87846 - Is Tourism Allowed in Islam?

the question

I hope that you can provide me with important and comprehensive information about Islamic tourism (Siyahah), or what is tourism in Islam, or what are the guidelines on tourism in Islam, or how we may develop Islamic tourism, or how we can develop a centre for Islamic tourism, or what would constitute Islamic tourism projects?

Summary of answer

It is prohibited to travel for the purpose of venerating a specific place, except the three mosques.
Undoubtedly, Shari`ah forbids tourism in places of corruption, where alcohol is drunk and immoral actions take place and sins are committed.
It is not permissible for women to travel without a Mahram.
In principle, it is permissible for non-Muslims to visit Muslim countries. Once a non-Muslim tourist is granted an entry visa by a Muslim state, then he is assured protection until he leaves.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Tourism (Siyahah) may mean many things, but in modern usage it is limited to a few meanings, which indicate moving about in the land for fun or to look at things, research and find out, and so on; not to earn money, work or settle there. (Al-Mu`jam Al-Wasit, 469)

When discussing tourism from the point of view of Islamic Shari`ah, we must look at the following categories:

The concept of Siyahah in Islam

Islam came to change many of the distorted concepts that are held by imperfect human minds, and to connect them to the most sublime and honourable values and morals. In the minds of earlier nations, tourism was connected to the concept of self-punishment and forcing oneself to travel through the land, and exhausting the body as a punishment for it or as a way of shunning this world. Islam abolished this negative concept of Siyahah.

Ibn Hani' narrated that Ahmad ibn Hanbal (may Allah have mercy on him) was asked: Is a man who travels about dearer to you, or one who stays in his city? He said: "Siyahah has nothing to do with Islam, and it is not the action of the Prophets or the righteous." (End quote from Talbis Iblis, 340)

Ibn Rajab Al-Hanbali (may Allah have mercy on him) commented on the words of Imam Ahmad by saying:

"Siyahah in this sense was done by some groups who are known to strive in worship without knowledge; some of them gave up this activity when they realised that it was not right." (Fat-h Al-Bari by Ibn Rajab (1/56)

Islam came to elevate the concept of tourism, and to connect it to great and noble aims, such as the following:

- Connecting Siyahah to worship. So travel – or Siyahah – is enjoined in order to perform one of the pillars of Islam, namely Hajj during certain months, and `Umrah to the House of Allah is prescribed throughout the year. When a man came to the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and asked him for permission for Siyahah (in the ancient sense of travelling as an act of asceticism or self-punishment only), the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) guided him to something that is more sublime and better than Siyahah. He said to him: "The Siyahah of my ummah is jihad for the sake of Allah." (Narrated by Abu Dawud, 2486; classed as sound by Al-Albani in Sahih Abu Dawud; its chain of narration was classed as good by Al-`Iraqi in Takhrij Ihya' `Ulum Al-Din, 2641). Think about how the Prophet

(peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) made a connection between the kind of Siyahah that is encouraged in Shari`ah and a great and noble aim.

- In the Islamic worldview, Siyahah is also connected to knowledge and learning. The greatest journeys were undertaken at the beginning of Islam with the aim of seeking and spreading knowledge. Al-Khatib Al-Baghdadi (may Allah have mercy on him) wrote a famous book called Ar-Rihlah fi Talab Al-Hadith (Travelling to seek Hadith) in which he compiled the names of those who travelled for the sake of a single Hadith. For example one of the Successors of the Companions (Tabi`un) said concerning the verse in which Allah Says (interpretation of the meaning):

{(The believers whose lives Allah has purchased are) those who turn to Allah in repentance (from polytheism and hypocrisy), who worship (Him), who praise (Him), who fast (or go out in Allah's Cause), who bow down (in prayer), who prostrate themselves (in prayer), who enjoin virtue (on people) and forbid (people) from evil, and who observe the limits set by Allah. And give glad tidings to the believers} [At-Tawbah 9:112]

`Ikrimah (may Allah have mercy on him) said: As-Sa'ihun (translated here as who fast (or go out in Allah's Cause)) are the seekers of knowledge.

(Narrated by Ibn Abu Hatim in his Tafsir, 7/429, and Fat-h Al-Qadir, 2/408)

Although the correct meaning according to the majority of the Salaf is that what is meant by As-Sa'ihun is those who fast.

- Another of the aims of Siyahah in Islam is to learn lessons and receive reminders. The command to travel about in the land appears in several places in the Quran. Allah Says (interpretation of the meaning):

{Say (O Muhammad): Travel in the land and see what was the end of those who rejected truth.} [Al-An`am 6:11]

{Say to them (O Muhammad): "Travel in the land and see what has been the end of the Mujrimun

(criminals, those who denied Allah’s Messengers and disobeyed Allah).} [An-Naml 27:69]

Al-Qasimi (may Allah have mercy on him) said they are the ones who go to different places to study the ruins and learn a lesson from them and seek other benefits. (Mahasin At-Ta’wil, 16/225)

- Maybe the greatest aim of Siyahah in Islam is to call people to Allah and to convey to mankind the light that was revealed to our Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). This is the mission of the Messengers and Prophets and their companions after them (may Allah be pleased with them). The companions of our Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) spread throughout the world, teaching the people goodness and calling them to the message of truth. We hope that the concept of Siyahah today will try to achieve the same great aims.
- Finally, Siyahah in Islam also includes travelling to ponder the wonders of Allah’s creation and to enjoy the beauty of this great universe, so that it will make the human soul develop strong faith in the oneness of Allah and will help one to fulfil the obligations of life. Relaxation is essential to enable one to strive hard after that.

Allah Says (interpretation of the meaning):

{Say: Travel in the land and see how (Allah) originated the creation, and then Allah will bring forth the creation of the Hereafter (i.e. resurrection after death). Verily, Allah is Able to do all things.} [Al-`Ankabut 29:20]

Is tourism allowed in Islam?

Guidelines on the type of Siyahah (tourism) that is acceptable in Islam.

Islamic Shari`ah has brought a number of rulings that regulate Siyahah so that it will achieve the aims mentioned above and will not overstep the mark or become a source of evil and harm in society. These rulings include the following:

- It is prohibited to travel for the purpose of venerating a specific place, except the three

mosques.

It was narrated from Abu Hurayrah (may Allah be pleased with him) that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: “No journey should be undertaken to visit any mosque but three: Al-Masjid Al-Haram, the Mosque of the Messenger (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and the Mosque of Al-Aqsa.” (Narrated by Al-Bukhari, 1132 and Muslim, 1397)

This Hadith indicates that it is prohibited to undertake “religious journeys”, as they are called, to any mosque other than these three, such as those who call for travelling to visit graves or shrines or tombs or mausoleums, especially those tombs that are venerated by people and from which they seek blessing, and they commit all kinds of shirk and haram actions there. There is nothing in Shari`ah to suggest that places are sacred and that acts of worship should be done in them apart from these three mosques.

It was narrated that Abu Hurayrah (may Allah be pleased with him) said: I went out to At-Tur (Sinai) where I met Ka’b Al-Ahbar and sat with him … He mentioned a lengthy Hadith then he said: Then I met Basrah ibn Abu Basrah Al-Ghifari who said: From where have you come? I said: From Sinai. He said: If I had met you before you went out, you would not have gone to that place. I heard the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) say: “Mounts are not to be ridden except to three mosques: Al-Masjid Al-Haram, this mosque of mine and the mosque of Eeliya’ or Bayt Al-Maqdis [Jerusalem].” (Narrated by Malik in Al-Muwatta’, 108 and An-Nasa’i, 1430. Classed as authentic by Al-Albani in Sahih An-Nasa’i)

So it is not permissible to travel with the aim of visiting any holy place except these three. This does not mean that it is haram to visit mosques in Muslim lands, because visiting them is prescribed and is recommended. Rather what is forbidden is setting out with that aim. If a person has another reason for travelling, and he happens to visit the mosque too, there is nothing wrong with that, rather he is obliged to pray Jumu`ah and prayers in congregation.

It is even more prohibited to travel to visit places that are regarded as holy in other religions, such as those who go to visit the Vatican or Buddhist idols and so on.

- The evidence also indicates that it is prohibited for the Muslim to travel in non-Muslim lands in general, because of the evils that will affect the Muslim's religious commitment and attitude as the result of mixing with those nations who pay no attention to religion and morals, especially when there is no need for him to travel for medical treatment or business and so on, rather it is just for leisure and for fun. Allah has made the Muslim lands spacious, praise be to Allah, and He has placed therein wonders of creation so that there is no need to visit the kafirs in their lands.

Shaykh Salih Al-Fawzan (may Allah preserve him) said:

"Travelling to non-Muslim lands is not permissible, because there are many dangers posed to one's beliefs and morals by mixing with the non-Muslims and staying among them. But if there is a valid need and a sound purpose for travelling, such as travelling for medical treatment that is not available in a Muslim country, or travelling to study something that is not available in a Muslim country, or travelling for business purposes, these are valid purposes for which it is permissible to travel to non-Muslim countries, provided that one adheres to the rituals of Islam and is able to carry out his religious duties in that country, but that (travel) should be done only as much as is necessary, then one should return to the Muslim world.

As for travelling for tourism, that is not permissible, because the Muslim has no need of that and it does not serve any interest that matches or outweighs the harm and danger to his religious commitment and beliefs that it involves." (End quote from Al-Muntaqa min Fatawa Al-Shaykh Al-Fawzan, 2/question no. 221)

We have already discussed this question in detail and at length on our site. Please see the answer to question no. 13342.

- There can be no doubt that Shari`ah forbids tourism in places of corruption, where alcohol is drunk and immoral actions take place and sins are committed, such as beaches and parties and immoral places, or travelling to hold celebrations on innovated festivals. The Muslim is enjoined to keep away from sin so he should not commit sin or sit with those who are

committing sin.

The scholars of the Standing Committee said:

“It is not permissible to go to places of corruption for the sake of tourism, because of the danger that poses to one’s religious commitment and morals. Islam came to block the means that lead to evil.” (End quote from Fatawa Al-Lajnah Ad-Da’imah, 26/332)

So, how about tourism that encourages sin and immorality, and is organised in order to promote it and spread it?

The scholars of the Standing Committee also said:

“If this tourism involves making it easy to commit sin and evils, and promotes them, then it is not permissible for the Muslim who believes in Allah and the Last Day to help others to disobey Allah and go against His commands. If a person gives up something for the sake of Allah, Allah will compensate him with something better than it.” (End quote from Fatawa Al-Lajnah Ad-Da’imah, 26/224)

- With regard to visiting the ruins and places of former nations, if they are places of punishment where they were swallowed up by the earth, transformed or destroyed because of their disbelief in Allah, then it is not permissible to take those places as sites for tourism and recreation.

The scholars of the Standing Committee were asked:

In the city of Al-Bada’, near Tabuk, there is an area where there are ancient ruins and houses carved out of the mountains, and some people say that these were the dwellings of the people of Shu`ayb (peace be upon him). My question is: Has it been proven that these were the dwellings of the people of Shu`ayb (peace be upon him) or not? What is the ruling on visiting these ruins for one whose aim is to have a look at them, and the one whose aim is to ponder and learn a lesson?

They replied:

“It is well known among the scholars that the houses of Madyan to whom the Prophet of Allah Shu`ayb (peace be upon him) was sent were in the north-west of the Arabian Peninsula, which is now known as Al-Bada’ and its environs.

Allah knows best what is really true. If this is correct, then it is not permissible to visit those places for the purpose of having a look at them, because when the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) passed though Al-Hijr – which was where the houses of Thamud were – he said: “Do not enter the dwellings of those who wronged themselves unless you are weeping, lest there befall you something like that which befell them.” Then he covered his head and urged his mount to move on quickly until he left the place behind. (Narrated by Al-Bukhari, 3200 and Muslim, 2980)”

Ibn Al-Qayyim (may Allah have mercy on him) said, whilst listing the lessons and rulings learned from the campaign to Tabuk:

“One who passes by the places of those who were subjected to divine wrath or who were punished should not enter them or stay among them, rather he should hasten to move on and should cover his head with his garment until he has passed them, and he should not enter upon them unless he is weeping and willing to learn a lesson. An example of this is when the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) hastened to move on in the valley of Muhsir, between Mina and Muzdalifah, because it was the place where Allah destroyed the elephant and its companions.” (End quote from Zad Al-Ma`ad, 3/560)

Ibn Hajar (may Allah have mercy on him) said, commenting on the Hadith quoted above:

“This applies to the dwellings of Thamud and others like them, though the reason was given concerning them.” (End quote from Fat-h Al-Bari, 6/380. Also see: Majmu`at Abhath Hay’at Kibar Al-`Ulama’ fil-Mamlakah Al-`Arabiyyah Al-Sa`udiyyah, vol. 3, essay entitled Hukm Ihya’ Diyar Thamud)

See also the answer to question no. 20894.

- It is also not permissible for a woman to travel without a mahram. The scholars have stated

that it is haram for a woman to travel without a mahram for Hajj or `umrah, so how about if the travel is for the purpose of tourism which involves a lot of carelessness and haram mixing?!

See the answers to questions no. 3098, 45917 and 4523.

- As for organising trips for non-Muslims in Muslim countries, the basic principle is that it is permissible. If a non-Muslim tourist is granted permission by a Muslim state to enter, then he is granted safety until he leaves. But during his stay in the Muslim country, he should be required to show respect for the Islamic religion and the morals and culture of the Muslims; he should not call people to his religion or claim that Islam is false, and he should only go out in clothes that are appropriate for a Muslim country, not as they are accustomed to dress in their country, semi naked and decadent. He should not be a helper or spy for his people. And finally the non-Muslims should not be allowed to visit the two Holy Sanctuaries in Makkah and Al-Madinah Al-Munawwarah.

Warning against evil kinds of tourism

It is obvious to everyone that tourism (Siyahah) nowadays mostly involves sin, immoral deeds and transgression of the sacred limits, such as deliberate wanton display and nakedness, permissive mixing, drinking of alcohol, promotion of corruption, imitation of the non-Muslim and introduction of their customs and ways, and even their diseases, let alone a waste of money, time and effort. All of that happens in the name of tourism. We remind everyone who is concerned about his religion, morals and ummah not to help to promote this evil kind of tourism; rather he should fight it and fight against the culture that it promotes; he should be proud of his religion, culture and morals, for they will protect him against all evils, and give him an alternative in the conservative Muslim lands.

And Allah knows best.