

# Syria is the cradle of



*“Go back as far as you will into the vague past, there was always a Damascus. In the writings of every century for more than four thousand years, its name has been mentioned and its praises sung. To Damascus, years are only moments, decades are only flitting trifles of time. She measures time, not by days and months and years, but by the empires she has seen rise, and prosper and crumble to ruin. She is a type of immortality... Though other claims the name, old Damascus is by right the Eternal City.”*  
**Mark Twain, ‘The Innocents Abroad’, 1869**

**S**yría lies on the eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea at the junction of three continents; Asia, Europe and Africa, and has always been of great strategic importance in the region. It is bordered in the north by Turkey, in the east by Iraq, in the south by Jordan and Palestine, and in the west by Lebanon and the Mediterranean Sea along a coast extending 183 kilometres. Until 1918, it was part of a larger area, called Bilad Al-Shaam (Greater Syria), which embraced the territory of present-day Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Jordan and north of Iraq.

Contemporary Syria is divided geographically into five regions: (1) The coastal region stretching alongside the Mediterranean Sea, (2) The mountainous region extending from north to south east of the coastal region, (3) The Inland or plains region; including the plains of Damascus, Aleppo, Homs, Hama and Dara’a. (4) The ‘Badiya’ (desert) region covering the whole southeast of the country. (5) The Euphrates River and north-eastern fertile region.

In general, Syria enjoys a Mediterranean climate turning arid as one goes to the south-east: moderate,

**Country name:** Syrian Arab Republic

**Capital:** Damascus (Dimashq).

**Other cities:** Aleppo (Halab), Homs, Hama, Latakia (Ladhiqqia), Idlib, Tartous, Deir-el-Zor, Raqqa, Dara’a, Sweida, Hassakeh.

**Population:** 19.747.586 (July 2008 estimate)

**Land Area:** 185.170 km, 1.295 km (The Jaulan/ Golan) under Israeli Occupation

**Official Language:** Arabic. English and French are widely used; Aramaic the language of Jesus-Christ is still spoken in three villages.

**Currency:** Syrian Pound (1 USD=46 SP).

**Administration:** Syria comprises fourteen governorates.

**President:** Dr. Bashar Al-Assad.

**Political System:** Presidential with parliament elected every 5 years.

rainy winter (0-15 C) and dry summer (30-38 C) with two transitional rather short seasons: autumn and spring (18-27C).



## History

Syria is the cradle of great civilizations and the accomplishments of its ancient people are renowned all over the world. Evidence of ancient history is found throughout the country. It was in Syria that agriculture began ten thousand years ago, that settlement commenced and civilization emerged. The coastal Kingdom of Ugarit offered mankind the first letter-based alphabet in history. Syria was also home to the Canaanites and Amorites - the indigenous peoples of the ancient Levant. At Ebla, a site south of Aleppo dating from the fourth millennium BC. an Amorite royal palace was discovered containing one of the largest and most comprehensive documentary archives of the ancient world. These documents were specialized in industrial, diplomatic, commercial and

administrative matters, in addition to war and peace relations with other countries. The same Amorites went eastward down the Euphrates to establish Babylon and introduce the first rule of law in the history of mankind ‘the Hammurabi law’. Also, Syria presented the world with yet another discovery: copper was made pliable and bronze was invented. Furthermore, it is from Syria that both Christianity and Islam spread to the whole globe. Because of this wealth of ancient civilization, Syria is often described as the largest small country in the world.

Ancient Syria flourished under the Arameans (reborn Amorites) during the first millennium BC. Then the Seleucid Dynasty prevailed, after taking over the lion’s share of the Greek Empire, established by Alexander the Great when it fell apart. The country subsequently became a vital part of the Roman Empire with many Syrians rising to be chosen Roman Emperors. Later, Syrian Queen Zenobia challenged the might of the Roman Empire from her city of Palmyra in eastern Syria. Successive waves of migrations from north and south gave an Aramean and then Arab character to the land assimilating the post-Seleucid Byzantine period and this character managed to withstand the invasions by Hittites, Assyrians, Persians and Romans.

The advent of Islam in 636 A.D. confirmed the Arab identity and