

# HAJJ and UMRAH Advice

Hackney Council Trading Standards Service



## Important information for pilgrims

The pilgrimage to Hajj is one of the most significant and spiritual journeys a Muslim can undertake. About 25,000 people descend on Mecca each year to fulfil a once in a lifetime opportunity. For most, the trip is both memorable and enlightening.

However, there have been a number of cases recently where tour operators have failed to deliver on bookings and assurances.

This leaflet outlines the questions you should ask when selecting a tour operator to travel with. It also provides useful information on how to get help if things do go wrong.

## Before you book

### 1. Is your tour operator ATOL protected?

Any tour operator arranging trips that include flights must hold a current Air Travel Organisers Licence (ATOL). If your tour operator holds this licence and folds before the date of travel, your payments will be protected. If you are already abroad, the licence also protects your trip and you will be able to complete your pilgrimage and return home without incurring any extra payments.

Tour operators that are ATOL protected are issued a number. This should be displayed on all receipts and headed paper. To check whether your operator holds a licence you can visit [www.caa.co.uk](http://www.caa.co.uk) or call **020 7453 6700**.

## **2. Has your tour operator been accredited by the Saudi Embassy?**

Only tour operators approved by the Saudi Embassy are able to obtain visas for pilgrims. Ensure the tour operator you are travelling with is on the approval list by checking the website at [www.hajjinformation.com](http://www.hajjinformation.com) Without a visa, you will be unable to enter the country.

## **3. Do you know what you're paying for?**

Agree the travel itinerary in writing before parting with any money. Examine brochures and leaflets carefully to ensure the operator is tailoring your trip to your needs. Request pictures and additional information on all the accommodation you will be staying in, and ensure that there is sufficient availability for you and the others you are travelling with.

Where appropriate, check what transport arrangements have been made to shuttle you to and from the relevant destinations. Keep all brochures and documents relating to the trip in a safe place.

## **4. Do you have any special requirements?**

If you, or any member of your party, have any special requirements, make sure the tour operator is able to meet these before you book with them. If you are satisfied that your needs can be met, obtain confirmation of this in writing from the tour operator and keep it safe.

## Before you leave

### 1. Have you prepared for your pilgrimage?

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) is on hand to assist you in preparing for your Hajj and Umrah pilgrimage. There is useful information on their website at [www.fco.gov.uk](http://www.fco.gov.uk)

### 2. What paperwork should you receive from your tour operator?

The tour operator you have booked with must give you:

- information about passport and visa requirements;
- health formalities required for the journey; and
- security and repatriation arrangements made by the tour operator in the unlikely event of the business going under.

This information should also show the businesses ATOL number.

Before you leave on your trip, you must ensure you have written information which details the itinerary, including transport connections, and the times and locations of any stop-offs. You should also be provided with the name, address and telephone number of a company representative for you to use while on your trip.

Read through all the information to ensure you have understood what your trip entails. Keep all documents in a safe place.

If any significant changes are made to your trip, you should be informed quickly to allow you to make appropriate decisions - and even cancel - without incurring a charge.

### 3. How should you pay?

Paying for your trip by credit card can give you additional rights if things do go wrong. You may be able to claim against the credit card company as well as the tour operator if elements of the trip are substandard or not provided at all.

### On your trip

If you have a problem while you are on your pilgrimage, bring it to the attention of the tour operator's representative immediately. They have an obligation to ensure all aspects of the trip are carried out properly, even if they are carried out by another individual or company.

If the problem persists, it is useful if you take photos and statements from other pilgrims, highlighting the problem. This will support your case when you return home.

### When you return

If you experienced significant problems with the tour operator during your trip, you can contact the Council's Trading Standards Service on **020 8356 4929** or e-mail **trading.standards@hackney.gov.uk**

Consumer Direct (CD) is a partner organisation that works to deliver consumer advice on a wide range of issues including package travel. You can contact CD on **08454 04 05 06** or visit **www.direct.gov.uk** for further advice.

## Other useful information

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) is on hand to assist you in preparing for the pilgrimage and the British Hajj Delegation attend the event every year to provide consular and medical health advice to British Hajjis. There is useful information on their website at [www.fco.gov.uk](http://www.fco.gov.uk)

