

## The Hajj Price in Tajikistan Went up Again. According to the Government, the Reason Is the Rising Prices in Saudi Arabia

In Tajikistan, in the context of the state's monopoly, the authorities raised prices for the hajj again.

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After six years of waiting, Zohir Obidov's turn to undertake a pilgrimage to the Kaaba finally has come.



Tajik pilgrims. Photo: news.tj

Zohir Obidov, 56, says that he has already paid above 35 thousand somoni (about \$3,720) for hajj. The Committee of Religion said that these funds will be spent on air tickets, accommodation in Mecca and Medina, as well as the purchase of a sacrificial sheep. Obidov says that, in addition to these funds, money is needed for various services at almost every step. For example, for a medical examination and preparation of documents. In addition, he was demanded to pay another 750 somoni (about \$80) for "unforeseen

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expenses”.

Zohir Obidov says that the hajj price is increasing every year, but no one complains. In case if someone begins complaining, there immediately will be someone else willing to pay even higher price for the hajj. There are tens of thousands people on the waiting list.

He is surprised that in Tajikistan, officially recognized as the poorest country in the CIS, the prices for the hajj are so high. For example, one of his acquaintances with Russian citizenship left for the hajj from Kazan, and all his expenses amounted to \$2,700, which is \$1,000 less than those in Tajikistan.

Let us note that this year, the Parliament of Tajikistan increased the prices just before the departure to the hajj.

According to the amendments to the Law “On Other Mandatory Payments to the Budget” approved at the lower house (Majlisi Namoyandagon) of parliament meeting on April 26, anyone who intends to undertake a mandatory hajj or umrah has to pay a fee of 500 somoni or \$50 to the Committee of Religion.

According to Sulaymon Davlatzoda, chairman of the Committee of Religion of Tajikistan, the organization responsible for organizing the departure for the hajj, “these funds will be used to provide services and prepare documents for pilgrims”.

Previously, these services were provided from the total amount of money paid by pilgrims.



Shukurjon Zukhurov, chairman of the the lower house (Majlisi Namoyandagon) of parliament of Tajikistan, criticized this initiative of the Ministry of Finance and the Committee of Religion.

*Shukurjon Zukhurov criticized the Ministry of Finance and the Committee on Religious Affairs. Photo: ozodi.org*

“People of Tajikistan are saving money for the hajj for many years. Now you raise its cost by another \$50. Do you even think about the people?” he noted.

In addition, the cost of a trip to the hajj this year, in conversion to somoni, increased by 1,800 somoni (about \$190).

### **In Majority of the Countries of the World, the Hajj Is Organized by Private Companies**

What are the costs of the hajj in other post-Soviet countries? In Kazakhstan, it amounts to \$2,700, in Kyrgyzstan - \$2,890 and in Russia - 179,640 rubles or \$2,700.

In Uzbekistan, the organization of a mandatory hajj cost about \$4,000. However, recently the authorities of this country declared that this year they would reduce this amount by 1

million som (above \$1,000).

Unlike Tajikistan, where the Committee of Religion organizes the trip to the hajj, in most countries of the world, private companies are involved in this.

For example, in Kazakhstan, 18 private companies provide pilgrimage services.

### **How the Money Collected from the Pilgrims Is Spent?**

Answering the question of how more than 35,000 somoni from pilgrims are spent, the Committee of Religion, Regulation of Traditions, Celebrations and Ceremonies under the Government of Tajikistan gave the following answer:

“Airplane tickets (round trip); accommodation and stay in Mecca and Medina; meals for the period of the hajj; experienced guides with language knowledge for each group of pilgrims; accommodation in the Mina and Muzdalifah valleys and on Arafat mountain; purchasing a sacrificial animal; transportation for pilgrims on the Jeddah - Mecca - Mina - Arafat - Muzdalifah - Mina - Mecca - Medina route; service companies in Saudi Arabia payment, the first-aid posts in Mecca and Medina, name badges, certificates and books on the hajj, suitcases for pilgrims”.

According to the Committee, the services cost for the season “Hajj-2019” will be 35,128 somoni.

### **Why Are the Prices for Hajj Growing Every Year?**

According to the Committee of Religion, Regulation of Traditions, Celebrations and Ceremonies, the cost for organizing a trip to hajj in 2016 was 28,649 somoni (about \$3,000), in 2017 - 33,000 somoni (\$3,670), in 2018 - 33,410 somoni (about \$3,720) and this year is 35,128 somoni.

According to Sulaymon Davlatzoda, chairman of the Committee of Religion, responsible for organizing the hajj, in 2019 the tax burden and the cost of goods in Saudi Arabia increased. Therefore, according to him, the cost of organizing a trip to the hajj has increased (up to \$420).

The Committee of Religion noted that the cost of organizing a trip to the hajj is annually conformed by the Antimonopoly Service under the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan.

### **Khodzoda: The Annual Cost Increase of a Trip to the Hajj Is of Concern**

Faridun Khodzoda, an expert on religion, believes that the main purpose of introducing a fee for the hajj is another way to “replenish the budget”.

According to him, the Government of Tajikistan by all means: by increasing the cost of goods and services, including the duty on pilgrims and tourists, wants to solve the problem of



*Davlatzoda assures that the rise in prices for the Hajj is due to tax increases and inflation in Saudi Arabia. Photo: tajikistantimes.com*

budget deficit.

“In my opinion, a mandatory fee of 500 somoni is not a large amount for pilgrims. For a person who has spent \$3,700 to undertake a hajj, paying an additional \$50 is not a problem. However, the fact that the cost of undertaking the hajj under various pretexts is annually increasing is of concern”, says Hodizoda.

Every year, more than 6,000 pilgrims travel from Tajikistan to the hajj, paying a total of about \$22.2 million for this trip.

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