

## HAJJ FACT SHEET

The Hajj is the annual pilgrimage to Makkah (Mecca), Saudi Arabia, and the largest mass gathering in the world. Hajj takes place from the 8th through the 12th of Dhu al-Hijja, the last month of the Islamic year, corresponding approximately to November 4–9 in 2011, and October 24–29 in 2012. Each year over 3 million pilgrims participate in the Hajj, and more than 11,000 are travelers from the United States. In recent years, the Saudi government has made many changes in the way the Hajj Pilgrimage is organized.

From the United States, most pilgrims fly into Jeddah and take a bus to Makkah. In general, after arriving in Makkah, pilgrims go to the Grand Mosque, which contains the Ka'aba, the most sacred site in Islam, and perform a *tawaf*, known as *tawaf el kodoum*, circling the Ka'aba seven times counterclockwise. Because of the vast number of people (each floor of the three-level mosque has a capacity of 750,000), a single *tawaf* can take hours. In addition to *tawaf*, pilgrims perform *sa'i*, moving seven times between the hills of Safa and Marwah. This route is enclosed by the Grand Mosque and can be traversed via air-conditioned tunnels.

Hajj culminates on the Plain of Arafat, a few miles east of Makkah, where pilgrims spend the day in supplication. After sunset, pilgrims move to Muzdalifah where they spend the night and collect pebbles for the following days. The following day's ritual known as *Jamrat el Aqaba*, the Stoning of the Devil at Jamarat, is the site of some of the densest crowds during Hajj. Pilgrims throw seven tiny pebbles (specifically, no larger than a chickpea) at each of three grey walls surrounded by collection basins. Because of the sheer number of people crowding around the pillars, crowd turbulence can easily trigger panic and stampede. The last time deaths or injuries resulted from stampede was in 2006. Since then, the Jamarat pedestrian bridge has been remodeled with a wider, multilevel bridge to prevent overcrowding. However, as with any large gathering, care should continue to be taken. Heavy police presence helps direct pedestrian traffic to avoid accidents during this event.

After Jamarat, pilgrims traditionally sacrificed an animal. In modern times, however, pilgrims often purchase a "sacrifice voucher" in Makkah. Centralized, licensed abattoirs then perform the sacrifice on behalf of the pilgrim, and meat is immediately donated to charity, often reaching international locations. This is followed by a *tawaf* known as *tawaf el ifadha* and two more days of stoning. After a final *tawaf*, known as *tawaf el wida*, pilgrims leave Makkah, ending Hajj. Many pilgrims opt to visit the Prophet's burial site at his Mosque in Madinah (Medina). The density of the crowds in Madinah rises dramatically after rituals in and around Makkah come to an end.

For additional information on Hajj, you may visit the Saudi Ministry of Hajj website at: <http://www.hajjinformation.com/main/f.htm#p3>.

### Visas:

Visas are required for Hajj or Umrah (which is pilgrimage outside of the annual Hajj period). Saudi government regulations stipulate that U.S. pilgrims performing Umrah and Hajj can only travel with those U.S. travel agencies accredited with the Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia. For

more information, contact the [Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia in Washington, DC](#) or consult the website of the [Saudi Ministry of Hajj](#). Pilgrims should confirm the full itinerary for their pilgrimage before departure. It is also recommended that pilgrims make two copies of their U.S. passports, including the pages stamped with Saudi visas, and keep one at home and another in a secure location during the trip.

### **General Guidelines:**

- Travelers must carry vaccination certificates with them for inspection by Saudi authorities at the port of entry.
- Upon arrival, all passports are turned over to "United Agents Office" representatives to enable the latter to complete all travel formalities to Makkah and Madinah. Pilgrims are issued an identification card and wristband that must be carried at all times.
- If pilgrims lose their passports, they should immediately report the loss to their travel agent and obtain a report from the appropriate United Agents Office.
- Hajj and Umrah visas are valid for travel only in the vicinities of Jeddah, Makkah and Madinah, and for travel between these cities. Non-Muslims are forbidden to travel to the holy cities of Makkah and Madinah. All pilgrims must leave the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia after Hajj no later than the 10th of Muharram of each year (this year approximately December 5, 2011). The rules and regulations of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia forbid any pilgrims from staying in the country after the completion of Hajj.
- There has been an increase in the number of reported cases of pick-pocketing and other forms of theft in Makkah, particularly in the region of the Grand Mosque and in Madinah. Pilgrims should take additional care with valuables while visiting these two areas and may consider using a money belt or under-garment pouch as a means to carry valuables.
- The Saudi authorities have issued instructions forbidding the taking of photographs (still or video, including mobile telephone photographs) at the Holy Mosque at Makkah or at the Prophet's Mosque at Madinah. This restriction also includes the courtyards surrounding these two holy sites. Any violation of these instructions is likely to lead to the confiscation of either film and/or camera. Pilgrims' bags are regularly checked upon entering the Prophet's Mosque and the Holy Mosque in Makkah. Pilgrims could be denied entry if found to be carrying cameras or cell phones with cameras.

### **Health Issues:**

Routine immunizations for all pilgrims should be up-to-date. Hepatitis A and B and typhoid vaccines are also recommended. Although a requirement for polio vaccine does not include pilgrims from the United States, it is best to ensure full vaccination against polio before travel. Current vaccination requirements are available from the website of the [Saudi Ministry of Health](#). Hand sanitizers, cold, diarrhea, and skin irritation medication are advisable.

## **Transport of Agriculture Items to the United States from the Hajj:**

Guidance for travelers who may be bringing religious articles back to the United States is available from [U.S. Customs and Border Protection \(CBP\)](#).

### **Other Information:**

U.S. citizens traveling abroad should regularly monitor the [U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Consular Affairs website](#), where the current [Worldwide Caution](#), [Travel Warnings](#), [Travel Alerts](#), and [Country Specific Information](#) can be found. The U.S. Embassy also encourages U.S. citizens to review "[A Safe Trip Abroad](#)," which includes valuable security information for those both living and traveling abroad. Follow us on [Twitter](#) and the Bureau of Consular Affairs page on [Facebook](#) as well. You can also download our free [Smart Traveler iPhone App](#) to have travel information at your fingertips.

In addition to information on the Internet, travelers may obtain up-to-date information on security conditions by calling 1-888-407-4747 toll-free in the United States and Canada, or outside the United States and Canada on a regular toll line at 1-202-501-4444. These numbers are available from 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. Eastern Time, Monday through Friday (except U.S. federal holidays).

U.S. citizens are encouraged to sign up for the [Smart Traveler Enrollment Program](#) with the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate in order to obtain updated information on local travel and security and keep information up-to-date. Enrollment is important; it allows the State Department to assist U.S. citizens in an emergency.

In the event of emergency Hajj pilgrims should first contact the following offices:

### **THE NATIONAL EXPERIMENTAL ESTABLISHMENT FOR PILGRIMS FROM AMERICA, AUSTRALIA, EUROPE AND TURKEY**

Telephone numbers from within Saudi Arabia: 02-542-7003

Fax: 02-542-0992

Mobile: 050-560-8150

Website: [www.mhteaee.com.sa](http://www.mhteaee.com.sa)

Street Address: Al-Nuzha District, Main Street, Makkah

### **HEALTH AFFAIRS**

Office: 02-530-8812

Lost pilgrims: 02-530-8813

You may also contact the U.S. Consulate General in Jeddah by phone at 02-667-0080 or the U.S. Embassy in Riyadh at 01-488-3800. Note that the Consulate General and U.S. Embassy will be closed Thursday, November 3 through Saturday, November 12, due to weekends (Thurs-Fri), local holiday for Eid-al-Adha/Hajj, and Veterans Day. Duty Officers will be available for

emergency assistance on those dates and after business hours on any other date. During regular business hours at any other time, callers should ask for the American Citizens Services Unit.

Note: When dialing the Jeddah area from the U.S., use country code 966 and city code 2, e.g. 966-2-542-7003 for The National Experimental Establishment for Pilgrims. When dialing the Riyadh area, use city code 1, e.g. 966-1-488-3800 for the U.S. Embassy.