welcome dinner in the evening.

Welcome Dinner

- We will gather for a welcome dinner.

Accommodation | Hotel in Baghdad

Included Meals | Dinner



DAY 2 | December 15 | Sunday

Baghdad City Tour

- **Mutanabi Street** | Explore the old part of Baghdad. We will go to Mutanabi Street, known as the Book Street, the antique market, and the old copper market. It is named after the 10th-century poet Al-Mutanabi.
- **Rasheed Street** | Once Baghdad's most prestigious avenue, lined with early 20th-century architecture, shops, and cafés.
- **Iraqi National Museum** | Visit the Iraqi National Museum to get introduced to Iraqi culture and history throughout the years. The Iraqi National Museum houses a vast collection of artefacts from Mesopotamian civilisations, including Sumerian, Akkadian, Babylonian, and Assyrian relics. It is considered one of the most important museums in the Middle East.
- **Abbasid Palace & Mustansiriya Madrasah** | Two fine examples of Abbasid-era architecture. We will also visit Mustansiriya School, one of the oldest remaining schools in the world. The Mustansiriya Madrasa was established in the 13th century. It served as an important educational institution during the Abbasid era.
- **Tahrir Square & Firdus Square** | See the sites associated with Iraq's modern political history.
- **Abu Nawas Street** | Evening stroll along the Tigris, with statues and gardens inspired by the tales of 1001 Nights.
- Dinner on the Tigris River, trying Iraq's famous dish masgouf.

Accommodation | Hotel in Baghdad

Included Meals | Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner



DAY 3 | December 16 | Monday

Baghdad → Babylon → Karbala

Babylon

- Drive south to Babylon: Ishtar Gate (reconstruction), Lion of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar's Palace, Saddam Hussein's Palace.
- **Ancient City of Babylon** | Babylon was one of the most important cities of ancient Mesopotamia, known for its role as the capital of Hammurabi and Nebuchadnezzar II. It is associated with significant cultural achievements, including the Code of Hammurabi and the **Hanging Gardens of Babylon**, one of the **Seven Wonders of the Ancient World**.
- **Saddam's Palace** | Pay a visit to Saddam's Palace and see the last remnant from his regime. From here, enjoy a great view of the ancient city.

Karbala

- Continue to Karbala.
- Karbala is a holy city for Shia Muslims and the site of the shrine of Imam Hussein. It is the focal point of the Arbaeen pilgrimage, one of the largest religious gatherings in the world.

Accommodation | Hotel in Karbala

Included Meals | Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner



DAY 4 | December 17 | Tuesday

Karbala → Najaf

Drive to Najaf

- **Old City** | Explore Najaf and Najaf's Old City, one of the most important cities in the Shia Muslim world.
- **Wadi al Salam** | We pay a visit to the **largest cemetery in the world** - Wadi al Salam. Meaning "Valley of Peace," it is located in Najaf and is the largest cemetery in the world. It has been a burial site for over 1,400 years.
- We then take a trip to the market where we can buy local clothes and Abayas, as well as lots of other souvenirs. You'll need this local attire to enter the shrine.
- **Imam Ali Shrine** | The Imam Ali Shrine in Najaf is the burial site of Imam Ali, the cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet Muhammad and the first Imam in Shia Islam. The shrine is one of the most important pilgrimage sites for Shia Muslims. The golden dome of the Imam Ali Shrine draws pilgrims from across the globe. We will take a look inside the separated female/male sections, and you'll truly be astounded by the colours, lights, and decorations from this fantastic piece of architecture.

Accommodation | Hotel in Najaf

Included Meals | Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner



DAY 5 | December 18 | Wednesday

Najaf → Uruk → Ur (Nasiriyah)

Uruk

- Drive south to Uruk, the world's first great city, associated with the invention of writing and the Epic of Gilgamesh.

Ur

- Continue to Ur to see the Ziggurat of Ur, a 4,000-year-old stepped temple.

Nasiriyah city

- Visit Nasiriyah city in the evening.

Accommodation | Hotel in Nasiriyah

Included Meals | Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner



DAY 6 | December 19 | Thursday

Marshes of Southern Iraq → Basra

Mesopotamia Marshes

- Travel to the Marshes, where we will have a late lunch of **Masquf**, the **Sumerian local fish** (vegetarian option available).
- **Marshes** | A UNESCO-listed wetland where life has changed little over millennia. The Marsh Arabs still live in traditional reed houses and travel by narrow boats along the waterways.
- **Boat Trip in the Marshes** | We take a boat trip to take a tour of the marshes and see what wildlife we can spot!

Basra

- **Basra** | This is the main southern city and its largest port. It has long been a gateway for trade, culture, and ideas. Basra is also known for its canals lined with date palms!

Accommodation | Hotel in Basra

Included Meals | Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner



DAY 7 | December 20 | Friday

Basra → Baghdad

Basra City Tour

- **Basra Museum** | A look into the history of Basra and the surrounding areas. It used to be Saddam's Palace.
- Stroll through the old city and antique museum.

Baghdad

- Drive back to Baghdad.
- **Martyrs Monument** | Go for sunset to the Martyrs Monument. The Martyrs Monument in Baghdad is a large blue-domed structure built in the 1980s to commemorate Iraqis who died in past wars. It is a symbol of national remembrance.

Accommodation | Hotel in Baghdad

Included Meals | Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner



DAY 8 | December 21 | Saturday

Departure from Iraq

Flight Departures from Baghdad Airport

- You will be transferred to Baghdad International Airport.
- Departure from **Baghdad International Airport** (BGW) to Lebanon. You must organise your own flights but we will provide guidance.
- Arrive in Beirut in afternoon/evening. Check in and free time.

Included Meals | Breakfast



DAY 9 | December 22 | Tuesday

Free day to explore Beirut city at your own leisure

- Relax and see the highlights of Beirut at your own leisure. We will be staying in a central district with lots to do just around the corner!
- Ask your tour leader for suggestions for food and activities based on your preferences!

Welcome Dinner

- [Optional] Welcome Dinner & Pre-Tour Briefing for those joining for the Syria part of this trip only.
- We will gather for some excellent Lebanese food and a pre-tour briefing tonight before the adventure ahead.

Accommodation | Crowne Plaza Hotel, 5* hotel located in Central Hamra, Beirut

Included Meals | N/A



DAY 10 | December 23 | Wednesday

Into Syria

Beirut to Damascus Scenic Drive

- We will leave early from the Lebanese capital on a scenic drive to the Syrian border, and onward to Damascus. This is a ca. 4-hour-long drive, including formalities at the Lebanon-Syria border.
- Check in and a short recharge at our hotel in Damascus.

The Historic Old Town of Damascus

- **Ananias Church** | The oldest underground structure of Damascus and the presumed remains of Ananias of Damascus' home, where Saul was baptised, who is known today as Paul the Apostle.
- **Straight Street** | Also known by its Latin name, Via Recta, is the Roman street that runs from East to West in Damascus' Old Town. The street has several sites dating back to the Roman, Christian, and Islamic periods, and according to the Book of Acts, St. Paul also visited here.
- **Al Nofara** | The oldest café in Damascus, where we will listen to the famous storyteller.
- Dinner will be at Naerj, the best restaurant in Damascus Old Town, where you are guaranteed to have one of the best meals of your life.
- Optional evening scrub at a historic Hamam.

Accommodation | Mamluka Hotel 5* or similar, Damascus.

Included Meals | Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner



DAY 11 | December 24 | Thursday

Damascus City Tour, Busra, Christmas in Syria

Day in Damascus

- **National Museum** | Here, we will gain an overview of the civilisations that have thrived on Syrian soil. It exhibits statues, seals, jewellery, masks, mosaics, tablets, and weavings from the most important sites in the country.
- **Souk Al-Hamidiye** | The most beautiful souk of Damascus. Its shops display a wide range of goods, including clothes, fabrics, pastries, and handicrafts.
- **Umayyad Mosque** | A historic site of worship, dating back to the first millennium BCE, it was once a church and is now one of the most important mosques in the World.

Busra

- In the afternoon, we head south through the lush, fertile plains to the ancient city of Bosra al-Sham (also Busra / Busra al-sham). Busra is certainly home to the best-preserved Roman amphitheatre in the world.
- We'll explore the city's rich Roman heritage, including its baths and captivating historical tales.

Drive back to Damascus

- **Christmas Eve in Damascus** | The biggest Christmas celebrations are on Christmas eve, so we'll be in Damascus the capital to take part in the festivities.

Accommodation | Mamluka Hotel 5* or similar, Damascus

Included Meals | Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner



DAY 12 | December 25 | Friday

Damascus to Aleppo

Mar Musa

- Our second stop along the road will be **Mar Musa**, a breathtaking 6th-century monastery perched among rugged mountains.
- Shaped like a towering fortress, this ancient site was founded by Mar Musa al-Habashi (Saint Moses of Abyssinia), who, according to legend, was the son of an Ethiopian king.

Hama

- Our last stop before reaching Aleppo will be **Hama**, where we'll visit the iconic waterwheels that once played a crucial role in providing water to the surrounding land. These ancient structures are a symbol of the city's rich history.

Aleppo

- **Aleppo** has been a flourishing metropolis since the 3rd millennium BCE. The city has been fighting with Damascus for the title of *the world's oldest continuously inhabited city*.
- After some exploring of the city, we'll enjoy dinner at **Qurtuba**, a renowned Syrian restaurant run by an Armenian family, known for its authentic flavours and warm atmosphere.

Accommodation | Rigga Hotel 4* or similar, Aleppo

Included Meals | Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner



DAY 13 | December 26 | Saturday

Aleppo

- **Aleppo Castle** | Located in the middle of the city, the castle dominates Aleppo from a height of fifty meters. Its admirably designed towers, along with its iron gates, are distinguished by their entrances made with perfection to prevent any enemy intrusion.
- **Aleppo Market** | Stretching from the front of the castle to the old city, we'll witness the contrast between the destroyed areas, the active restoration sites, and the fully renovated section, which now looks stunning.
- **Abu Hagoub Restaurant** | As Aleppo is renowned for its spicy sausage, we will have lunch at this famous restaurant to sample the best sausage sandwiches in the city.
- **Umayyad Mosque** | The largest and one of the oldest mosques in the city, which is currently in the final stages of restoration.
- **Al-Jubaili Soap Factory** | The oldest soap factory in Aleppo, where you'll have the opportunity to witness the traditional process of crafting the world-famous laurel Aleppo soap, renowned for its quality and history. We will also visit a soap exhibition where you can touch the largest bar of soap in the world, according to the Guinness World Records Book.
- For sunset, we will visit one of our secret spots overlooking Aleppo.

Accommodation | Rigga Hotel 4* or similar, Aleppo

Included Meals | Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner



DAY 14 | December 27 | Sunday

Aleppo - Idlib - Hama - Krak Des Chavaliers - Homs Countryside

Idlib

- **Idlib Governorate** | Here, we can observe a unique economic system distinct from other regions, and we will also visit the refugee camps, gaining insight into the challenges faced by displaced families.

Hama

- Drive south to Hama. Here, we'll visit the iconic waterwheels that once played a crucial role in providing water to the surrounding land.

Krak des Chevaliers

- **Krak des Chevaliers** | After that, we'll continue our journey to Krak des Chevaliers, which is described by Lawrence of Arabia as "the most wholly admirable castle in the world."
- In addition, this medieval crusader fortress is one of the most significant and well-preserved castles from that era, offering a fascinating glimpse into Syrian History.

Jarjour winery

- **Jarjour Winery** | We'll drive through the picturesque rural villages of the Homs Valley, heading to the renowned **Jarjour winery**, which is famous for its unique blue wine.
- Here, we'll enjoy a **wine and cheese tasting**, immersing ourselves in the flavours of the region.

Almishtaya

- Afterwards, we take a short drive to the Christian village of **Almishtaya**, known for its vibrant nightlife. Indeed, you can experience the lively atmosphere and enjoy the evening in one of Syria's most charming villages.

Overnight in Homs Countryside

- Finally, we have an overnight stay in a 4-star hotel in Al Mishtaya-Homs countryside.

Accommodation | Hotel in Homs Countryside

Included Meals | Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner



DAY 15 | December 28 | Monday

Al Mishtaya - Palmyra - Damascus

- Syria's most iconic tourist destination. Notably, once a key city on the Silk Road, **Palmyra** briefly ruled its own empire in the 3rd century, stretching from Turkey to Egypt.
- However, despite being well-preserved, much of the city was sadly destroyed during the ISIS occupation in 2015.
- During our tour, we will explore what remains, including the **Arch of Triumph**, **Fakhr ad-Din al-Maani Castle**, the **Sulphur Spring**, the **Great Columns**, the **Theatre**, the **Agora**, and the **Tombs**.
- We'll enjoy a delicious lunch in a traditional Bedouin tent restaurant, run by a local family. This is, indeed, a perfect opportunity to savour authentic Syrian cuisine while experiencing the warm hospitality of the region.

Return to Damascus

- We will drive back to Damascus, arriving just in time to enjoy a relaxing dinner in the city.

Accommodation | Traditional Hotel in Damascus Old Town

Included Meals | Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner



DAY 16 | December 29 | Tuesday

Return to Beirut

- In the morning, we will cover the remaining attractions in Damascus that might have been left out during the busy previous days.
- We will also have some time for some last-minute shopping.
- Drive back to Beirut. The estimated arrival time in Beirut is 18:00.

Accommodation | Crowne Plaza Hotel, 5* hotel located in Central Hamra, Beirut

Included Meals | Breakfast, Lunch



DAY 17 | December 30 | Wednesday

Departure Day

- Departure from **Beirut-Rafic Hariri International Airport** (BEY) throughout the day to European or Middle Eastern destinations offering connections to the rest of the World.

Included Meals | Breakfast