



Stories from the Hijaz

THE MAKKAH CHRONICLES



The ultimate journey: people's challenges, struggles and sacrifices

In the first article of our series on Makkah, we look at the sacrifices people have made, the effort they have put in and the challenges they have overcome to perform what is described in the Quran as 'a duty' we owe to Allah.

SALIM PARKER

'AND proclaim the pilgrimage (Hajj) among men: they will come to thee on foot and [mounted] on every kind of camel, lean on account of journeys through deep and distant mountain highways.' (Surah Al-Hajj, v 27)

Hajj is the setting out, the commencement, of an obligatory journey in the life of any Muslim if there are no defined barriers. In the words of Dr Ali Shariati, it is the 'evolution of the believer to his Creator'.

Some say it is the blossoming of a new dawn, others desire it as the dusk settling on a fulfilled life and, for some, it perpetually illuminates their lives, giving meaning, solace and hope when the dark shadows of their temporary existence on earth seems overwhelming.

For most it is, without doubt, the most important, the ultimate, journey of their lives. Throughout the ages, humankind has striven to embark on this travel.

Our narratives are rich with the stories of



the attempts by many to take the first step forward of this intention.

Sometimes, decades passed before the dream was commenced, some were mercilessly and ruthlessly robbed of their hard-earned savings and had their dreams forever unfulfilled.

A lucky few never in their wildest imagina-

tion dreamt of setting off due to their financial or health circumstances only for a benefactor to elicit a radiant smile from their hearts.

Scholars refer to Hajj mimicking life. In the life of a Muslim, Hajj is part of life.

For those who complete the journey, Hajj often is life.

(Left) This photograph, from the collection of the author's wife, Gabeba Agherdien, of one of the first flights taking Cape pilgrims to Makkah was taken at the Cape Town airport in the early 1970s. Photo AGHERDIEN COLLECTION

The epic journey of Musa Mansa, who was the emperor of an empire in West Africa in the present-day Mali region, in the 14th century and who went on pilgrimage between 1324-1325, has been grandiosely documented. His procession reportedly included 60 000 men, including 12 000 slaves who each carried nearly two kilograms of gold bars. About 80 camels each carried between 23 and 136 kg of gold dust, which was given to the poor met along his route. In fact, he carried and distributed so much gold on his journey that the price of the precious metal was depressed for more than a decade in Cairo, one of the cities he passed through.

At about the same time, in June 1325, at the age of twenty-one, Ibn Battuta, one of the greatest explorers who ever lived, set off from his hometown in Morocco to perform Hajj. This journey would ordinarily take sixteen months but he would not see Morocco again for 24 years.

He describes his departure as: 'I set out alone, having neither fellow traveller in whose companionship I might find cheer nor caravan whose part I might join but swayed by an overmastering impulse within me and a desire long cherished in my bosom to visit these illustrious sanctuaries.'



Kharlzada Kasrat Rai walked 6 387 km from Pakistan in order to perform Hajj. Source AL ARABIYA, OCTOBER 13, 2013

'So I braced my resolution to quit my dear ones, female and male, and forsook my home as birds forsake their nests.'

'My parents being yet in the bonds of life, it weighed sorely upon me to part from them, and both they and I were afflicted with sorrow at this separation.'

The South African Hajj traditions have been eloquently portrayed by Dr Hoosain Ebrahim in his book *The Cape Hajj Tradition: Past and Present*.

He poignantly describes the numerous unsuccessful attempts by Imam Frans of Bengal to perform Hajj in 1806, the departure of Imam Adulgamiyat of Palm Street Mosque, in 1811, for the holy journey from which he never returned home to Cape Town, and, finally, the first pilgrim to return in the form of Hajji Gassonodien more than 20 years later.

From that time, a rich, colourful and established culture has been in place in Cape Town with hordes of family members seeing off pilgrims embarking ships in the Cape docks as a tradition in the previous century. One scribe penned it as: 'Their colourful garments rivalled the most gorgeous flowerbeds.'

Currently, the intoxicating fever to perform Hajj has certainly not been subdued by the distractions of modernity. Senad Hadzic, in 2012, walked 5 700 km from Bosnia;

Kharlzada Kasrat Rai, in 2013, walked over 6 300 km from Pakistan, and Mohammed Ali Al-Mirfa, 75-year-old, in 2014, walked for more than two months from Yemen to take part in the five-day pilgrimage.

Two fit young men, Natheem Cairncross, and Imtiyaz Haron, cycled almost 11 000 kilometres from Cape Town in 2010 to perform Hajj.

The journey took nine months, compared with the less than 12 hours it takes today to be flown there.

But Hajj is desired by even the sickest. 'I am prepared for Allah to recall me while undertaking this journey,' were the words uttered by a man whose body was ravaged by cancer and who, according to doctors, only had a few months to live.

'I saved a few pennies weekly for forty years and Allah has blessed me to go on Hajj, even though I am wheelchair bound,' an elderly seamstress related.

Throughout the ages, humankind has been aware of the importance of Hajj in their lives and as a preparation for the hereafter.

The Quran vividly explains that Allah does not need mere mortals at all but humankind has a debt in the form of the pilgrimage to pay.

'Pilgrimage thereto is a duty men owe to God; those who can afford the journey; but if



Imam Yusuf Pandy, an iconic figure in the Cape Hajj tradition, embarking at Cape Town Harbour in 1966. He is currently still, more than 50 years later, leading groups on this holy journey. Source: CAPE ARGUS 28, 1966

any deny faith, God stands not in need of any of His creatures.' (Quran 3:97)

Stories from the Hijaz is sponsored by Al Jeem Foundation



The journey from Istanbul to Madinah via Damascus was reduced from 40 days to five days with the construction of a railway line from Damascus in 1908. Source: WWW.BRITISH MUSEUM.ORG



Every year, millions of Muslims gather on Arafah in response to the instruction given to Nabi Ibrahim (AS) by our Creator, Allah SWT, to 'proclaim the Hajj among men'. Photo SALIM PARKER

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14 Nights at the Hyatt Regency Hotel Breakfast & Dinner	9 Nights at the Movenpick Anwar Al Madinah Hotel 8/9	10 Nights at the Sofitel Hotel 8/9	9 Nights at the Sofitel Hotel 8/9
10 Nights at the Hyatt Regency Hotel 8/9	10 Nights at the Hyatt Regency Hotel 8/9 and 25th Dhul Qa'dah	6 Nights at the Al-Anwar Express Al Madinah Hotel 8/9	MADIKKAH
MADINAH	JERUSALEM	MADIKKAH	Arafah at the Elaf Al Salam Hotel until departure
10 Nights at the Al-Anwar Express Al Madinah Hotel 8/9 and 25th Dhul Qa'dah	4 Nights at the Movenpick Anwar Al Madinah Hotel in the old city including Breakfast & Dinner	12 Nights at the Sheraton Hotel until 1st Dhul Hijah including Breakfast	6 Nights at the Sheraton Hotel until 1st Dhul Hijah including Breakfast & Dinner
INCLUDES 2 UMRAHS	1 Night stay in Amman at the Bellevue Hotel including Breakfast & Dinner		

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DEPART 24 JULY 2017	DEPART 24 JULY 2017	26 Jul 12 nights at the Movenpick Anwar al Madinah	26 Jul 12 nights at the Movenpick Anwar al Madinah Hotel
14 nights at the Hyatt Regency Makkah [Enter with an Umrah] including breakfast	10 nights in Madinah at the Movenpick Anwar Al Madinah	2&7 Aug 10 nights at the Movenpick Anwar al Madinah Hotel	2&7 Aug 10 nights at the Movenpick Anwar al Madinah Hotel
10 nights at Movenpick Anwar al Madinah including Breakfast	Stay until the 25th Dhul Qa'dah at Hyatt Regency Makkah	10 Aug 7 nights at the Movenpick Anwar al Madinah Hotel	10 Aug 7 nights at the Movenpick Anwar al Madinah Hotel
Shorafat Makkah Makarem until departure	Jerusalem consists of the following:	DEPART MAKKAH	DEPART MAKKAH
[2nd Umrah from Madinah] Breakfast and Dinner until 7th Dhul Hijah	4 nights stay at the Hashimiyah Hotel in the Old City including Breakfast & Dinner	26 Jul 16 nights in Makkah at the Darul Tawhid	26 Jul 10 nights in Makkah at the Swissotel Al Maqam until 25th Dhul Qa'dah
	1 night stay in Amman at the Belvedere Hotel including Breakfast & dinner	2 Aug 11 nights in Makkah at the Darul Tawhid	2 Aug 5 nights in Makkah at the Swissotel Al Maqam until 25th Dhul Qa'dah
		7&10 Aug 6 nights in Makkah at the Darul Tawhid Intercontinental until 1st Dhul Hijah	7&10 Aug 6 nights in Makkah at the Swissotel Al Maqam until 1st Dhul Hijah