



**Louise Broadley**



**SECURITY**

Despite most pre-conceptions, Damascus is not like Beirut, and currently a relatively safe place to travel. We certainly felt very relaxed and safe throughout our stay. Everyone we encountered was friendly, and the generous hospitality of the Syrian people shone through. As always, you should check the FCO website before travelling.



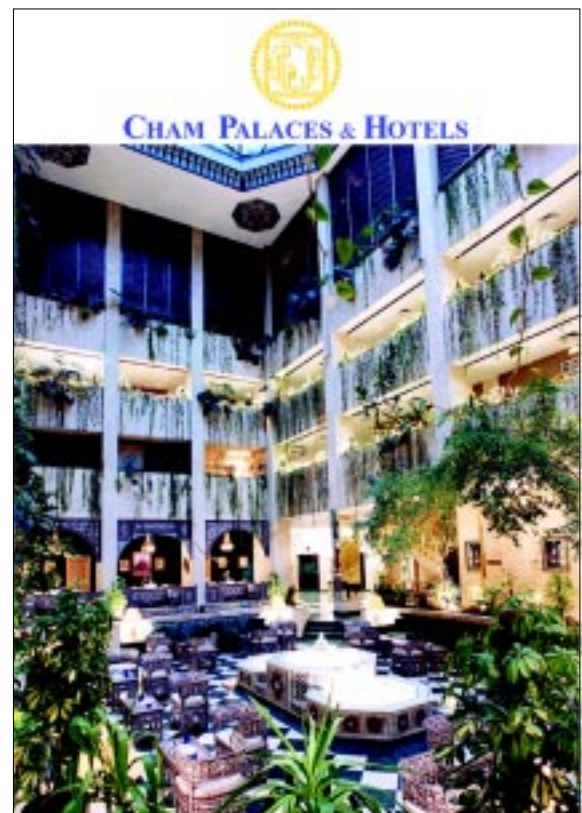
**SIGHTSEEING**

Modern Damascus is a cauldron of noise and bustle but the narrow cobbled lanes of the old town are mostly too narrow for cars, so don't be surprised to see a donkey and cart lumbering past heavily laden with fruit and veg. This place is not just a tourist attraction - most of the activity is local. Citizens live out their lives within the old walls, assisted by a web of retro plumbing and wires. This said, be sure to visit Souk Al Hamidiyeh; it's open from about 9 till 9, but is probably more atmospheric in the evening. Beware of the "just come in for tea" line, it can be difficult to leave until you've parted with some cash. The Omayyad Mosque is certainly worth a look. It is the most important Islamic building in Syria, and in sanctity is second only to the holy mosques of Makkah and

Madinah. Another stunning building and certainly a jaw dropper in terms of the awe inspiring architecture is the Azem Palace, a complex of buildings courtyards and gardens built between 1749 - 1752 as a private residence for the governor of Damascus. On to the Christian quarter and the well known street called Straight. It should be said at this time the street is undergoing huge renovations, with the whole road completely dug up and newly paved road being laid. It is almost impossible to cross this area at the moment unless intrepid and happy to wobble along the make shift planks. Sadly there are some extremely good shops in this area. In the far corner of the quarter is the chapel of Ananias with its crypt (and yes, we did see a vision!!) and the chapel of St. Paul

**SOUVENIRS**

Pack light because the old city is a shopper's paradise. Beautiful table cloths, glass ware, brass and copper ware, carpets and rugs and the wonderfully attractive inlaid boxes, chests and backgammon boards beckon. For this I recommend the furniture shop of Ellie Akbar, in the Christian quarter and just down the road from the church. This kind man packed a beautifully ornate 4-drawer chest, then took it to the airport on the assumption that Saudi would be lenient with the weight allowance. Indeed it was, and we left Syria with several suitcases bags and my fabulous chest of drawers, and 100kg over our weight allowance!!!



*Editors Note: Having been a regular visitor to Damascus for the last eight years, I can heartily endorse Louise's view that it's a great place to visit. My own choice of Hotel would be the Cham Palace, an older hotel in the downtown area and yes, the lobby does look like the picture below. They've also been a great supporter of the magazine's we produce for the British Embassy in Syria!*