

McCabe Pilgrimages

A JOURNEY TO SYRIA



**From the Diocese of Cyprus and the Gulf
Led by the Right Revd Michael Lewis,
Bishop in Cyprus and the Gulf**

24th April - 2nd May 2012

A 9-day tour featuring stays in
Damascus, Palmyra, Hama, Aleppo & Maaloula



A PILGRIMAGE TO SYRIA

WITH THE RIGHT REVD MICHAEL LEWIS

24th April - 2nd May 2012

I warmly invite you to join me on pilgrimage in Syria in spring 2012. We shall visit places and meet people in one of the most richly interesting lands of the Near East.

Damascus, where we shall gather from our various countries for a three-night stay, is one of a handful of cities that claim to have been continuously inhabited longer than anywhere else. Aleppo, also on our pilgrimage, makes the same claim. Damascus is now large. To the south-west, just off the road from Jerusalem, is the traditional site of St Paul's conversion and the first prayers of our pilgrim journey will take place there. Then after driving back and entering the Christian quarter we shall walk along part of Straight Street and celebrate the eucharist in the Chapel of St Ananias before visiting the Chapel of St Paul at the place in the walls where his dramatic escape in a basket is commemorated. Our time in Damascus also takes us to the great Omayyad Mosque and its beautiful courtyard, successor to a temple of Hadad/Jupiter which became the Christian cathedral and contains a shrine said to encase the head of St John the Baptist; Saladin's modest tomb; Azem's Palace, an 18th-century governor's residence; the souks of the Grand Bazaar; and, outside the Old City, the Tekkiye Mosque and the National Museum.

Palmyra, north-east and in the desert, is the next destination. Its brilliant heyday under Queen Zenobia was a brief period in a rich and much longer history built on lucrative Silk Route trade. Its ruins are spectacular and vast and well reward travellers for their expedition.

West of Palmyra is Homs, the ancient Emesa where the Syrian Orthodox Church has several interesting churches to show. Nearby, we visit the classic Crusader castle of Crac des Chevaliers and the flourishing Monastery of St George before a stay at Hama, the biblical Hamath, city of waterwheels used for irrigation.

After seeing the huge abandoned Roman/Byzantine city of Afamia, the ancient Apamea, we come to another highlight, the enormous fifth-century church built around the stump of the pillar of St Simeon Stylites, who drew pilgrims from across the world to his ascetic, thirty-eight-year perch.

Aleppo is Syria's second city, and during our two-night stay we shall climb the mighty central Citadel, walk through the complex of souks, and visit some of the churches serving the significant Christian population.

Our final section, after we have stopped to see extraordinary mosaics, takes us into Christian hill country near the present Lebanese border. At Sednaya the icon of Our Lady, in a tiny chapel within a hilltop convent, is ancient and encrusted with devotion. Maaloula is hidden in a gorge and has the venerable monastery of St Sergius and the working convent of St Thecla with its holy cave.

If you possibly can, do join me and Julia on this pilgrim visit encompassing history, architecture, prayer, and the pleasure of good company.

Bishop Michael

TOUR INFORMATION

The cost of this tour is £1,045 (note: LAND ONLY - not including flights into and out of Damascus. Flights from the UK are likely to cost around £440). 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. For those who need them, 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 will be arranged in advance by McCabe and is issued free of charge on arrival in Syria.

Everybody travelling should purchase travel insurance. McCabe can only offer insurance cover to UK residents (£59). If you are a non-UK resident, please arrange this locally. We will request details of your insurance policy prior to travel.

The group gratuity fund contribution is £40 (to be collected by your tour leader in Syria). Single rooms are available and the charge is £315. 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

Tuesday (24th April) TO SYRIA

We meet in Damascus at the Cham Palace hotel where we begin our pilgrimage and where we spend three nights.



Wednesday INTRODUCTION TO DAMASCUS

We begin our pilgrimage by driving out to Kaukab Hill, a traditional site of the conversion of St Paul. We then 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. Lunch in the Old City. In the afternoon we spend time in the National Museum, also calling at the nearby Tekkiye mosque complex. We also make a brief call at the evocative Hejaz railway station.

Thursday INTRODUCTION TO DAMASCUS

We return to the Old City to see the Omayyad Mosque and the nearby Saladin's Tomb. We spend time in Azem's Palace (including the visual museum). We also have the opportunity to walk through the fascinating bazaars of the Old City such as Souk al-Hamidiye.

Friday 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 Cham Palace Hotel.**



Saturday HOMS & CRAC DES CHEVALIERS

We leave Palmyra and drive first to Homs where we visit the Church of St Elian (fine 12th Century frescoes) and the Umm al-Zinnar Church, which claims to house part of the fabric of the girdle of the Virgin Mary. We then continue to Crac des Chevaliers, the greatest of all the Crusader castles, where we have lunch. We also call briefly at the Monastery of St George. **We continue to Hama where we spend one night at the Afamia Hotel.**

Sunday ST SIMEON AND ALEPPO

We leave Hama and drive to Afamia, ancient Apamea, for a



brief visit. We then continue to St Simeon's monastery, where he preached from the top of a pillar for over thirty years. Here we plan to celebrate Holy Communion. 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 also call at the 5th Century basilica of Mushabbak. We then continue to Aleppo. **We spend two nights in Aleppo at the Pullman Hotel.**

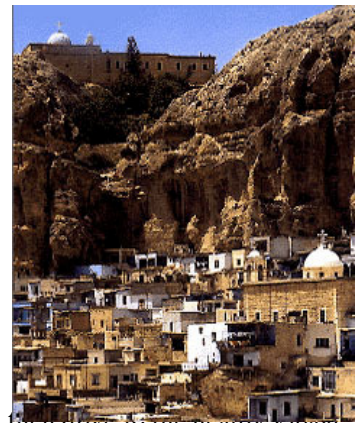
Monday ALEPPO

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 call at the impressive Citadel which dominates the city. We also 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 a khan (merchants trading courtyard) and the *muristan* (hospital) al-Nuri. We visit the Jdeide Quarter of the city, home to many churches of various denominations and here we have lunch. In the afternoon, there is opportunity to spend time in the famous *souks*.



Tuesday HAMA, MAALOULA & SEDNAYA

Leaving Aleppo, we drive to Maaloula. En route we visit the mosaic museum at Marat il-Numan. We take a short detour to visit the mosaic at Tayibet al-Imam, the floor of a 5th Century church and drive via biblical Hama, with its ancient water wheels on the river Orontes. We lunch in Hama. We continue to visit the convent in Sednaya, where an icon of the Virgin is said to have been painted by St Luke. We then drive to the nearby village of Maaloula where we call at the Greek Catholic Mar Sarkis (St Sergius) Monastery and the very much alive Greek Orthodox convent of Mar Thecla. **We spend our last night in Syria at the Maaloula Hotel.**



Wednesday (2nd May) HOMEWARD BOUND

After breakfast, we begin to make our various return journeys home from Damascus International Airport. (Transfers not included).

Suggested flights from UK:

Tuesday 24th April Heathrow - Damascus BD947 1600 / 2300
Wednesday 2nd May Damascus - Heathrow BD944 0940 / 1315



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 (cheques to be drawn on a UK bank, and made payable to 'McCabe Pilgrimages' please) plus £59 for the insurance premium (if appropriate and required) to:

Mrs Georgia Katsantonis (PA to the Bishop),
Diocese of Cyprus and the Gulf,
PO Box 22075, 1517 Nicosia, Cyprus
Tel: +357 2267 1220 Email: georgia@spidernet.com.cy

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 do advise you, however, to consult your doctor regarding your own personal requirements.

TRAVEL INSURANCE

Please note that McCabe cannot extend insurance cover to those not resident within the UK. For British residents, 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 0843 208 1461](tel:08432081461). 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. Visit the website to find out more about the Association or call 020 8744 9280.

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