

Chapter 10

Factors Determining the Price of Umra Package among Travel Agencies in Kano Metropolis

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ABSTRACT

The incessant complaints by civil society organizations and the general public in Nigeria against exploitative charges by tour operators and travel agencies on hapless Hajj and Umrah pilgrims call for careful examination. Previously, some of these unscrupulous tour operators have hidden under the excuse of the high cost of visas to charge exorbitant fees. However, with the recent clarification from the Saudi Arabian Embassy in Nigeria that both Hajj and Umrah visas are free, it is clear that some travel agencies have been exploiting Nigerian pilgrims. This chapter is conducted in order to address this issue. Consequently, the chapter attempts to provide relevant insights on Islamic tourism in Nigeria with specific emphasis on the reasons behind the high cost and variations in the prices of Umra packages among travel agencies in Kano State of Nigeria. It is an exploratory study that uses a qualitative approach through in-depth interviews with senior officers of selected travel agencies in Kano. Findings from the study reveal that Umra pilgrims in Kano pay higher and different fares. It has also been established that there are variations in Umra prices due to some direct and indirect factors that determine Umra package fares. Consequently,

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it is recommended that there is a need for the National Hajj Commission of Nigeria (NAHCON) to properly regulate Umra pilgrimage like that of Hajj and to embark on an aggressive enlightenment campaign to educate potential and present Umra pilgrims on the necessary factors that affect the price of a typical Umra package and how they can identify a registered travel agency from a quack one so as to protect themselves against undue exploitation.

1. INTRODUCTION

In Islam, the activity of travelling and exploring the world is generally motivated by the need for *ibadah* (worship), *da'wah* (propagation) and *dhalab al-ilm* (knowledge seeking). Muslims perform Umra for the sake of worshipping Allah and by extension to acquire practical knowledge (ainul-yakin). This is because anybody who visits Mecca or Madina will see the Ka'aba, the Holy Prophet's mosque and *Safa* and *Marwa* physically among other holy places as stated in the Holy Qur'an. As a result, Umra pilgrimage can best be described as an aspect of spiritual and religious tourism. This is based on the fact that a Muslim travelling for Hajj, Umra, *Rihla* or *Ziyara* could certainly be called an Islamic spiritual tourist (Haq, 2013). The notion of spirituality here denotes an enlightened attention to Supreme Being or High Spirit, attention to oneself and attention to others (Mitroff, 2003; Piedmont & Leach, 2002). Thus, Islam as a religion inspires spiritual and religious tourism which are in turn sub-segments of cultural tourism. Haq and Jackson (2009) define a spiritual tourist as someone who visits a specific place out of his/her usual environment, with the intention of spiritual meaning and/or growth, without overt religious compulsion, which could be religious, non-religious, sacred or experiential in nature, but within a divine context. This goes to show that there is a symbiotic relationship between Spiritual, religious and Islamic tourism. Therefore, this study treats Umra as an Islamic spiritual tourism that is motivated by the religion of Islam.

Religious tourism has been described as tourism that is completely or partially related or motivated by religion (Cochrane 2009; Raj & Morpeth 2007), while pilgrimage is a faith-oriented journey to a holy place revered by a particular religion in order to connect with a Supreme Being (Timothy & Olsen, 2006). Consequently, pilgrimage has been referred to as the developed institutional and organized form of religious tourism (Collins-Krener et al., 2006; Rinschede, 1992).

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