

Fancy something different – why not try a weekend in Aleppo, Syria – cheap, convenient and a great place to shop and visit.

- **Flights**

SAMA at 1410rs on a Wednesday afternoon arriving 1655hrs – Syria is an hour behind Saudi Arabia. Departing Aleppo at 1310hrs on Friday afternoon arriving Riyadh 1605hrs – book your tickets on line - www.flysama.com - in time and your return ticket price will be about SR1,100 per person. (On the way back you will need to retain SP1,500 – SR120 per person to pay departure tax at Aleppo airport before checking in. The Syrian Pound is currently some SP47 = US\$1 or SR10 = SR1.

- **Visas**

These must be obtained from the Syrian Embassy here in Riyadh at SR195 – you will need to apply in person and submit a completed application form, passport sized photograph and a letter in Arabic from your employer confirming your employment. [Ed's Note: This may only be possible if you have an Iqama. If you are in KSA on a visit visa you may need to apply to the Syrian Embassy at home. Although the rules are slowly changing it is still not possible for a British passport holder to get a visa on arrival]

- **Security**

Aleppo is pretty safe although crossing the roads can be a nerve wracking experience - drivers do not give way to pedestrians. In the souk persistent vendors can be a slight annoyance but this is a relatively minor inconvenience as generally the people are welcoming and indeed very hospitable. As a visitor you should register with the British Embassy - www.fco.gov.uk - this can be done on line before you depart. It is also prudent to take out holiday insurance - healthcare in Syria is not up to the high level of Riyadh.

- **Accommodation**

Instead of staying at overpriced and inconvenient international hotels on the outskirts of town - stay at Beit Wakil in the Al Jdeida part of the city. Beit Wakil is a boutique hotel being the conversion of two 16th century town houses with restaurant and bar. Twin room plus en suite shower inclusive of breakfast will cost \$121 plus 11% tax per night - www.beitwakil.com - the hotel will arrange a driver to pick you up from the airport and if traffic is bad, it is about a half an hour journey to the hotel - cost \$16 or SR60.



Also worth a visit is the Hotel Baron - www.the-hotel-baron.com -

A Weekend in Aleppo



which has witnessed a century of Syrian history and European involvement in the politics of the Middle East. Lawrence of Arabia slept in Room 202 and from the balcony in Room 215, King Faisal declared Syria's independence. The hotel has seen better days but a visit to the bar after a day of sightseeing and shopping for a couple of pre dinner drinks is worthwhile. Room rates are \$44.40 per night.

- **Cusine**

Probably the best restaurant in Aleppo is Beit Sissi conveniently situated across the alley way from Beit Wakil and again a converted old merchant's house now serving typical Aleppo food. There is a piano bar and subterranean bar where once can relax with a couple of Almaza beers or some of the local arak. Aleppo's cuisine is considered Syria's finest

