

The HAJJ and UMRAH Pilgrimages

Important Information for booking a pilgrimage package

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For many Hajj and Umrah pilgrims their trip is thankfully a memorable and trouble free occasion. However, you may have heard reports about some pilgrims who have suffered at the hands of disreputable travel organisers. This factsheet tells you what to consider before and while booking your trip. It also explains what to do if you end up dissatisfied with your trip. For further and more detailed information please see the pages on package travel on the consumer pages of the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) website www.bis.gov.uk.

In the UK, anyone who offers for sale (other than occasionally) package tours must comply with the Package Travel Regulations (PTRs) 1992. The majority of Hajj and Umrah trips will fall under the PTRs and the main responsibilities for travel organisers under this law are explained in a separate factsheet.

Before you book

- Check your trip is ATOL protected. Your Hajj or Umrah package will more than likely include flights. Any tour operator arranging packages with flights must hold a current Air Travel Organisers Licence (ATOL). Those who do not are operating illegally! An ATOL ensures that your prepayments are protected and also provides for getting you back home if necessary in the event of the operator going bust. You can check whether your operator holds a licence on-line at <http://www.caa.co.uk> or by calling 020 7453 6424.
- You are entitled to rely on the descriptions on brochures and internet sites, including photographs - they should not be misleading or inaccurate.
- Ask for and read the terms and conditions of the trip.

At the time of booking and afterwards

- If you have any special requests make sure they are specifically mentioned on the booking form.
- Before the contract is completed you must be given information in a suitable form about any: passport and visa requirements, health requirements, and security and repatriation arrangements in the event of the operator going bust.
- Before you leave on your trip you must receive a written copy of the terms of the contract for the holiday plus confirmation of your booking, details about the itinerary; transport connections; times and places; the name and address of a company representative or an appropriate contact for you to use while you are on your trip. These all form part of your contract with the organiser.
- Keep your contractual documentation, booking invoices, letters or other documents in a safe place.

Changes to the details of your trip

Significant changes to your trip such as flight details or itinerary should be made known to you as quickly as possible in order for you to make appropriate decisions and – if you wish – to cancel your trip without penalty.

If you are unhappy with your trip

- Local Government Trading Standards Departments (TSDs) which are located within local councils are responsible for enforcing the PTRs and can offer you advice on how to seek redress. You can find the address and telephone number for your nearest TSD by entering your postcode on www.tradingstandards.gov.uk, or contact your local Council.
- Another source of legal advice is your local Citizen's Advice Bureau (CAB) www.nacab.org.uk
- The Consumer Direct Website www.consumerdirect.gov.uk offers information and advice to consumers on a wide range of issues including package travel.

It should be noted that there are situations which may be encountered in Saudi Arabia (such as lost passports, health and safety matters) which are not covered by the PTRs. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) provide helpful information on how to prepare for and what to expect from your Hajj and Umrah pilgrimage on their website <http://www.fco.gov.uk/hajj>.

It should also be noted that the CAA who issue ATOLs has no remit to deal with complaints about the standard and quality of Hajj or Umrah trips. This is again a matter for trading standards.