

HAJ – The 5th Pillar of Islam

The haj preparations are basically made up of 6 things.

1. Mental preparation - The practicality of the Haj from the time one leaves PE to the stay in Madinah Munawwarah to Makkah Mukarramah to Aziziya and return. This will assist in terms of being mentally prepared with bags of sabr.
2. Educational - Information about the Haj itself.
3. Spiritual Preparation - We all are equally responsible to have already started with this inshallah.
4. Physical Preparation - Do 2 to 3 kilometers brisk walk every day, to allow for the body to adapt...come the days of Haj inshallah.
5. Logistics - Agents guide
6. Medical – Chronic and non

Mental Preparation: First Leg

1. Packing one's bags. Always try to pack as light as possible. Leave behind anything unnecessary. Carry only Islamic garb as this is what will be used throughout the journey, every day.

Men - besides the normal packing of kurtas/topi and essentials, ensure that we also carry headscarves for the heat, sunglasses for the glare of the marble, tawaaf socks if available locally, pair of wudhu sandals, moneybag, comfortable shoes/ sandals for all the walking. Buy non scented chafing cream at clicks, to be used for any friction when in Ihram.

*Ihraam + sandals, tawaaf socks, etc can all be purchased in Madinah Munawwarah. Available from all different shops. The best Ihram to purchase is the Velcro in my humble opinion, whilst others may feel comfortable with other style ihrams.

Buying the Ihraam in Madinah helps with the weight issues of one's bag.

Women - Barring all the necessaries and toiletries, ensure we also have a roll up sun-hat, comfortable shoes, takkies, sling bag to keep all small dua kitaabs, preferably longer than usual burkahs, simple loose fitting cloaks, nothing fancy, or nothing with thick material, black socks, general and chronic medication etc.

Hand luggage - Always keep something warm to cover oneself for the aircons in plane – it can get a bit cold, and if we travelling the transit route, some landing in Egypt, Dubai or Qatar 1st, on to Madinah Munawwarah, then ensure that we keep minimum toiletries with toothbrush and toothpaste, packed in a small toiletry bag, with one set of clothing in our hand luggage, esp. when transits are longer than 5 or 6 hours.

Also, in hand luggage - A small kit bag with hand sanitizer, eyedrops, plasters, facecloth, tissues, vaseline etc. All small amounts in small kit bag. No sharp objects or anything flammable as this will be confiscated.

Keep reading material, like dua kitaabs, history of Makkah Mukarramah and Madinah Munawwarah.

Keep snacks as well.

Hand luggage will also contain all important documents like ID, Passport, always keep at least 3 to 4 copies of these important documents in big suitcase, in the event of any emergency.

Currency change - pls ensure this is done before hand here in SA. From my experience, American Express in Walmer Shopping Centre has the cheapest rates. Always ask for VIP rates telephonically before going in. Change to dollars not directly to riyals as this is the safest option given the duration of stay in saudi.

The rand is very volatile, as a result if it weakens during our stay in Saudi, then we will get lesser riyals in saudi when changing from rands to riyals. However, with the dollar it will remain unchanged. For every 100 dollars you will get 373 riyals.

Once we are spiritually prepared to leave the home, check our flight details. **For domestic departures** ensure that we are standing in the que at airport to check in, at least 90 min before departure to avoid for any possible delays. If we are acquainted with online check in, then utilize this option as this will make life very easy at ques or counters. Don't take it for granted and leave late, anything can happen from a delay point of view especially if we catching connecting flights.

For international check in, LATEST - 3 hours before departure in que as a minimum and due to the congestion at international airports, try to be there 5 hours before. Again, online check in also helps.

In jhb/saudi, the agents that you are travelling with will take care of the necessary's of getting you on time to your flights, so just ensure we get on the pe to jhb flight on time.

Mental Preparation - 2nd Leg

Important Documents - make sure to keep your ID, Passport, flight details of both domestic and international, and whatever travel vouchers, always at hand.

Baggage - Always weigh our bags beforehand. Check the airline regulations in terms of how many bags we are allowed and what are the weight restrictions. Always stay within the rules. Airlines are very strict with over-weight baggage as this poses legal issues for them. Hence if bags are overweight, they will make you offload the excess at the airport. Also read through all banned substances of the airline or requirements of country that we are travelling to. This will assist us in avoiding unnecessary delays or checks at passport controls etc.

Do not delay in getting to your departure gates. This can easily happen when we have family members wanting to greet us at airport. Rather let all the greeting and meeting take place at home.

Ask the following questions to your agent/or person over the counter who does the check in for you, regarding check in of baggage....

Can I check in my baggage from pe to Madinah or must it be checked in from pe to jhb.....then offloaded in jhb, then checked in again from jhb to Madinah?

The reason for this is at times there's delays in baggage reaching Madinah Munawwarah on time. You land in Madinah and baggage comes one day later. Some had to wait even longer for baggage. I sincerely hope that this has changed. Hence always keep something extra in hand luggage just in case. But remember not be over 7kg with hand luggage.

Importantly, keep your bag tags (Issued when bags are checked in) very safe, in the event there be a delay in bags arriving later.

Also tie some colourful ribbon on handles of bag so that your bag can be easily identifiable.

Wrap bags at airport or from home as this protects it from damage and or tampering.

From my experience. I always check in my bags from PE to JHB then pe to Madinah to avoid this delay. A bit more effort to offload in jhb and then reload in jhb.... I found this more easier in getting bags on time. Allahu A'lam....do what you feel is best.

We depart PE to JHB.....if we haven't chosen the option to send our bags direct to Madinah Munawwarah, then make sure to offload bags in JHB and head to Terminal A for international departure.

Make sure to find your agent and inform them that you are present. You will find them at terminal A with banners etc. Always have your agents local and saudi number at hand for any logistical queries.

From this point onwards your agent will guide you through check in - you will go through passport control, and head out to departure gates. Keep ourselves informed about gate numbers and what times gates open and departure times etc.

Plan our salaah and toilet times in advance. Don't leave anything for last minute.

This is when our travel musallahs etc (which we packed in hand luggage) will come in handy.

Expect flights to be delayed because of the related air traffic congestion coming in from different parts of the world for Haj.

Mental Preparation - Phase 2

Transit - most Hujjaaj will use the transit route, flying with emirates, then lands dubai then off to Madinah Munawwarah, or flying egypt air, lands in Egypt then off to Madinah Munawwarah etc. The port of entry for these transit airlines will be Madinah Munawwarah.

Those travelling with Saudi Airlines...the port of entry will be Jeddah then domestic flight or bus en route to Madinah Munawwarah.

The difference in both local saudi airlines and foreign airliner is that baggages are generally offloaded at port of entry.

In the case of landing in Jeddah, it gets offloaded then reloaded onto the domestic flight...this is where the delays in baggage generally happens. It's always good to check for your bags in Jeddah and reload it onto domestic flights yourselves.

Whilst the flights are shorter with Saudi Airlines from jhb, the wait period getting through passport controls and delays in baggage is generally tedious.

For those that have transit routes, check your connecting flight details, if the wait is long, like approx. 8 hours or more, then they will offer a hotel and / or sightseeing of the country for free. You will be given options. If it's any lesser, then the wait will be at the airport.

Please check with agents regarding this.

Landing in Madinah Munawwarah via egypt air or emirates - this is the best airport to land at during haj - very efficient, no long ques etc. - generally very quick. And because of international landing, no baggage delays INSHALLAH. Hopefully this all has not changed

Landing in Jeddah with Saudi Airlines - needs alot of sabr, extremely long ques, minimum waiting period is about 3 hours to get through passport controls, max can go upto 5 to 6 hours.

This is how we deal with it. Prepare the mind with sabr, ensure you have travel musallahs, some food to go around, and just follow instructions. Don't lose your cool.

Remember saudi regulations keep changing all the time. At times even the agents are confused. It's not their fault.

In any case, landing with saudi in Jeddah is always the challenge. If u have a domestic flight to Madinah, then ensure u get bags and reload as far and fast as possible. They will push you to another que so that you don't miss the domestic flight, otherwise they will find another flight for you should u miss the domestic flight, due to delays at passport controls. So don't panic.

And if you are going by bus to Madinah Munawwarah, then the agents will be there to guide you once you pass the passport controls. Look for them outside the doors once you have collected baggage. From there they will guide you to busses etc.

Once you have landed, and come through the arrival doors, after collecting bags, you will get the muassasah guys or your agents coming to you and taking your passports away. In lieu of this they will issue a muassasah card to you. This card will either be given at airport or at hotel. Don't panic. Keep this card very safe. You will also be given haj tags to be used as a band on the wrist at all

times. Do not remove them or lose them at all. This makes it easier to identify a person in the event that someone gets lost. The passport will only be returned when leaving Saudi after the Hajj on the last bus home. The muassasah cards have the same function as your passport. Again, always keep copies of your passport.

The agents would have now met with you in Madinah Munawwarah outside the doors of arrivals, and directed you to the awaiting busses that will take you to hotel.

Due to congestion at airports, you will find that they rush you on, to move the busses as quickly as possible and sometimes we feel like we are not being treated like royalty, all sorts of frustration enters the mind. No worries. Just know that the agents are following Saudi regulations by clearing you out of the airport as quick as possible. Agents get fined for delays etc.

The reason for mentioning this is because, you may need to go to toilet or the time of salaah may be going out and you don't want to make it qadha, and now you are panicking, so always be 1 up and anticipate any delays. Go to toilet earlier.....drink lesser liquids when landing, read salaah whenever you find a gap to do so. Don't entertain the thought of.... I will do it when I'm outside. Seeing that "the outside" can take several hours.

Now we are on route to hotels, the agent would have prepared your key cards for your room in advance, so once you hand in vouchers, there is a small process of check in. Then have a nice rest. You may have not gotten sleep for over 24 hours by now

Remember all these different processes take time. And the irony is....there is no such thing as time in Saudi, so just make sabr....the more we shout or scream....the more stubborn the

service becomes. If we feel frustration, find a place to sit/sleep or take a walk, or make durood.

The Holy lands are very sensitive as to how we behave in them..as per the hadith of Nabi sallalaahu alaihi wasallam.

Cellphones - Before departing SA, ensure that the settings on your smart phone are properly set.

This entails -

1. Switch Data roaming off.
2. All downloads of pics or videos or upgrades of apps must only automatically download on Wi-Fi.

If left unattended. We may sit with hefty bills when using our local SA number overseas. It costs approx. 28 rands per mb or more. Ensure that the data roaming is switched off at all times.

When we land and want to inform family that we are safe, then a simple sms will do. Its costs 2 rand some change.

Do not under any circumstance call SA with your local SA number nor should you answer any calls made to your SA number. In both instances you will be charged approx. 15 rand a minute.

So here's how you get around it..

There are 3 major network companies in Saudi.

- A. STC
- B. Mobili
- C. Zain

STC is the most trustworthy network, whilst others have fantastic deals.

Find out which deals suit the length of your stay as they sell contracts for 1 month.....6 weeks etc.

You will find these network shops all around the haram.

Take your copy of passport/muassasah card and go to them. Take out the deal you want, that gives you airtime and data bundles. Pay cash over counter. Slip that sim card into phone and in a matter of 30 min or so you will be online as per normal. However, you will now have a saudi number, and all apps will work as normal.

You may use apps like whatsapp, facebook messenger, hangout etc. to call home for free but only over Wi-Fi.

Most hotels have WiFi.

For those not acquainted with apps.....Use the saudi number to call home. Much cheaper. And find out when is the off/peak times

Those who have dual sim smart phones can merely insert the saudi sim, then switch to the saudi network.

If you still need your local SA number to be switched on AND you don't have a dual sim smart phone, I suggest you buy a cheap phone for 100 rand and slip in your SA sim into that....so that you can still receive your sms's on that number or see your missed calls.

PRECAUTIONS:

We are living in a world of social media. Hence we should embrace it responsibly.

Going to the Holy lands becomes very challenging with smart phones . Hence heres a few things to keep in mind as a precaution.

1. Leave any groups that you deem unnecessary. Groups with humour or nonsensical content will only pollute our spiritual connection with Allah.
2. Leave all groups that post anything about extremism. Saudi government has hi-tech surveillance systems that can very easily detect and track your inclinations/thoughts or sentiments via apps and calls. I've seen this 1st hand. Always keep chats to strangers as friendly as possible, never share your stance on any issue that criticizes Arab policies etc. Keep focused as to why we are there.
3. Picture taking in the haramain has become the greatest challenge. Keep in mind the respect of symbols of Islam at all times.
4. We do need to carry phones to the haram, as at times if we get lost, we will need to call someone, however do not make this a chatting zone, whether by calls or messaging.

Money Exchange - with 100 dollar bills you will get the best rates at the money exchanger known as صراف (SARRAAF)

You will find them in almost every street. You will get 373 riyals for every 100 dollars. Closer to haj you may only get 370.

Under this section - here's a few things to keep in mind.

1. You will need to buy food. So plan your day as such.....

Breakfast is normally catered for by hotel, eat a healthy wholesome breakfast. Then have a later lunch. And have a small supper.

So on average if you spend 50 riyals per person per day on food.....multiply this by the number of days you will be staying in Saudi and you will get a rough idea of how much to carry for meals.

If your package has dinner as an inclusion...then well and good.

2. Shopping - Purchasing gifts for all and sundry. This is also part of the haj..... However this cannot become the focus of haj.

So for shopping.....Ulema generally advise that more money be spent in Madinah Munawwarah, as it is a greater source of barakah given the duas of barakah that Nabi sallalaahu alaihi wa sallam made. Also do not forget charity.

Kurtas/cloaks range from 50 riyals to 300 riyals....always bargain.

The simple concept of not getting carried away with shopping is, if you don't need it then don't buy it.

Gifts for families etc....the best is always kajoor, zamzam, tasbeehs, musallahs, etc.

Remember for men. Purchase your ihraams etc here if you haven't already purchased it back home. Everything is available for the ihraam.

Clothing/gift shops around the haram are generally more expensive than on the outskirts. However, do not venture on the outskirts without a proper guide.

I think that's enough about shopping. The idea is to spend with the intention of gaining reward from the ahaadith. Not to make it an everyday event.

Laundromats - You will also find them all over. Get one closest to you. Or do our own.

For those intending to buy lots of gifts that may make up 10 bags ..then there are options of couriers. Enquire from agent in Saudi

Mental/Spiritual Preparation - Phase 3

Most hujjaaj will be staying between 6 and 14 days in Madinah Munawwarah, depending on the package.

Hence work out a schedule for time spent in Madinah Munawwarah.

It will be summer. So, days are generally 40 to 50 degrees. Most things are closed until around 2pm. Most sleep in the day and its mostly night life.

Read up on the history of Madinah Munawwarah and the significant points to visit or to make ibaadah at.

Ensure to read up on the history and do's and don'ts

The ziyaret that the agents offer is maximum 7 places due saudi regulations.

Beyond this, visit the following places....

1. Jannatul baqee (read up on its virtues and visit the graves) (i will post the diagram)

2. Learn about the different points/pillars in Masjid Nabawee (صلى الله عليه وسلم). And wherever we are exhorted to make ibaadah in Masjid Nabawee (صلى الله عليه وسلم) then we should try to do so.

Madinah Munawwarah is generally peaceful. There are designated times for women to make ziyarat of the haram. Hence always attend the programmes that agents have scheduled and go with the designated person on the salaah and salaam of the qabr mubaarak of Nabi sallallahu alaihi wasallam. This is a spiritual experience and one's heart should be completely pure for this.

On a practical note - it's all about the timing when there's a crowd. Those going earlier on a 6-week package will probably have quiet times to do everything in the haram with ease. Closer to haj....it gets busy, as a result planning has to be done better.

For ladies, there are different scheduled times to make ziyaret of the haram in Madinah Munawwarah. Your agent will inform you every day of the times and some responsible lady should always accompany you from the agent's side.

Always stick with the group when making ziyaret with the agents official. This makes it easier from a logistical point of view.

Mental Preparations Phase 4 -

After days spent in Madinah Munawwarah - the time has now come to don the ihraam.

Busses generally leave Madinah Munawwarah after the Zuhr Salaah. Hence preparation for ihraam will commence from before zuhr at the hotels. Prepare early for no delays.

Always keep alert for announcements from agents regarding departure etc.

Preparing one's Ihraam for UMRAH

Remember this common rule - Before the niyyah of Ihraam is made - showering with scented soaps, perfumes, shaving etc are all permitted. However, once we have made the intention at the boundary, all the prohibitions of Ihraam will then apply.

Men - prepare by making sunnah ghusal etc in Madinah Munawwarah, tie the 2 pieces of ihraam towels. Ensure to acquaint oneself with all the prohibitions of the ihraam.

Women - will use normal clothing. Nothing fancy at all. Ghusal etc in Madinah Munawwarah. Acquaint oneself with the prohibitions of ihraam.

Women in menses should also acquaint themselves with the rules pertaining to how the ihraam will be donned in this situation.

Hence, we have physically prepared for the ihraam.

The busses will then take us from the hotel to the meeqaat (boundary), which is now known as Bi'r Ali.

At Bi'r Ali, is where we will perform the 2 rakaats sunnatul ihraam. 1st rakaat, surah kaafiroon, 2nd rakaat surah Ahad.

(For men, these 2 rakaats will be performed with the head covered.)

Thereafter the niyyah will be made. "Oh Allah I intend making umrah to Makkah Mukarramah, so make it easy from me and accept it from me". This niyyah can be made in english or arabic.

Thereafter men should recite the talbiya (labbayk) loudly, whilst women should recite it softly.

We will be given approx. 15 min to half hour to complete this. Ensure that we always keep our bus numbers and as to where our busses are parked. Always keep with the group. If we need to use the toilet then inform the group leader. This is for logistical reasons, as generally the congestion is at peak, and it can lead to someone getting lost.

Do not stop to buy anything that's being sold on the sides of the walkway. Leads to unnecessary delays etc.

Thereafter, busses will now proceed to Makkah Mukarramah. There will be stops for salaah and eating along the way.

Toilets facilities along the way are not always up to standards. Hence eat less = less need for toilet, but ensure that you keep hydrated as the heat and busses can become an exhausting factor.

Busses generally take 6-7 hours to Makkah Mukarramah, depending on traffic.

Recite as much as talbiya on the bus with zikr. No futile talks as per the prohibitions of Ihraam.

Read up books regarding the spiritual manner in which one should leave Madinah Munawwarah and how one should enter Makkah Mukarramah.

We will be entering Makkah Mukarramah on or after esha salaah inshallah.

Busses will drop us outside our hotels. Keep our hotel vouchers ready for the agent. Our key cards should be ready.

Thereafter proceed to room, and shower (remember not to use anything scented), eat some carbs/nutritious (for physical energy to sustain you for the umrah rituals).

The agents will give you at least 2 or 3 hours to get prepared. Always take note of times when doing umrah with groups.

This is more a spiritual preparation than physical.

At the appointed time, groups will meet at the foyer to complete the umrah.

Generally, Ulema appointed by the agents take the groups for umrah. Follow his instructions at all times.

Mental Preparation Phase 5 - The Umrah

It's imperative at this point to note that due to the long journey from Madinah Munawwarah and many other related frustrations, one will be mentally and physically exhausted.

Hence, this is the biggest test for every person. We are not use to crowds, we will be in unfamiliar places, generally tempers flare up right about now, fights start, arguments pursue etc. It's as though the Ihraam exposes the true nature of a person.

So, together with the spiritual and physical preparations we have made, mental preparation is of utmost importance.

Always remind ourselves as to WHO'S call we have responded to. We are the guests of Allah SWT, and always keep the sanctity of the place and ihraam at heart.

The umrah should begin around 11pm, if possible we will enter through the door named baab e salaam. Group leaders will guide us. Its best for those who haven't gone before to stick with group leaders.

The haram is a huge place, hence getting lost is the norm. Don't panic. Ensure you have cellphones with you. Always identify markers inside and outside of the haram.

Brief synopsis of the umrah -

1. Proceeding to Kabah shareef with gaze lowered, making dua when seeing kabah for the 1st time
2. Making the intention of tawaaf, learn it from the dua kitaabs.

At this point - men will make Idtibaah. (right arm bare)

Men will also try to make ramal in the 1st 3 rounds. Ramal is not a marathon, hence do it as you can, but don't lose your better half (wife) in the crowd.

If there's too much congestion then abandon the ramal completely.

3. Begin tawaaf from hajre aswad (black stone), in line of green lights in haram.
4. Make the masnoon duas in tawaaf - learn this from the dua kitaabs. Completing 7 rounds.

5. Kissing the hajre aswad on each round as you pass it. (Kissing it directly) has become almost impossible. Hence the Ishaarah (kissing lips and pointing hands towards it as we pass) will be the 2nd option.

Note - to look at the kabah or to touch it, whilst in the state of ihraam is not permissible.

6. The tawaaf will conclude at the end of the 7th round - 8th kissing. Thereafter we proceed to make the 2 rakaats behind maqaame ibrahim or anywhere else in haram. 2 rakaats of waajibut tawaaf. 1st rakaat surah kaafiroon and 2nd rakaat surah ahad. Make dua after this.

7. Thereafter proceed to drink zamzam. Fuel the tank.

8. Proceed to begin the saee.

9. Begin by kissing hajre aswad. (Ishaarah.), make intention of saee. Learn from dua kitaabs.

10. Proceed from safaa to marwa. 1 round. Then marwa to safaa is round 2. Until 7 rounds are completed. Learn all masnoon duas to be read here. And read up the history.

Note - Men will make ramal between the 2 green lights, clearly marked in haram.

11. Make dua at marwa for acceptance at the completion of the saee.

12. Men will proceed to shave hair at barber. Women will snip a pinky finger wrap of hair in room.

Once we have done this, we are now out of ihraam.

We will be physically drained, especially if we did not prepare physically for this.

Hence, keep aware of the salaah times. And prepare accordingly. Remember to have a good rest to allow for the body to recover. Hence, work out a schedule that does not become too taxing on the body.

It is always better to make nafl tawaaf than to make more umrahs in this time. Unless someone really can handle it.

The idea is that, these are the days leading up to the haj. If we haven't felt sick by now then shukr to Allah. It's bound to happen at some point **بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ**, as our bodies are simply not used to this type of activity. So, preserve your energy for the days of haj, as this will be very taxing on the body and health etc.

Time spent in Makkah Mukarramah -

Use this time carefully. Watch how we speak to others, what we do, even to the extent that at all times govern our thoughts.

This is the Ultimate, only chosen servants of Allah are allowed here, always remember that we are guests of RAHMAAN.

This will determine the outcome of how ibaadah, haj etc. Rewards here are multiplied 100 thousand times. Sins are also multiplied the same.

Keep in mind the aspects of intermingling and hijab, especially at the areas of shopping. We could lose reward very quickly here, and our time spent could almost amount to nil. And Allah knows best.

Ziyaarats will be done of Makkah Mukarramah, hence read up on its rich history. Try and visit all these historical places, even if it means going privately.

Then in the haram itself, identify the significance of all places where we can gain maximum reward. Read up on all the virtues.

Rewards of:

1. Looking at kabah
2. Making salaah at kabah
3. Making tawaaf of baitullah
4. Kissing hajre aswad
5. Making dua at multazam
6. Reading salaah in the hateem.
7. Making dua under meezaabe rahma.
8. Touching rukne yamaani

Read up on the history of the kabah as well.