

## Chapter 4

# When You Get To Saudi Arabia

### 4.1 General

Very little information is available about Saudi Arabia in books on Hajj. Answers to the many questions you will have are hard to come by. What should you expect in Saudi Arabia in terms of living conditions, rules and regulations, customs and travel? What is going to happen in Jeddah? Where is Meeqat, and what facilities for shower and bath, if any, are available there? What precautions and arrangements will make your stay more comfortable? These and other similar questions are dealt with in this chapter.

### 4.2 At Meeqat

Your travel agent will inform you about the location of your Meeqat. There, you will shower if possible, take care of general personal hygiene and then change into Ihram.

Wrap the larger of the two portions of the Ihram around your waist to cover your body from just above the navel to about the ankles. Secure the Ihram either with a belt or with a two to three inch wide strip of fabric torn from the Ihram material. Drape the other part of the Ihram over the back and the shoulders. Do not cover your head even for salat while in a state of Ihram. You may use perfume before changing into Ihram, but be sure not to apply it directly to your Ihram.

You are now a Muhrim (i.e., one in a state of Ihram) and are subject to certain obligations and prohibitions which are given later in this chapter.

Offer two rakah salat us sunnah and pronounce your intention to perform Umra or Hajj, as the case may be. Start reciting the Talbiyah loudly and frequently, and continue to do so until you arrive at the Masjid ul Haram.

*Ihram for ladies consists of their simple and unpretentious clothes of daily wear. They are required to keep their hands and faces uncovered in the state of Ihram.*

While in Ihram, you may use certain things for comfort and convenience. You may wear flip-flops, or similar slippers, provided that they cover as little of your feet as possible. You may also wear eyeglasses or a watch, use an umbrella, take a shower or a bath, wash and change your Ihram, use unscented soap, use a belt and a pillow, and cover yourself with a blanket during cold weather leaving your head and face uncovered. *Ladies may continue to wear intimate apparel and socks but may not use gloves.*

### 4.3 Obligations And Prohibitions Of Ihram

A Muhrim must observe certain obligations and prohibitions. A willful violation of any of them will require a Dum or Kaffarah, while an inadvertent violation carries no penalty. A Dum is not designed to punish you for your violation! It simply reminds you of your special state and offers you an opportunity to renew your commitment to perform Hajj according to the dictates of Allah and the sunnah of Rasool Allah (pbuh). The rules of Ihram are as follows:

- a. Keep your head uncovered at all times. *Ladies will keep their heads covered.*
- b. Do not shave, cut your hair, clip your nails, use perfume, or wear sewn clothes of any kind.
- c. Do not perform a marriage (nikah) or enter into one yourself.
- d. Do not kill an animal of any kind for any reason unless it poses a danger to you or to other people around you.
- e. Do not enter into conjugal relations with your spouse. Avoid suggestive and provocative talk or gestures, and remain focussed on your mission of Hajj.

### 4.4 Dum

As has already been mentioned, you are not accountable for inadvertent violations of the prohibitions of Ihram. Should you violate the sanctity of the Ihram knowingly and willfully, you are required to offer a Dum by way of expiation and of renewing your commitment to Hajj. There are three ways you may offer this Kaffarah:

- a. By offering a sacrifice.
- b. By feeding six indigent and poor people.
- c. By fasting for three days.

You must offer the Dum as soon as possible. However, you may delay it to a more suitable time and place if absolutely necessary.

#### 4.5 Jeddah And On To Mecca

There are legal formalities to be completed and paperwork to be done at Jeddah airport, and they will take a lot of time! To put things in perspective : Mecca, which is usually the first stop after Jeddah for most people, is a mere fifty miles from Jeddah. You will, in all likelihood, spend as many as eight to twelve hours completing formalities and travelling in a bus to cover this distance. Be patient. There is not much you can do to speed up the process.

After going through a maze of procedures, paperwork, customs and immigration, travel coupons for internal travel within Saudi Arabia will be attached to your passport and you will be escorted to government buses for your journey to Mecca. At this time, your passport will be taken away. Do not expect a receipt; none will be provided. The passport will be kept by the muallim assigned to you by the Saudi government, and you will next see it again at Jeddah airport the day you leave for home! You will be issued a picture-ID card in Mecca by your muallim in lieu of the passport. **Take good care of this vital document until your passport is returned to you.**

The bus will take you first to the Hujjaj Reception Center on your way to Mecca. After your papers are checked once again over an indeterminate period of time, you will be taken to your muallim's office in Mecca. There you will be issued a plastic bracelet or some other form of a document with the name, address and the telephone number of your muallim printed on it. **Be sure always to have it on your person. If you ever get lost or are in an accident, the bracelet/document will be your passport to the right people. Without it you may face tremendous difficulties in returning to your place of residence.** Your agent will next take you to your residence in Mecca.

Once you put your belongings safely away, and finally settle down, you will be ready to go to Masjid ul Haram for Tawaf ul Qudoom!

#### 4.6 Travel Within Saudi Arabia

Travel within Saudi Arabia is highly restricted. As a pilgrim, your travels will be limited to the cities of Mecca and Medina, to the tent cities of Mina and Arafat, and to Muzdalifah. Inter-city travel (for example between Mecca and Medina) will require you, or your travel agent, to inform your muallim's office twenty four to forty eight hours before the projected time of your departure. You will travel by government bus using one of your travel coupons. You may also be able to travel by taxi at an additional cost to you. In either case, your passport will be handed over to the Saudi bus/taxi driver (a non-Saudi driver is not acceptable) by the muallim. The driver will personally hand the passport over to the relevant Saudi authority at your destination. **At every such exchange of the passport, request to see the document in order to ensure that it really is yours!** You do not want to reach your destination only to discover that someone else's passport has been inadvertently substituted for yours! This can happen. Be pro-active, alert and informed of everything that is happening at all times.

It may be to your advantage to use private taxis at an extra expense to you for inter-city travel. Your travel coupons are designed to be used for such trips by government buses only. However, the paperwork, government bureaucracy, and the bus system are excruciatingly slow, especially during the Hajj season. To cite a couple of examples :

- a. The Jeddah-Mecca journey (a distance of merely fifty miles) may take eight to twelve hours by bus from the time you land to the time you reach your residence in Mecca.
- b. The Mecca-Medina journey (a distance of about 250 miles) may take twenty to thirty hours by bus from the time you report to the muallim's office to when you arrive at your final destination. Some people in the writer's group spent forty hours during this journey in a government bus!

A taxi will make short work of these trips in one and a half to two hours and three to four hours, respectively. The paper work is also abbreviated because you arrange for the taxi yourself and don't have to wait on other passengers, nor are you at the mercy of the bus driver. You will pay for the taxi out of your own pocket, but the time, frustration, and physical toll this will save far outweighs the small monetary expense. Talk to your travel agent beforehand to ensure that this highly desirable option will be available to you.

Also, remember to redeem your unused travel coupons at Jeddah airport on your way out of the country. Your agent should be able to help you in this matter. Do not forget to inform your muallim of your plans to travel by taxi well ahead of time, otherwise he will remove the coupons from your passport and you will not be able to have the appropriate amount of money refunded.

There is no civilian airport at Mecca, but there is one in Medina. You may choose to fly from Medina to Jeddah at your own expense. However, with the extra paperwork, the drive to the Medina airport, and the inevitable wait there, you will probably end up spending as much time flying as you will spend by travelling in a taxi.

#### 4.7 The DO'S and DONT'S Of Hajj

The following are some suggestions based on common sense and the experience of the writer and his fellow pilgrims. They will make your life easier and your Hajj experience more pleasurable, Insha Allah:

##### The DO'S:

1. **DO** carry sufficient money with you to cover your expenses comfortably. Even if your agent has made adequate arrangements for your meals, you will want to eat out at times, and then there is shopping! You may also choose to travel by taxi between cities at an additional charge to you. It is no fun running short on funds in a foreign country, especially during Hajj.
2. **DO** wash all fruits in clean water before consumption. Stick to fruits that have to be peeled before use. Avoid pre-cut fruits, salads, and food handled in an insanitary fashion. Avoid all food exposed to the elements. Fast food is available at some places but tends to be of somewhat lower quality than its American counterpart. It is, however, safe and sanitary.
3. **DO** keep the name, address and the telephone number of your muallim as well as of your place of residence with you at all times. **DO** wear the bracelet issued by the muallim and **DO** carry your picture ID card at all times. They will prove to be invaluable should something happen to you or if you get lost.
4. **DO** be aware of the heat and the problems it can cause (e.g., dehydration, heat stroke). Drink plenty of water (bottled water only, with or without

4. **DO** be aware of the heat and the problems it can cause (e.g., dehydration, heat stroke). Drink plenty of water (**bottled water only**, with or without GATORADE), soft drinks, and fruit juices. Stay in the shade when possible and use an umbrella and sunglasses to protect yourself from the harsh sun.
5. **DO** pace yourself in everything, including acts of worship. Know your physical limits and stay well within them. It is only too easy to get caught up in the emotion of the moment and exceed the boundaries of your strength and stamina. Pilgrims often try to spend every spare moment of their time in prayers and devotionals in Haram ash Shareef and often become sick. It is very painful and frustrating to get sick in a foreign country and an illness during Hajj is even worse as it defeats the purpose of your visit.
6. **DO** carry an ample supply of general purpose medicines for personal use. Most medicines are readily available in Saudi Arabia over the counter. Talk to a pharmacist or see a doctor promptly if you need help.
7. **DO** spend some time in studying and memorizing the layout and the location of your tent at Mina and Arafat, and your place of temporary stay in Muzdalifah with respect, possibly, to a nearby permanent landmark. All tents and pilgrims look alike. Should you get lost or confused, you will be faced with an extremely difficult, even an impossible, task of getting back to your base.
8. **DO** be patient, understanding, caring and compassionate. The hot weather, the tremendous crush of the pilgrims, and the considerable physical demands of Hajj tend to make people irritable and short of temper. You can avoid potentially awkward situations and unnecessary arguments by remaining focussed on your mission of Hajj, and by maintaining a positive and caring attitude towards others.
9. **DO** try to be responsive to others in need of guidance or help. Realize that your physical stamina and mental toughness will be repeatedly tried during Hajj.

#### The DONT'S:

1. **DON'T** ever leave money or other valuables (eg. papers, jewelry etc.) in your room. Always carry them with you on your person and be aware of people around you. Unfortunately, there are pickpockets and thieves in and around the Haram ash Shareef. Keep your fanny pouch covered by the top part of your Ihram in order to avoid drawing unwanted attention.
2. **DON'T** expect Hajj to be a pleasure trip. Try to take your frustrations, hardships, and disappointments (and there will definitely be many!) in stride as a part of the sacrifice expected of you. See if you can ease someone else's burden a little by offering your support.
3. **DON'T** break or try to circumvent Saudi laws and regulations. The rules are clear and rigid, and the authorities are very strict.
4. **DON'T** get involved in unnecessary religious discussions with anyone. You will see slight variations in religious and Hajj practices among different people. Someone may even point out to you the "wrongness" of your ways. Be patient and walk away from a difficult situation. Patience and understanding go a long way towards making your Hajj more meaningful and enjoyable.

#### 4.8 Prices In Saudi Arabia

The following prices in Saudi Riyals (SR) of a few representative items are intended to give you an idea of what to expect in the marketplace. Hagglng for prices is common and, indeed, seems to be expected. Talk to knowledgeable people (e.g., your travel agent or a local friend) to decide on an opening price for an item. In the experience of the writer and his fellow pilgrims, 75% to 85% of the asking price appeared to be an acceptable opening figure:

Casual Shirt : SR 10-15

Average Quality Thoub : SR 20-25

High Quality Thoub : SR 60-80

Musalla : SR 15-20

Bottled Water (1 liter) : SR 1

(2 liters) : SR 2

Soft Drinks (12 oz can) : SR 1

Fruit Juice (12 oz can) : SR 1-2

Ice Cream (2 scoops) : SR 2

Milk (1 liter) : SR 3-4

Vegetarian Dinner : SR 5-7

Non-Vegetarian Dinner : SR 7-10

Deep-fried Chicken Dinner : SR 10-12

Barbecued Chicken Dinner : SR 12-15

Flip Flops (Thongs) : SR 10

Taxi (Mecca-Medina) : SR 50-60 per person

Halq/Taqseer (Haircut) : SR 10



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