



Shaheed and Noha, married for 6 years, have been blessed with 2 children Yaseen (5yrs) and Zahra (2yrs). Shaheed is a qualified Quantity Surveyor working for a major financial institution and Noha runs her own marketing business.

Year Hajj performed : 2008
Age : 34
Accompanied by : Wife, Noha
Travel Group : Al-Anwar
Accommodation in Makkah : Ajyad Makkah
Accommodation in Medinah : Movenpick
Other cities visited : Istanbul in Turkey, and Jeddah

PREPARATION FOR HAJJ

SPIRITUAL PREPARATION My wife and I attended Sheikh Faaiiek Gamiieldien's Haj classes in 2002. We also watched the Hajj DVD's by Sheikh Abduraghman Alexander which we found informative and easy to follow. Furthermore, we read up on the Hajj in Islamic literature and heeded advice from our elders and other Hujjaaj. We took with us on our journey Islamic booklets and guides concerning the correct principles of Hajj. We referred often to a pocket-sized book by the name of "The rites of Gadj and Umrah and the visit to the mosque of the Prophet (S.A.W)." This was a gift from a dear and special friend of ours. The book was concise and unambiguous, a useful hand-bbok to consult on specific matters.

When we got married in 2003 we made an intention to perform Hajj together within 5 years; we set ourselves goals to achieve this. The internal spiritual preparation was to consciously and emotionally prepare ourselves for what we knew was going to be the greatest journey of our lives. The preparation, we believe, commenced in 2003 with the intention firmly rooted in our mind. We initially hoped to undertake Hajj in 2007, however this was not to be. We resigned ourselves to the belief that we will be "called" to Hajj and that we will be Allah's guest when the Almighty deems it appropriate. To this we surrendered, and it was in 2008 that we were granted the opportunity, Algamdulillah.

PHYSICAL PREPARATION

Admittedly there was not much physical preparation that we did prior to our departure. Noha had a slipped disc and was in severe pain for months before: she therefore underwent physiotherapy nad chiropractic therapy in physical prepration for our Hajj. Given Noha's physical condition, our mental preparation was crucial in undertaking the journey that lay ahead. We made sure that we had comfortable shoes for our travels that complied with the Hajj rituals and requirements.

Wear comfortable shoes that you are familiar with. DO NOT buy new shoes to wear for Hajj: "stick with what you know and with what you've worn."

FINANCIAL PREPARATION

My wife and I were very fortunate to have acquired our funds over a relatively short period of time which we dedicated for our Hajj. Aside from our plane tickets and accommodation, we also made provision for:

- foodstuff etc.

Note: the above could be considerable if not budgeted and planned for accordingly.

- Expenses for our children – although they were very young and taken care of by their aunt, we believed it prudent to make provision for their daily needs, e.g. nappies, purity food, etc. We also made provision for their eid expenses i.e. clothes and potential holiday 'pocket money' given the time of year i.e. November to December.

- Monthly household expenses

- Our daily expenses for the duration of our stay overseas.

- Our 'actual' Hajj expense i.e. plane ticket, accommodation, etc. We also tried to make provision for a huge variance in the exchange rate, should it occur. In 2008, the Dollar was about R11 - R13. So the Riyal was almost R3. We therefore received less for our rand and hence everything appeared expensive.

- We chose to transfer most of our monies onto our visa/mastercard credit cards. We also notified our banks that we will be utilizing our cards overseas. This we believed was convenient and safe vs. carrying travellers cheques and/or huge amounts of cash. The cash that we did have on hand, we converted to dollars and Riyaals locally. In need, we could draw cash from the ATMs or pay directly with our cards.

- At all the hotels we stayed in there were internet cafes enabling us to use internet banking, if necessary.

TRAVEL PREPARATION

All our travel arrangements were made by our travel agent, Al Anwar. We decided on a Business Package as it allowed us the convenience and comfort we wanted, as well as the duration of 4 weeks. We would strongly advise couples to opt for couple rooms (if they are by the means) throughout their stay. We also had the option to fly with either Turkish Airlines or Egypt Air. We chose Turkish Airlines as it was a direct flight to Medina. Given the weather and our destination, we packed very light. The only things we bought in S.A were our Ihraams, toiletries, medications (especially for Noha's back condition), and comfortable shoes. We chose to buy whatever else was required e.g. abayas, scarves, etc in Medina or Makkah. The retail outlets offer variety and there are many similarities between their malls and ours in S.A. If you are moving to Azziziah, confirm with your agent what is available at the apartments you will stay at. If it is very basic, you might have to budget to purchase OR pack in basic necessities like towels, plates, cups, spoons, cleaning aids, etc.

FAMILY PREPARTAION

We left behind our two children, Yaseen (3 years) and Sofiya (5 months) in the loving care of their grand-parents, aunts and cousins. We are fortunate to have a very supportive family structure, and therefore felt at ease when we departed knowing that they would be well taken care of.

Before we left, we spoke to Yaseen everyday and explained why and where we were going. We prepared a countdown chart to the period that we were away for Yaseen. The chart gave him an

idea of when we would phone and when he could expect a letter from us. The chart also indicated when we would not be able to speak to him i.e. specifically on the days of Hajj and Tashreeq. We also bought gifts for him, to be given by his aunt every week. He was to be told that these gifts were “sent from his parents in Makkah”, so he felt thought of and cared about although we were not physically with him. Because he was fascinated by the moon and its cycles, we explained to him that we would depart by full moon and we would return by the following full moon.

In order to keep in regular contact with family back home, we advise individuals to take their cellphones and purchase sim cards and airtime locally. It is relatively inexpensive if used wisely.

MENTAL PREPARATION

We tried to plan each day of our trip as far as possible. Given our hectic lives back home, it is crucial to plan your days in Makkah and Madinah. Your only responsibility is the remembrance of Allah. There are no distractions, e.g. work, project deadlines, dropping and collecting children from crèche, washing, ironing, and other chores, etc. If you do not prepare yourself mentally, you could waste valuable time in these two holy cities.

VOCATIONAL PREPARATION

I informed my employer 6 months before our departure and applied for 5 weeks leave. There were initially a couple of questions concerning the length of my requested leave, however this was amicably resolved. Although SAHUC had not confirmed our accreditation by that time, we prepared ourselves nonetheless. 5 Weeks is a relatively long absence from work with no contact with the office (I chose not to be contacted), hence adequate preparation and ‘handover’ to my colleagues was important. I left at ease in the knowledge that my work and responsibilities was in the hands of capable colleagues.

My wife runs her own company and was in the middle of a fairly huge project when we left. She made preparation 3 months in advance with a trusted and capable business associate to oversee the business in her absence.

ACTUAL HAJJ EXPERIENCE

PERFORMANCE OF RITUALS

For us the best time to Tawaaf was between 1am and Tahaajud salaah. It was cooler and less congested. We also found a gap immediately after the Maghrib salaah. Given that it was ‘winter’ Fajr was fairly late in the morning, which meant that the wakts came very quickly after each other. For this reason we found ourselves staying in the Haram until Eshaai most nights. We tried to do most of our Ibaadah from around 12 midnight. There was plenty of time after Eshaai to rest, and also sometimes between Fajr and Thuhr. We spent the majority of our time either making our thikrs, making duah or reciting our Gatam al Quran. My initial intention was to recite at least 3 – 4 Gatams during our stay. Once we were there my wife and I decided to do a Gatam together reading an English Quran. (Note: Reading an English Quran takes much longer than reading it in Arabic!) This was beautiful to experience in Makkah and Medina as we felt we could see the Surah’s unfold before our eyes. The central theme to most of our conversations was discussing and debating what we read in the Quran and relating it back to our everyday life. I would recommend that if you are not fluent in speaking or understanding the Arabic language, then reading the Quran with the English translation is most insightful and beneficial (not only in

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Tuesday, 12 October 2010 19:30

Makkah/Madinah but at home as well).

For Jumuah, we tried to be in the Haram from at least 10h30. Jumuah is at 12h00 or 12h30 in Saudi. We made sure we had a good spot, preferably close to the Ka'bah, or else shaded or air conditioned.

In Medina, we also made sure we were early for Jumuah and even for other wakts too. Our hotel was very close to the Medina Haram, so when the Athaan was called, we could walk over and still be in time.

It is important to be familiar with the Salaatul Janaazah as you will be making it every waqt. Given my wife's slipped disc we did not perform many Umrahs. Umrahs were best performed late at night or early in the morning.

For men, going to the Rhoda was simple. However, for women, there were long queues. Noha found it easier going into the doors just before 11pm when the gates closed, meaning you would be part of the last group and have more space and time in the Rhoda. When entering the Rhoda, always walk to your far left first, not straight. And when the Asgaries want you to move, just pick up your sallie in salaah and make another 2 rakaats.

PHYSICAL

In the Haram of Makkah and Medina it is best not to use the toilet, especially for the women. Once you leave your space, it is impossible to get it back. We had spray canisters filled with water for "wudu on the go". If we really needed to, we went to one of the pay toilets in the malls close to the Haram or the hotel, whichever was closest.

Toilets in Mina, and along the journey on the days of Hajj, are not in the best of conditions, especially the female toilets. We took sanitizers to clean the toilets before use. My wife also had elastic bands to tie her clothes higher up on her body in order to keep it clean.

As a rule, we only partook of breakfast and supper throughout the journey. If hungry, we would snack during the day with something light.

The weather was surprisingly easy to deal with. While it was 49 degrees Celsius, we managed. Cotton and loose fitting abayas were the best to keep cool. Keep yourselves well hydrated. Zam-zam is in abundance: drink it. We took vitamins everyday and on some days we took energy boosters.

We had a medical doctor with us, made available by our tour agents. However, it must be known that both Makkah and Medina has the best medical facilities and staff.

Rest is very important, especially before the days of Hajj. You will need all your strength for the days of Hajj, both the walking Hajj and travelling by bus.

ACCOMMODATION

We stayed at the Movenpick Hotel in Medina. The hotel was very comfortable with breakfast as part of the package. The breakfasts were very good and we generally skipped lunch. The hotel was located at the end of the Haram, only a few steps from the gates.

In Makkah, we stayed at the Ajyad Makkah, which was also very close to the Haram and right next to the hospital. This hotel was also comfortable with breakfast and supper as part of the package. This was very convenient as it allowed us to focus on our ibaadah, and not concern ourselves with sourcing food for supper.

We moved to Azizia from the beginning of Thul Hajj until we went home. This was a humbling experience given the comforts we had experienced in the previous hotels. The accommodation was very basic, and therefore good practice for the minimalistic living we were about to

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experience in Mina.

In Mina we were in the Special Services camp for South Africans. The camp was very close to the Jamarats. The tents were amenable and the Al-Anwar group had many programmes, lectures and thikrs. This was also the first time Noha & I were not together as women and men were separated. We would strongly recommend the special services (if you are able and by the means): all our basic needs were catered for and we were very close to the Jamarats.

ARAFAH & MUZDALLIFAH

Given Noha's slipped disc and sprained ankle we opted to take a bus from Azizia to Mina and again from Mina to Arafah. We each had our own programme on Arafah that we pursued, and we only took part in the group duah after thuhr. We took our Arafah – meaning “to know” - literally and hence decided to spend time only with “ourselves”. This was truly an opportunity to reflect on our past and to get in touch with our true selves, in order to truly connect with our Creator. Our experience was indescribable and eye-opening.

My wife and I decided to continue our journey on foot from Arafah to Muzdallifah. With the grace and mercy of our Creator my wife managed very well given her condition. The walk with millions of people is a breathtaking and surreal experience. The unity that is felt is unbelievable.

GENERAL

Embrace this journey with an open heart and mind and be prepared to ‘stretch’ your five senses in every respect. Hajj is an experience like no other. Only once you've experienced it can you identify with other hujjaaj. This journey is between you and your Creator and is symbolic of our journey through life itself. Be true to yourself and know that Allah continuously bestows His mercy and compassion on us (24/7/365).

Know that there are no mistakes and no coincidences in this world. Allah is perfection and love and only wants what is perfect for us. Believe in what you yearn, prepare, plan and execute accordingly, and Allah will make it easy for you.