

Sumptuous Syrian Textiles

15 –28 May, 2010

Lead by Dijanne Cevaal and Fiona Wright

Damascus is a town that has always been there it seems. Either Damascus, or Aleppo just up the road hold claim to being the world's oldest continuously inhabited cities –perhaps around 6000 years in all. Many characters of the Old Testament hung out here as did Knights of the Crusades and today many friendly, welcoming locals.

Dijanne Cevaal has a great affinity with the Middle East, she has taught and toured Textile Exhibitions around many countries there and for her Syria rates as a real highlight.

The people are very friendly and welcoming and there is so much here intact and easily accessible- extensive Roman Ruins, Crusader Castles, souks or covered markets; a warren of treasures waiting to be discovered and bartered over, packed full of carpets, textiles and hours worth of satisfying exploration. A recent travel article on Damascus points out -it is mix of Jews, Christians and Muslims spiced by Greek, Roman, Persian, Byzantine, Arab and mostly recently French culture as you can guess not only will a sense of history prevail, there is a rich culture to explore and the food it amazing!

Imagine standing at the edge of the Souk, looking through a massive Roman Gate at an eighth century mosque, your eye passing along a shop selling 21st Century sunglasses- that view sums the country up- layers of history living together.

This journey of exploration will revolve around a travel journal- time to collect ideas, discuss designs, sketch or stitch samples inspired by some of the places we visit and things we see, Fiona and Dijanne are practicing artists and used to working on the road, catching ideas, raiding markets and starting off projects to finish back home. We will visit local artisan weavers, felt makers and a textile restorer, the last family continually to raise silk worms and produce textiles, ancient roman ruins- Palmyra once a major stop on the legendary Silk Road, Crusader Castles, Saladin's Fortress, souks and great food experiences.

Creative Arts Safaris tours are – art and culture based with a hands-on, get out and about type attitude.

- all inclusive utilising good quality mid-range up to flash accommodation and excellent dining experiences – *we look for atmospheric places to stay [off the beaten tourists trails where possible] always good, clean bathrooms, friendly service and comfortable rooms.*

- groups of 8-14 participants

These trips are not traditional package tours, rather it is hoped we can travel as a group of friends; Creative Arts]

Cost – Au \$ 3950 -twin share

[all inclusive except your shopping]

Single supplement Au \$510

Deposit \$1000 to book today

Deposit Deadline 14 February, 2010

Full payment due 28 March, 2010

Email fiona@creative-arts-safaris.com

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Safaris have done the research, our tutor handles the artistic side and a host makes sure it runs smoothly; we all share our observations and knowledge along the way. [any info you pick up in preparation is easy to share with the group via the internet and helps you 'meet' the others too

Day 1, Saturday 15 May, 2010

Damascus

Arrivals and transfers to our hotel

Day 2, Sunday 16 May, 2010

Damascus

A guide will escort us through all the highlights and history of the Old City, The Omayyad Mosque, a palace, the Christian Quarter and many fascinating souqs will fill this day– to keep up our strength we will pop into the best ice-cream shop in Damascus. We will round out the day with a visit to a Syrian textiles expert for an introduction to the rich history of the region and a little indication of what is happening at the moment. [breakfast, ice-cream dinner]

Day 3, Monday 17 May, 2010

Damascus

Syria is the refuge for over 1.5 million Palestinian refugees, 70% of whom live in Damascus, some of the ladies continue their rich embroidery heritage making work for sale in the souq. We have the opportunity to spend the morning stitching with some ladies and start a small piece in a traditional Palestinian cross stitch pattern, in the afternoon we are off to poke our nose into some Kafir weaving workshops [the Kafir is the traditional checked headscarf worn through out the Middle East] and visit a small group who are reviving hand loom Damascene silk brocade weaving. Some of the looms have been in their families for 250 years. It is quiet a few decades since commercial quantities of hand loom silk brocade have been produced [up until last year there was one old demonstration loom to be found in the souq but it unfortunately had to close– too noisy!] yet Damascus was once a centre of excellence...let us hope we are witnessing it step into the future.

Somewhere along the way we fit in a visit to the National Museum, to whet our appetite for antiquities and view some samples of textile found in Palmyra dating back to 83AD. You can still see the work of the hand that made them– amazing!

Day 4, Tuesday 18 May, 2010

Damascus-Maalula-Krak des Chevaliers

Leaving Damascus you realise what an oasis in the desert it is, yet this landscape has witnessed so many conflicts over the millennia. It is said Cane and Able started the ball rolling back in Old Testament times, many layers of history then built on their foundations– Phoenicians, Greeks, Romans, Muslims, Crusaders, and more up until the resent occupation of the French....all came in take what they could.

Maalula and a visit to the Convent de St Serge which houses a small Byzantine Church rich with wonderful paintings and an opportunity to hear the Lord's Prayer in the tongue Christ would have spoken.

Then on along the path the fabled Salah ad-Din would have travelled as he ventured out from his city of Damascus to try to

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breach the Castle of Krak des Chevaliers in crusader times. We will rest this evening with a view of the castle and you can choose from one of the many local restaurants for dinner, bring your swimmers– they have a nice pool. [breakfast, lunch]

Day 5, Wednesday 19 May, 2010

Krak des Chevaliers– Qala'at Salah ad-Din– Hama

Heading up the valley towards the bright stretch of sea we could see from the keep of the castle yesterday, we will take morning tea beside the Mediterranean Sea before journeying onto explore Salah ad-Din's castle– this is your quintessential castle, dating back to 1188 and perched on a rocky crag safe from all around. Then onto Hama and an old Presidential Palace to call home.

[inc breakfast, lunch, dinner]

Day 6, Thursday 20 May, 2010

Hama

First we will wander in town to admire the beautiful groaning wooden Norias or water wheels on the river, then visit the Azem Palace museum, you can still feel the elegance of the life lead within these walls. A short drive into the mountains will take us to visit the last family producing silk in the region. 20 years ago this area boasted production of 10,000kg per year now it is 150 kg. Don't despair this family and their teenage sons are committed to keeping the tradition alive and can show us all the steps from worm to beautiful scarves.

[inc breakfast, lunch, dinner]

Day 7, Friday 21 May, 2010

Hama– Aleppo

Afamea, our first Roman ruins and truly awe inspiring is the scale of what is left; with a street lined in huge pale granite

pillars. Not hard to image that once up to 500,000 people lived here.

Heading north to Aleppo we have a lead on a village still producing fine embroidery to follow [The lead turned up the day we were leaving Syria, so we could not eye-ball it yet!]

Then Aleppo, where Damascus's souqs are vast and airy here they a small and labarynthine, you wander, you get lost, you find yourself and always so busy with locals doing their shopping. Mosque day today so they are closed but still interesting for an introductory wander before dinner.

[Inc breakfast, lunch]

Day 8, Saturday 22 May, 2010

Aleppo

In the morning we will head off to the ruined Basilica of St Simeon [born 392 AD] an early Christian saint who was so widely known in his time he was a 'celebrity'. The basilica is situated on the spot he chose to get away from it all and crowds followed him seeking his guidance. It is a long story, we can tell it as we wander around. In the area are some very interesting abandoned cities from the same era well worth a wander through as well. In the afternoon it is serious souq time back in town and then we can meet at a lovely local restaurant, well known for its Alepp cuisine.

Day 9, Sunday 23 May, 2010 Aleppo– Dier ez-Zur

Heading east will join up with the Euphrates River, one of the Cradles of Civilization and follow it along to Lake Al-Assad a gloriously coloured turquoise lake formed by damming the river [home to Syria's much valued hydro-electricity scheme] for lunch.

First though we will call at one of Syria's few

Notes

Weather – At this time of year is warm in the daytime but we have the comfort of an a/c coach so don't worry.

Clothing – light weight layers of clothing is good. To respect local customs it is best for skirts or trousers to be mid-calf length at least, tops not too revealing. Light, loose layers work well with the climate. Generally I find 3 or 4 outfits sufficient, there is always the opportunity to pick up things along the way. Pack a pair of socks and cardigan for the cool of the morning.

Shoes – sensible walking shoes such as sneakers or strapped on sandals are the best options. Surfaces are often rough and you really want your footing stable so you can focus on all the wonderful things everywhere to look at!

Money – ATMs are in Damascus and Aleppo so you can use a travel card, visa debit or credit advance easily. If you plan to use a card overseas DO warn your bank to expect overseas activity – some will freeze the card wondering what is happening. Money changes abound to change travellers cheques or currency.

Camera – we have a laptop so can download your pictures onto a memory stick [don't forget your connection leads].

Power – 240 volts, European adaptor plugs are the most useful.

Begging? – is generally not to be encouraged. Giving gifts of pens and lollies to children is encouraging them to learn a begging mentality [if you like to give a gift to children we can hand it onto a school]. – a coins to a very old person or a handicapped person is very kind.

Tipping? – we cover tips for the group – eg bags into and out of hotel, dinner etc. If you receive a personal service – eg cup of tea through room service, laundry delivery, it is customary to give a small tip. If you enjoy the commentary of a guide, a performance, take a photo of some one posing in the street etc it is customary to give them a small tip. Set something aside for our driver – he will take us safely and comfortably through the adventure of many Indian roads.

Step lightly on our environment, be frugal in water use, turn off power

switches, take rubbish with you where possible.

Say NO to Plastic! Please bring a cloth carry bag.

Creative Arts Safaris tours include:

- pickups from the airport for arrivals on Day 1
- departures last day of tour

[we are happy to organise pick-ups if you arrive earlier or depart later at an extra fee, we are also happy to help with accommodation etc if you wish to stay longer]

- accommodation from the evening of Day 1 up to and including the night of our Farewell Dinner

Our accommodation is generally mid-range. We use heritage hotels where we can. All places are clean, friendly and have western bathrooms! It is ambiance and friendliness we are looking for. This is the range where we may meet locals as well – top end is far removed from this and just full of foreigners!

- all transportation, road taxes and fuel costs for the tour
- all breakfasts and most other meals

Food is a reflection of the culture and we are pleased to say we will sample a range of good dining experiences.

- sightseeing entrance fees [which covers the use of a still camera]

- all tuition fees

- all tips for meals, bags etc are included *See tipping in the notes section for tipping for personal requests or other tipping instances.*

You need to cover:

- some lunches
- bottled drinking water
- laundry
- the one expense that we can't guestimate' for you is shopping! *[this is not a shopping expedition but you will see some amazing things and you will probably want to indulge!]*
- **airfares**
- **travel insurance**
- **visa** see note next page

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Remaining felt makers. Ahmed produces thick woollen rugs to line your tents and keep out the winter chills. Later in the day we will stay at Deir ez-Zur a rather quaint dusty outpost in the far east of Syria and dine on the banks of the Euphrates River [reminds me of Moses stories in Sunday school as a kid!]

[inc breakfast, lunch, dinner]

Day 10, Monday 24 May, 2010 Deir ez-Zur– Palmyra

A visit to the local souq this morning, not so much for shopping rather for that very interesting occupation of people watching. The local community is a mix of Kurds in their bright and sparkly outfits, Arab with their much more demure and modest wardrobe and Bedouin, differently wrapped and often sporting face tattoos.

Then through the desert to Palmyra, the stunning ruins of a Roman town on the edge of the desert.

After lunch and a brief wander through town we will meet Mohamed and his camels in front of the ruins to ride out to a Bedouin camp for the night [you can take the bus if you choose], dinner will be cooked over a fire and we are invited to help and pick up some recipes, then sit back under the stars before retiring to our tents for the evening. Every thing is here for a lovely Arabian Nights dream but you do need to bring your own Sheik!

[Inc breakfast, dinner]

Day 11, Tuesday 25 May, 2010 Palmyra

Returning to town at a leisurely pace you can wash up before we head out to explore the Ruins for the afternoon, dinner will be in the restaurant of our hotel with a beautiful floodlit view of the ruins across the olive groves.

[Inc breakfast, dinner]

Day 12, Wednesday 26 May, 2010 Palmyra– Damascus

A relaxed start to the day, possibly time for a little sketching or working on your journal? Then a leisurely drive to Damascus and I am sure you would like to wander up to the souqs!

[inc breakfast]

Day 13, Thursday 27 May, 2010

Damascus– Bosra– Damascus

Heading south from the city we will stop off in Chaba to view some superb Roman mosaics, visit an Arak vineyard [a local specialty aniseed flavoured spirit, refreshing on ice after the desert– some days our research questions are very demanding!] then the pearl that is Bosra. It is rather a black pearl as it is built out of black basalt, a Muslin Citadel wrapped around a Roman Amphitheatre, some say the best one still in existence. The local stalls had some fine locally made Bedouin carpets– not being produced anymore these represent the contents of families treasuries [they were seen as money in the bank]. There is some tiny little longing try to re-start rug weaving with the Bedouin of Syria and so value add to the beautiful fleece they produce...but at the moment it is only a rumour, hopefully one that gains substance in years to come, the generation that is the repository of these skills is getting very old now...

Return to Damascus and a special evening –our Farewell Dinner with a wonderful view over the city.

[inc breakfast, lunch, dinner]

Day 14, Friday 28 May, 2010

Depatures– you will be transferred to meet your flight.

[inc breakfast]

Preparations...

This is an area rich in history, to maximise your experience taking time to catch upon some background information and to feed your imagination really adds to your experience.

Following is a short list of things we have found stimulating

Movies

Kingdom of Heaven– very insightful story of the Crusade, watch it a few times. It was filmed in Morocco so the castle is not right [it is Ait Ben Haddou a place we visit on our Moroccan tour] but the costuming and story are spot on.

Gladiator– just to fire your imagination of how they dressed in some of these places.

Books

[We find the Book Depository a great online bookshop and they are posted free [except India] to your door!

<http://www.bookdepository.co.uk>]

-Agatha Christy Mellor Come, Tell Me How You Live: An Archaeological Memoir- Christie's husband Max Mellor was an inspired archaeologist who spent considerable time in Syria as did Christie in often inhospitable conditions; charming tale.

-Amin Malouf -Samarkand. Samarkand follows the very eventful life of Omar Khayyam author of the Rubayyait which he was ordered to write in a blank book as punishment for intrigue against the sultan. - *Balthazar's Odyssey* Another kind of journey in pursuit of a rare and old book 'The Hundredth Name' through Syrian and Turkish lands to London and back.

William Dalrymple From The Holy Mountain: A Journey In The Shadow Of Byzantium– very interesting story of the path of early Christians in the region.

In Xanudu: a quest A tale of following Marco Polo's journals, via Aleppo, Syria

James Jackson Pilgrim Interesting tale based at time of the Children's Crusade.

Ross Burns -Monuments Of Syria: A Historical Guide.

This book is a must for anyone is interested in archaeological sites and the wonderful monuments and ancient sites still in existence in Syria. Burns was a diplomat in Syria and fell in love with the place

Salam Cafe- Comedy show on Australian TV run by a host of Muslim comics-witty and educational -a great insight into Muslim beliefs

Syrian Visas

All visitors to Syria need a valid visa, you will also be asked if you have visited Israel.

Our travel associate can arrange one if you would like to be granted a visa upon arrival [alternatively seek one in your own country before travelling]

A representative from his company will meet you inside the airport before immigration and organise all the formalities.

If you would like to avail yourself of the service FULL passport and flight details MUST be forwarded to us 2 months, prior to arrival. The cut off date is 15 April, 2010.

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