

THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW BEFORE GOING FOR HAJJ

Hajj is the fifth pillar of Islam. It is to be done once in a lifetime. And even though it seems logical to assume that any Muslim will be careful and take enough time to learn and prepare him self for this great worship, it is surprising that most Muslims do not. When I traveled for Hajj a few years back, I was shocked to find out that most of the 100 plus of us in the plane did not know even the basic rites of Hajj, and many did not know how to perform Umrah which is the first thing they had to do upon arrival in Makkah.

Early preparations are important also because the Hajj experience is going to be different from any other. A Muslim has to be ready mentally, spiritually, physically and financially. So, it is really important that one talks with Muslims who have made Hajj and plans his trip so that he goes in a group of Muslims. And even after one adequately educates himself, Hajj may not be easy to put in practice and carry out for everyone.

The following is a list of things that one should keep in mind when preparing to go to Hajj. By no means is this list comprehensive and one is advised to consult the local masjid and Hajj providers who can answer his questions and insure that he does things correctly:

1. Make sure you have enough money
2. Valid Passport and Visa. The Saudi Government requires that visas be obtained from countries of origin. If you are born in the US or other non-Muslim country, you should have a certificate showing that you are a Muslim, especially if the passport does not show a Muslim name.
3. Buy your Ihram and learn how to put it on and be comfortable doing it so as to avoid any embarrassing
4. Make sure you have vaccinations in time and that your air ticket is a round trip one.
5. Muslim females must have a Mahram to travel with. A Mahram is a male member of your immediate family: a father, a husband, a son or a brother and because he will have to go to Makkah and Madina, he should also be a Muslim.
6. Do not plan to go alone. Find a local or national group. It is better if such a group included a learned person and people who have made Hajj before.

7. Learn how to make Hajj. Read and educate yourself. Try to attend a workshop by a local community center to understand the rules and regulations about the day-to-day activities of Hajj. Talk to people who have experienced Hajj. Buy Hajj guide books and take them with you. Make sure you get answers to anything you don't understand.

8. Get some safety pockets and a safety belt to keep your money and documents with you. It is good to always keep them with you.

9. Do not worry about finding food or having to cook. In Makkah you can find all types of food. So, do not take any with you.

10. If you are sick or need certain medication, take it with you. Medicine, however, is plenty over there. You can find it in hospitals and you can buy it from pharmacies. Most medicine can be obtained without physician prescriptions.

11. Remember that your goal is to have your Hajj accepted and to be forgiven for all of your sins. To do that, you have to busy yourself in Ibadah. Don't worry about what you see wrong from other Muslims. Worry about what you do and whether Allah will accept your Hajj performance or not.

12. Be patient as much as you can. Makkah and Madinah are going to be over crowded. More so, in Ka'abah during Tawaf, and in Sa'i. Remember that more than a million Muslim are going to be there at the same place doing the same rites. So, whenever you have see someone who is ignorant or does not respect others, take it easy and move to a different spot.

13. Avoid heavy crowds as much as you can. Serious accidents can happen. You may get hurt. And to keep your Hajj in good standing you should not be in a position in which you cause harm to others.

14. In Mina and Arafat, you will be living in tents. Try to identify the number and the direction of tents so that you can make it back without a lot of trouble. This is very important to do because tents and streets look identical and people can easily get confused and be lost.