

UMRAH: A SPIRITUAL JOURNEY FROM MOUNTAINOUS VALLEY OF KASHMIR INDIA

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ABSTRACT

The Umrah sharief is an Islamic journey performed by Muslims of all over world to holy cities of Saudi Arabia, Makkah and Medina. Masjid al haram of Makkah and Masjid Nabawi (S.A.W) of Medina are under the control of his Excellency custodian of holy mosques, kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Kashmir valley of J&K has Muslim majority and people of state are visiting holy cities in large numbers for Umrah as compared to other states of India. Umrah pilgrimage were to fulfil religious obligations, spiritual enhancement and to follow holy teaching of Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (pbuh) and to see sacred places in holy cities Makkah and Medina where revelations of holy Quran occurred and about way of living of holy companions. This huge gathering of Umrah is possible only by best infrastructure, health care facilities, provided by his Excellency custodian of holy mosques kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Keywords: Umrah, Haj, Kashmir, Makkah, Medina, Custodian.

INTRODUCTION

The Umrah (Arabic: *عُمْرَة*) is an Islamic pilgrimage to Makkah, Saudi Arabia, performed by Muslims that can be undertaken at any time of the year. Every Muslim has a great yearn to visit holy places in their life time. For females as per Islamic law travelling to any part of world or for umrah journey, they should be accompanied by a mehram (husband or son or brother or father). The valley of Kashmir is a Muslim majority state in India and from some years it has been witnessed huge pilgrimage from this mountainous valley of Kashmir to holy cities of Saudi Arabia, i.e., Makkah and Medinah. People of Kashmir valley in large numbers Men and Women are enthusiast to visit these holy places to seek spiritual benefit there. Due to heavy rush of pilgrimage it leads to mushroom growth of Umrah travel operators in valley who provide different packages to these pilgrims. Most travel companies are registered with Government of J&K and with Saudi Government. Also, many newly married youths are enthusiastic to visit holy places for Umrah with his bride to seek spiritual benefit and peace. As per Islamic history prophet Muhammad (pbuh) performed first Umrah with his follower dates back 629 AD or 7 AH after the treaty of Hudaibiya. This was called the first Umrah.

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The holy mosques Masjid al Haram and Masjid Nabwi (S.A.W) and Ziyarat Sharief like Masjid Ayesha in Makkah, Masjid Quba, Masjid Qiblitan in Medina, etc., are under the direct supervision of Custodian of holy mosques, kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The ziyarat's in Makkah and Medina are Baitul Rasool (pbuh) (today islamic library), Mount Arafat, Mount Jabal al Noor, Cave of Hira, Cave Sor, Mount Uhud, Taif, Khandaq, Badar, Valley of Jin, Jannat ul Baqqi, Jannat-ul Mawa, Masjid Jin, etc. In year 2018, as per report of Government of Saudi Arabia, 3.6 million Umrah visas were issued. As per local travel operator statistics, around 35000 umrah pilgrim's visted holy places from December 2017 to March 2018. In the valley of Kashmir from November to February valley of Kashmir remains under harsh winter faces continuous chilled cold and snowfalls. So, people mostly prefer to visit holy places in these months and prepare their plan for umrah journey. The Umrah travel companies operating in valley has been offering economical, Deluxe and Super Deluxe packages at different rates. Also, packages differ on the basis of days like 15 days, 22 days and 28 days. Some travel companies take pilgrims from Srinagar to Saudi Arabia (Jeddah or Medinah) by direct flight through connecting service via Airindia (Srinagar to Delhi and Delhi to Jeddah on same day) and by Saudi airlines (Delhi to Jeddah or Medinah every day). Some operators take pilgrims via Kuwait, Oman, Dubai, Bahrain, etc., where mostly pilgrims have to face layover on these international airports from 4-12 h in minimum. These put pilgrims on exertion and if pilgrims like to eat anything on these airports have to pay much on their currencies of that country put sometimes economical burden. Most travel operators provide in packages direct flight services to pilgrims which are comfortable for Umrah pilgrims by which they reach holy places same day easily and safely. These packages cost more than via flight services. Selecting packages should be taken calmly and after consulting the pilgrim who visited holy place already. As per my suggestion, I prefer and suggest direct flight service as compared to via from any other Arabian country. Which are comfortable for Umrah pilgrims? In packages travel operators offer Direct flights or via flights, nearest hotels in holy cities, food, transportation to Ziyarats and Guidance. On the basis of these services cost of packages varies from operator to operator. So, operators should cost that much amount on the services which they have shown to Umrah pilgrims in their packages in interest of noble mission for the sake of Allah.

OBJECTIVES

Our objective is to study and aware pilgrims regarding Umrah, Ziyarats and basic facilities given to them by custodian of holy mosques.

METHODS AND DISCUSSION

For Umrah pilgrimage, Passport (Travel document) is mandatory. After submitting passport by Umrah pilgrim, he or she has to prepare themselves for this spiritual journey. Get guidance regarding holy journey, about demography of holy places, reciting holy Quran and continuous Nimaz. Also, pilgrims should do morning walks so that they can walk easily and comfortably there. Saudi Government has made these holy places and mosques very neat and clean. Thousands of workers are working on different jobs in and around holy mosques. Large number of separate Washrooms and ablution sections for Men and Women

with neat and cleanliness having air conditioning system are around holy mosques. Every Umrah pilgrimage should abide the law of Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Smuggling of drugs, theft, murder can lead to death verdict. Around holy mosques are hospitals, health centres, restaurants and world class shopping centres. In Makkah zam-zam water is available and in Medinah many types of dates are available in market. Which pilgrims brings after successfully completing journey for their family, friends and colleagues etc. On reaching Delhi international airport, after completing immigration formalities, men pilgrims wears Ahram (two piece cloth), women has own dress Ahram. After boarding Delhi to Jeddah flight when plane reaches near to Mekat (entry point) pilot announces, pilgrim has to make Niyah and he or she has to follow rules of Ihram till he or she completes Umrah. He or she must avoid the following acts after putting Ahram: making marriage proposals, cutting hair, clipping nails, putting perfumes on their body killing or hunting animals, sexual intercourse, shaving any parts of the body, men must not wear any underwear or cover their heads or get in disputes. The sole purpose of these prohibitions is to focus the pilgrims mind and body on the Umrah pilgrimage. Umrah pilgrims start to chant this: **“Labbayk Allahumma labbayk. Labbayka laa, Shareeka laka labbayk. Innal-hamda wan-ni’ mata laka wal mulk. Laa” Shareeka lak”**

(English meaning: Here I am O Allah, Here I am. Here I am, you have no partner, here I am. Surely all praise, grace and dominion are. Yours and You have no partner).

Rituals of Umrah

On reaching Masjid al haram Makkah al-Mukarramah, pilgrims has to start rituals from Kabba sharief in the state of Ahram. The pilgrim performs a series of ritual acts symbolic of the lives of Prophet Ibrahim and his second wife Hajra.

- *Tawaf* (Arabic: طواف), which consists of circling the Ka'bah seven times in an anticlockwise direction. Men are encouraged to do this three times at a hurried pace, followed by four times, more closely, at a leisurely pace.
- *Sa'i* (Arabic: سعي), which means rapidly walking seven times back and forth between the hills of Safa and Marwah. This is a re-enactment of Hajar's frantic search for water. The baby Ismael (Ishmael) cried and hit the ground with his foot (some versions of the story say that an angel scraped his foot or the tip of his wing along the ground) and water miraculously sprang forth. This source of water is today called the Well of Zamzam.
- *Halq or taqsir*: Taqsir is a partial shortening of the hair typically reserved for women who cut a minimum of one inch or more of their hair. A halq is a complete shave of the head, usually performed on men. Both of these signify the submission of will to God over glorifying physical appearances. The head shaving/cutting is reserved until the end of Umrah.

These rituals complete the Umrah and the pilgrim can choose to go out of ihram.

It is mandatory for Muslims of all worlds to visit Masjid Nabawi (S.A.W) in Medinah after completing Umrah in Makkah. As per Sunni Hanafi Islamic school of thought it is mandatory to visit Prophet's Mosque. Medina is 450 km far from Makkah, in bus it takes 5-6 h to reach there. Medinah is a beautiful city, having Prophet's Mosque, pleasant weather, surrounded by Mount Uhud, date trees

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and having large number of shopping malls, restaurants, hospitals, etc. Pilgrims in their package stays their around week and offers around 40 Nimaz there. Saudi government has putted SR2000 fee for second timer and this is up to two hijri calendars. Overall, Government of Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has been providing best facilities to pilgrims in both holy cities and they are expanding area of holy mosques and infrastructure of hotels in surroundings as per Saudi vision 2030. May Allah give chance to me, my family, friends and all Muslims to visit holy places, amen.

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