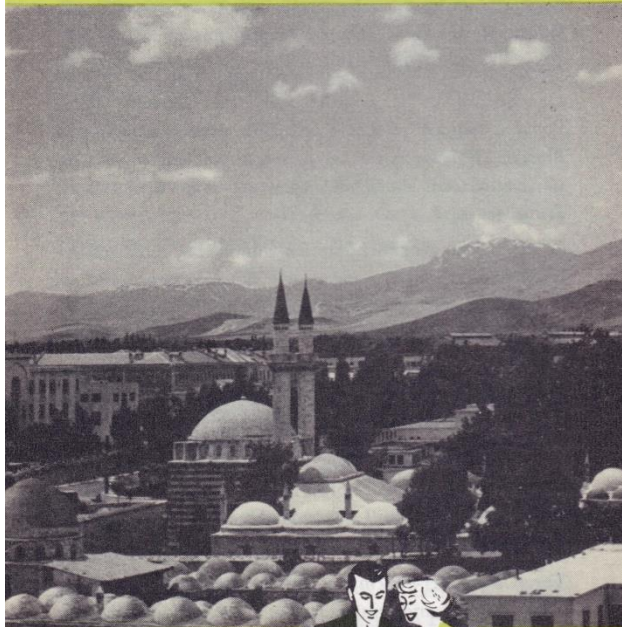


SAS CITY PORTRAITS

Damascus

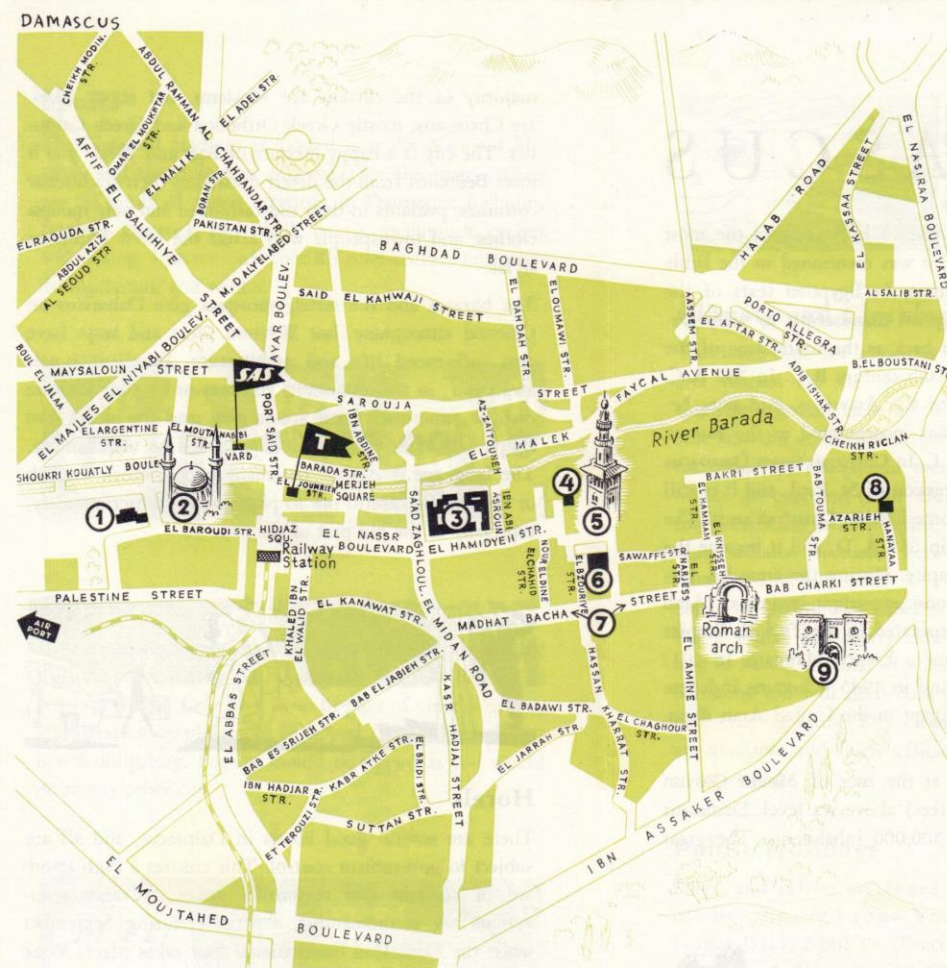
SAS



View of Sulcan Selim Mosque
and a part of Syrian University



SCANDINAVIAN AIRLINES SYSTEM



Your First Hour in Damascus

Upon arrival at Damascus, passports are collected at the aircraft by a security officer. An SAS representative will take you to customs and after the luggage check you will get your passport back at the adjoining counter. There is no official bank at the airport, but the SAS staff can change small amounts of money if necessary.

Passengers and luggage are transported to the hotels or to the town terminal by taxi at SAS expense. If you have not been able to reserve a hotel room in advance, tell the SAS people at the airport and they'll assist you. The trip to the town takes about 15 minutes.

The monetary unit in Syria is the Syrian Pound (S£), divided into 100 Piasters. One US dollar is equivalent to about S£ 3.50, and one £ sterling is equivalent to about S£ 9.50. Money can always be changed at hotels, where there will always be someone who speaks English or French.

Make sure to reconfirm your onward journey at the SAS Ticket Office, and consider the SAS staff your personal advisors in all touristic matters during your stay in Damascus. They are only too pleased to assist you.

Key to the Map:

1. *The National Museum.*
2. *Tekieh Souleymanieh (Suleiman Mosque).*
3. *The Citadel and the "souks".*
4. *Saladin's Mausoleum.*
5. *Omayad or the Grand Mosque.*
6. *Azem Palace.*
7. *The Street Called Straight.*
8. *St. Anania's House.*
9. *St. Paul's Window.*

SAS SAS Ticket Office: 14, Shoukri Kouatly Boulevard.
Telephones: 16604 and 17351

T Tourist Information Office: Al-Joumrieh Street
Telephone: 17060.

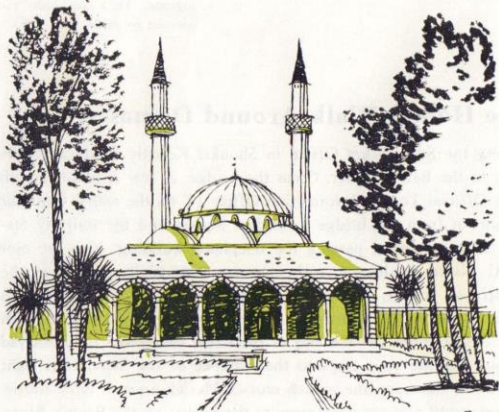
One Hour's Walk Around Damascus

Leaving the SAS Ticket Office in Shoukri Kouatly Boulevard walk down to the Barada River. Cross the bridge. A few steps to the left is the Official Tourist Information Office (T on the map). Continue straight on from the bridge to Hijaz Square and the Railway Station. Turn left here, passing the telephone building. You are now on Al Nassr Boulevard, and soon on your right you'll see the Ministry of Justice. Proceeding further you come to Al Hamidieh Street in the famous Hamidieh Souk, a typical native district with hundreds of shops. At the end of the street stands the fine Omayad Mosque. Retrace your steps to the entrance of the Souk, turn right and follow the tram line, which crosses Merjeh Square. Now follow the river until you are once more at the bridge on the Barada River, and you are back at the SAS Office.

DAMASCUS

Damascus (*Dimashq* in Arabic) is considered the most ancient city in the world; it was mentioned in the Bible in connection with Abraham, in Egyptian texts of the 18th Dynasty and in Assyrian manuscripts as well. Damascus was famous as far back as the foundation of the Aramaic kingdom in the 10th century B. C. In 732 B. C. the city was taken over by the Assyrians, and later became Persian, before it was incorporated in the Roman province of Syria in 64 B. C. In Christian times Damascus was the scene of the conversion of St. Paul, and it is still an important center for some Eastern Christian sects. The Arabs took over the city in 635 A. D. and it became the capital of a vast Arab empire. During the crusades, Damascus was one of the most important centers of Arab resistance. Syria was incorporated in the Turkish Empire until 1918 when it became a French Mandate. In 1932 Syria became a republic and in 1945 it became independent. In 1957 it joined Egypt in the United Arab Republic.

Lying in a fertile plain at the foot of Mount Qasyun about 700 meters (2275 feet) above sea level, Damascus today is a city of about 500,000 inhabitants. The great



majority of the citizens are Moslems, but about 10 % are Christians, mostly Greek Orthodox and Greek Catholics. The city is a happy mixture of East and West: you'll meet Bedouins from the desert dressed in their traditional costumes, peasants in their old-fashioned and very modest clothes, and townspeople who affect the latest European styles.

The bazaars and the stately mosques give Damascus an Oriental atmosphere, but Western ideas and ways have also influenced life and architecture. Excellent hotels await you; in the restaurants you may order your favorite dish or experience local specialities, and the stores and shops will offer you a wide choice of fine merchandise. The language is Arabic, but many people speak English or French. Be careful not to photograph indiscriminately, especially in the old part of the city.



Hotels

There are several good hotels in Damascus, and all are subject to government control. This ensures a high standard of comfort and reasonable prices. Advance reservations are recommended, especially during September when the Damascus International Fair takes place. Your own SAS Office or travel agent will reserve a hotel room for you in advance.

In the de luxe category the New Omayad and the Semiramis are both excellent. Prices are S£ 22.00 for a single room with bath, and S£ 30.00 with full board. Other first-class hotels include the Cattans, the Kassiouan and the Orient. A single room with bath in these hotels costs S£ 17.50 and including full board S£ 25.00.

The Semire, the Rami and the Karnak are second-class hotels charging S£ 15.00 for a single room with bath and S£ 20.00 for a room with full board.

Note: The electric voltage in Damascus is 110 volts A. C.



Restaurants

The international hotels serve both Western and Oriental food. Other leading restaurants are The Silver Tower, Socrat, Oasis, Agha, and the Airport Restaurant.

Local food is generally prepared with a special Arabic fat which may be a little heavy for Western tastes. Popular national dishes worthwhile trying are *Koussa Mehsbe*, *Yabrak*, *Fattet Makadem* and *Koubbeh*. *Mazza* is a varied hors d'oeuvre with which it is customary to drink the local *Arak*.

There are no general hours for dining, but most restaurants are open from noon to 3 PM, and from 6 PM to 10 PM. An average meal costs from S£ 4.00 to S£ 6.50 plus 10 % service charge.

Entertainment and Night Life

There are no theaters, concert halls or casinos in the city. Several cinemas show English and French-speaking films. Your hotel porter will give you the schedule. The show usually starts at 3 PM, 6 PM and 9 PM.

There is dinner-dancing at the Mezze Restaurant (airport) summer and winter, and at the Orient Seville and the Ashbilia (summer only). The latter sometimes offers a floor show, as do the cabarets Shehrezade and Florida. Other night clubs include Syrianna, Al-Caza, Caravan and Semiramis. These have floor shows with Oriental dances and music.



Sights

There are no regular sightseeing tours of the city, but SAS Ticket Office can arrange a special tour for you on request. Here are the principal sights as marked by numbers on the map:

- (1) *The National Museum.* The most outstanding part of this museum is the famous synagogue of Doura-Europos, moved here from its original site on the Euphrates river after its discovery in the early thirties by a group of American scientists from Yale University. It was built in 244 A.D., destroyed by the Persians twelve years later, and its ruins were completely buried by sand when the American archeologists found them. The National Museum is open to the public every day except Tuesdays and Syrian holidays, in winter from 9 AM to Noon and from 2 PM to 4:30 PM, in summer from 3 PM to 5:30 PM.



- (2) *Tekieb Souleymanieh* (Mosque of Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent). This great structure was built in 1554 on the base of the ancient "Black and White Palace". With its two slim minarets and its large cupola the mosque is typical of Turkish architecture. Attached to the mosque is a Moham-medan convent.
- (3) *The Citadel and the "Souks".* At the Sanjakdar mosque turn left into the Souk El Khouja, one of the roofed bazaars. Half way through is the entrance to the Citadel (El Qalaa). The Citadel, built in the 13th century, is now the headquarters of the Syrian mounted police and part of it is a state prison. To visit it a special permit is obligatory. Continuing through Souk El Khouja you pass the Greek market, and soon find yourself in Souk Hamidieh, the most important bazaar in the city. It is always crowded, except on Friday – the Moslem holiday – and a great variety of goods is for sale: antiques, Persian and Anatolian carpets, textiles and many other kinds of merchandise.
- (4) *The Mausoleum of Saladin.* The tomb holds the mortal remains of the famous Kurd, General Saladin, who met and



defeated Richard the Lion Hearted in one of the climatic battles of the Crusades. The mausoleum may well be regarded as a symbol of the Moslem revenge against the invasion of Christians.

- (5) *Omayyad Mosque, the Grand Mosque.* On this site 4000 years ago stood a pagan temple of Hadad, the great Aramean god. In the course of time it was transformed successively into a Roman temple to Jupiter and into a basilica dedicated to St. John the Baptist. In the 8th century it finally became a Moslem mosque. The interior contains beautiful mosaics, some of which date back to the 7th century (in the Prayers' Hall and the porticos of the courtyard). Visitors are welcome except during the prayer hour, but no photographing is allowed, and you may not enter the sanctuary with shoes on. Ladies must be very conservatively dressed. Do not touch the books on display.
- (6) *The Azem Palace.* Originally a residence of the Emir Essaad Pasha El Azam, this building was constructed 1749-61. It was partly destroyed in 1925 and restored in 1934. A fine example of the Saracenic style of Moslem architecture, the building is divided into the *Salamlek* (reception part) and the *Haramlek* (family living quarters). The latter in particular has fine oriental decor. Today the palace houses the Syrian Folklore Museum. Admission hours: 8 AM to 5 PM except Tuesdays.
- (7) *The Street Called Straight.* This street was mentioned in the New Testament when St. Paul walked on it, after his miraculous conversion, to visit Anania's house (see below). In Roman times it was one of the most magnificent in the Empire. Dividing the old city into northern and southern parts, it was 1500 meters (1625 yds) long and 25 meters (30 yds) wide, adorned with Corinthian columns on both sides. Of its ancient splendor nothing is left except the remains of the Triumphal Arch which was excavated a few years ago.
- (8) *Saint Anania's House.* According to tradition this is the house in which St. Paul miraculously recovered his eyesight. In an underground chapel constructed by Franciscan monks, the walls are encribed with the Bible's account of St. Paul's conversion to Christianity on the Damascus Road. The apostle came to St. Anania's house to discuss and learn the Christian faith.

- (9) *St. Paul's Window.* From St. Anania's house St. Paul walked to the ancient city's town wall, and was there lowered from the fortifications in a basket by his fellow Christians. This part of the town wall has been restored and is called St. Paul's Cathedral or St. Paul's Window.

Beside the sights in Damascus itself there are some interesting places nearby, such as the picturesque village of Maalula, built on cliff terraces. Here the people still speak Aramaic, the language of Jesus Christ. A visit to Palmyra, the legendary capital of Queen Zenobia in the midst of the desert, is an unforgettable experience. On a hilltop, above the ruins of the temple and palace, towers the noble Castle of Fakhr al-Din ibn-Maan.

The southern parts of Syria have fine Roman remains, and so has the province of Latakia on the Mediterranean coast. There are no organized excursions to these interesting places, but SAS will arrange for you to travel on your own or with an English speaking guide.



Shopping

The main shopping center is the Hamidieh Souk. Shops are open from 8 AM to 6 PM, except on Fridays. Generally you can and should bargain on the quoted prices. Typical Syrian souvenirs are brocades of real silk or rayon, which usually may be bought at prices ranging from S£ 8.00 to 30.00 per yard. Other attractive souvenirs are gold and silver jewelry which you can buy in the famous *Sagha* or goldsmith shops, fine silver inlaid boxes and trays with fine mosaic work, leather goods and embroideries. Note: it is not always to your advantage to rely on the assistance of an official or private guide when you go shopping. If you master the art of bargaining you will often find that the price you arrive at on your own is cheaper than with someone assisting you.

Sports

The National Stadium is located near the National Museum and the Suleiman Mosque (see the map). There are all kinds of sports activities in Damascus, including football (soccer), basketball, tennis, swimming, cycling and boxing. International football competitions take place during spring and winter.



Tipping

Hotels and restaurants usually add a 10 % service charge to their bills; if they do not, tip 10 %. Taxi drivers do not expect tips, and there is no tipping of cinema ushers. Hairdressers are pleased to be tipped 10 %, although this is not obligatory. Porters should be tipped as you would do in any other city.



Transportation

Public transportation consists of trams and buses, but most foreign visitors prefer to move about in the city by taxis. The charge for any distance within the city area runs from S£ 1.50 to 2.00. Self-drive cars are not available. There is a regular taxi service with hourly departures between Damascus and Beirut, Lebanon, a distance of 110 kms. (70 miles). The cost per seat is S£ 5.00.



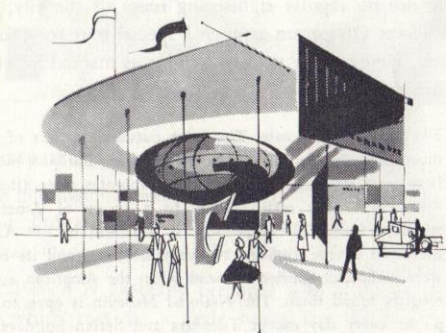
Climate and Clothing

The ideal time for a visit is in spring or autumn. July and August are the hottest months with temperatures sometimes getting near 40° C (104° F), although as a rule between 30° - 35° C (86° - 95° F). However, the mornings are cooler and even in the peak of summer, nights are cool and fresh. During this period white cotton dresses are recommended. During winter the temperature usually fluctuates between 5° C (41° F) in the morning and 10° - 15° C (40° - 59° F) later in the day. The period December - March is generally rainy. For a winter visit heavy clothing is necessary, and it is best to have a raincoat or an umbrella handy. For special occasions you will need dark evening wear. You cannot hire evening attire. Dry cleaning and laundry facilities are available and fairly efficient. Ask your hotel porter to assist you.

Public Holidays

Shops and offices are closed on the following official holidays: January 1 (New Year's Day), March 22 (Arab League Day), April 17 (Evacuation Day), December 25 (Christmas), December 26 (Tree Day).

Note also that there are a number of Moslem holidays, including the *Ramadan* and *Al Adha* feasts, both moveable, on which all Moslem shops are closed. Christian shops close on Christmas Day, New Year's Day and during Easter.



- especially created to serve you when you consider attending a fair, a congress or a gathering of any other kind . . .

SAS

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