

Destination Damascus

7 WEEKLY FLIGHTS

Vying for the title of the world's oldest continuously inhabited city, the Syrian capital is absorbing, fascinating and utterly unique

Words by **Matthew Teller**



Settled for perhaps 10,000 years, Damascus was once famous for its beautiful gardens, watered by the River Barada which flows down off the Anti-Lebanon range to the west of the city.

Start at the **Souk al-Hamidiyya**, a covered bazaar leading into the still partly walled **Old City** – the romantic heart of ancient Damascus. Shops, boutiques, cafés and businesses flank a tumult of people out to shop, stroll and gossip – expect donkeys, hawkers, boys pushing carts and a thousand sights and sounds. The souk ends at the great **Umayyad Mosque** (pictured left), a haven of tranquillity built in 705CE, where the serene marble courtyard is dotted with golden mosaics.

Press on through the Muslim Quarter into the **Christian Quarter**, where the call to prayer mixes with the sound of church bells. Take a break at any of the dozens of cafés and restaurants, such as relaxed **Beit Jabri** on Sawwaf Street, or **Al Khawali**, a formal restaurant occupying a palatial medieval residence off Straight Street.

Damascus' once-derelict Jewish Quarter is being revived as a hub for artists; drop into the gallery and workshop of



Mustafa Ali, Syria's foremost sculptor, on Tal Al Hijara Street, then catch up on culture at the vast **National Museum**, off Shukri Al Kuwatly Street in the modern part of town.

Don't miss Naranj, another superb courtyard restaurant – or, for power-dining to impress, book at **Al Halabi** (pictured above) within the opulent Four Seasons hotel.

Destination New York

4 WEEKLY FLIGHTS

Whether it's your first or your 50th trip to the Big Apple, there are always plenty of attractions to get the pulse racing in the city that never sleeps

Words by **Nancy Groves**



While the skyline of Manhattan may be dominated by gleaming, modern skyscrapers, there are also many examples of classic design that hark back to bygone eras. If it's vintage New York you're looking for, be the first to book into **The Chatwal** (thechatwalny.com), opening this spring in the landmark Stanford White building. Former home of Fred Astaire's Lambs Club, this hotel has been carefully restored by architect Thierry Despont on the doorstep of Broadway's finest theatres.

Continuing in the art deco vein, take a lift to the **Top of the Rock**, at Rockefeller Plaza, for spectacular views of the Empire State Building – without the queues. Don't miss the excellent permanent exhibition downstairs before you head out for a skate. From here, a short walk brings you to **Museum Mile**, where you can marvel at the vastness of **The Met** (pictured above right) before heading into the **Frick** or **Guggenheim** for a more manageable afternoon of art.

Head back south and **Fifth Avenue** turns into a shoppers' paradise, from the twinkling windows of Tiffany's to legendary toy-store FAO Schwarz. Savvier



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stylistas head downtown to the **Meatpacking District**, where former abattoirs play host to designer boutiques and cafés. The area also boasts **The High Line**, a stretch of elevated railway track from the 1930s recently replanted to form the city's newest park – 30 feet up in the air.

For a final glimpse of the Manhattan skyline, nothing beats a sunset stroll over **Brooklyn Bridge**, the world's longest at the time of its completion in 1883. Then reward yourself on the other side at **Grimaldi's Pizzeria**, a favourite haunt of Ol' Blue Eyes himself.