

Customs

The Syrian people are very affectionate when greeting those of the same gender and it is not uncommon to see two men holding hands while walking. It is considered inappropriate for men and women who are unrelated to touch. It is not uncommon for people to use gestures or speak loudly when communicating. If you ask for directions, you may literally be guided to your destination. Shaking of the head may mean something is not understood and placing your hand on your heart is a way to decline something. It is common for Syrians to barter about prices. Being on time is not highly regarded in the Syrian culture. Being thirty minutes late is not unusual. Feet are considered undesirable and should not be pointed at others or used to move objects. Also the left hand is considered dirty, so right hands are used to touch things or people. Pork is not eaten by Muslims. Lamb is the most popular meat, but many Syrians cannot afford meat and eat vegetable-based diets. Tea and coffee are popular drinks. Art is expressed in the form of buildings because Islam forbids representations of living people or animals.

Drugs/Alcohol

Drugs: Many Syrians use tobacco and smoke pipes. Other drug use is not permitted and carries strict penalties.

Alcohol: is prohibited by the Muslim faith.

Eighteen is the legal drinking age, but it is not enforced and minors may obtain alcohol and tobacco easily.

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Syrian Culture



Who are the Syrians?

Background

Syria is a country that is somewhat larger than North Dakota. Two thirds of the land is desert and half of the country lies in the Fertile Crescent; 80 percent of the people live in that area, half of which are urban/metropolitan areas. Of the 13 million people, four million live in Damascus alone.

Syrians speak Arabic, although they do not use the Arabic numeral system, but have borrowed numbers from India. Syrians are great believers in fate and love proverbs.

Friday is the Islamic "day of rest." Syrians are often aggressive in behavior and punctuality is not highly esteemed, but they are very affectionate among themselves and their families and hospitable to others.



Medical Practices

The government provides assistance to those who cannot afford healthcare. Previously all healthcare services were covered by the government, but in the late 1990's, small fees began to be charged and have continued to grow as health care services have expanded. Life expectancy had grown to be longer than others areas of the Middle East until the recent civil war, which has greatly impacted all healthcare services.

Family Structure

The culture holds traditional family and gender roles. Women traditionally take care of the house, chores and cooking while the men work outside the home. Arranged marriages still occur and divorce occurs infrequently. Homosexuality is not accepted in the culture. Elderly are cared for by family members and live with their children; there aren't nursing homes. Because of low wages, most employed work two or more jobs. Less than 10 percent of women work outside the home. Syria is more progressive about women's rights than other Middle Eastern countries.



Children

Children live at home until they are married and it is not uncommon to have several generations living together. Punishment can be harsh for children, but families are very loyal and devoted to their children. Schooling begins at age six and occurs 6 days per week. Education is government funded. Common activities that children enjoy are soccer, martial arts, swimming, tennis, running, ping pong and watching camel races.

Death

Syrians observe three days of mourning following a death and widows wear black for at least a year and possibly for the rest of their lives.

Education

Education expenditure has gradually been increasing and, although a poor country, Syria now has a solid basic education system. Control is centralized with the ministry of education that determines the curriculum. Education is compulsory through grades one to nine, and there are few private schools. Following a period in state-managed Rindergartens children enroll in primary school that they will attend for six years. The gender parity principle is being approached, but it is not yet fully achieved.



Religious Practices

Syrians predominantly practice the Muslim faith. There are a variety of sects. There is a small percentage of Christians and Jews. Many Syrians observe the month of Ramadan by fasting and abstaining from drinking, smoking or sexual activity during daylight. Muslims also observe the practice of praying five times a day, prostrate facing toward Mecca.