

Aleppo:

witness of history

Aleppo - Fady Kassatly:

The city of Aleppo is nicknamed the "blond" because of the color of the stones used in its construction. Situated 355 km to the north of Damascus, it is considered the second city in the country because of its historic importance and the size of its population. The former Aleppo is one of the most beautiful cities of the Orient and the most attractive, because of its old historic architectural wealth of 5000 years, as well as the 240 unique buildings in the old city. That is why UNICEF declared the old city of Aleppo as a universal heritage site. Since ancient times, Aleppo was an important city that controlled international trade routes. It was the home of several civilizations. In the beginning of the 4th century of the Higma (10th century) Aleppo had become the center of the famous Hamadania Emirate.



Short visit to Aleppo

After booking into the hotel in which we were going to spend the night, we discovered that it was an Arab house constructed in 854 the Higma (15th century) and that it had a view directly overlooking the fortress of Aleppo and the old city. The hotel is to be commended as it respects Islamic law, in not serving alcoholic drinks. From our hotel, we headed towards the fortress of Aleppo, situated in the center of the city of which it is a symbol. It also has military importance. The fortress is surrounded with a deep and large ditch that was filled with water in times of siege. We headed thereafter to the Tekya, constructed during the time of the Ottomans and characterized by a new architectural plan. Close by is Khan Shouna an architectural work by the renowned Ottoman architect Sanan Pasha. It is currently a

handicraft market. We used it as a short cut to the old souks, where we found ourselves in the main souk, about 1 km long. Other souks spread out from here for a distance of 12 km. It is advisable to buy Zattar and famous soap named "Ghar". In the traditional souks, one finds most of Aleppo's khans – shops reserved for tradesmen. They are famous for their highly decorated facades and their doors made of wood strengthened by iron and copper, such as the "Khan Al Wazir". We were invited to have our lunch in a restaurant that offers the most famous dishes of Aleppo: it was indeed a varied and high-quality lunch: various kababs and koubba, varied cakes of karbij and juices of almond. One finds many restaurants inside the city or on the freeway leading to Damascus. On second day, we visited the National Museum of Aleppo. It consists of three floors

and five pavilions with exhibits from prehistory to contemporary arts. Close to it, we observed the clock of the "Door of the Faraj" (the "Door of Salvation"), a memorial from Ottoman times. Then we visited the Museum of Traditional Arts – an Arab house, constructed in the 18 century. This house is characterized by its richly decorated façade and rooms depicting the life of the time. Aleppo is the third city of the Islamic World: it has about one thousand mosques most important of which is the Omeyyade Mosque. In front of the mosque is the Al Halouiya School - one of the most important of the thirteen schools of the old city. It is characterized by its portal and splendid wooden Mihrab. There is also the Al Mhmander Mosque characterized by its original minaret, one of the most beautiful minarets of old Aleppo. ■