

Brazilians Join 3 Million Pilgrims Reenacting Abraham's Journey to Mecca

Contributed by Isaura Daniel
Friday, 30 December 2005

The tradesman Nagib Smaidi and his wife Soraia, from the city of Taubat , in the interior of the southeastern Brazilian state of S o Paulo, traveled to Saudi Arabia just before Christmas.

In the suitcase Nagib took large and light colored towels and Soraia the long dresses worn by Muslim women. As is the asked by the Islamic religion, Nagib is going to wrap himself in the towels and Soraia will cover her whole body, except for the face and hands, to visit the holy places in Saudi Arabia where the prophet Abraham went in the past.

The couple is part of the group of Brazilian Muslims who are going to make, at the beginning of next year, the pilgrimage to Mecca, holy city in Islam.

Every year between two and three million people from the whole world travel to Saudi Arabia for the Hajj. The next Hajj will be on the 7th of January, followed by a four-day holiday. On these days the Muslims repeat the rituals made by Abraham about two thousand years before the birth of Jesus Christ.

The Brazilian Muslims normally travel in groups. The sheikhs Mohamad Amame and Yasser Hussein, from S o Paulo, for example, organized a group of about 40 people. The majority of the members of the group are travelling to Mecca for the first time and are about 50 years old or more. This is the first time the sheiks organize the trip.

The pilgrimage is a re-enactment of the journey made by Abraham after building, where Mecca is located today, the Kaaba. According to the Muslim religion, the Kaaba was erected by the prophet by divine order to become a place of adoration.

It is still in the original place, but was rebuilt many times throughout the years. The peregrines, as well as praying before the Kaaba, go to other holy places such as Mount Arafat, visited by Abraham in his time for being the place where, according to Islam, Adam and Eve met.

"The peregrination is a form of coming closer to God, to turn yourself to God," said sheikh Jihad Hassan Hammadeh, vice-president at the World Assembly of Muslim Youth.

This, according to the sheikh, is the second holiday in the year for the Muslims. The other is at the end of Ramadan, period in which the followers of the Islamic religious fast from sunrise to sunset.

The Journey

Normally the peregrines travel already in December to Saudi Arabia so that they are already in the country on the determined day. The couple Nagib and Soraia plan on returning to Brazil on the 20th of January. This is the second time the tradesman will make the pilgrimage. Soraia, however, is travelling for the Hajj for the first time.

Nagib, who made his first peregrination in 2002, recalls precisely the moments he spent in Saudi Arabia. "It is nourishment for the soul to come before the place to which you turn five times a day to pray. Muslims in the whole world turn towards the Kaaba to pray and suddenly you are in this place," says he, who is 40 years old. At Mount Arafat, which is part of the peregrination, Nagib spent the whole day in prayer.

He also visited other places, which are not officially part of the peregrination, but are religious places. One of them was the Mosque of the Prophet, where the prophet Mohammed lived, in Medina.

Nagib also went to the Cave of Hira, where Mohammed received the first revelations of the Koran, holy book of Islam, from the archangel Gabriel. The cave is made of stone and is located at the top of a mountain.

Even though this is Nagib's second time to participate in the peregrination, it is the third time he travels to Saudi Arabia.

During his other journey, in 2004, the tradesman took his sons, a 17-year old girl and a boy of 14, to see the religious and historic places of the country. The two teenagers, according to Nagib, also plan on making the peregrination in the future.

Anba - www.anba.com.br