

Advisory: 052 (Ramadan 2015)

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In 2015, Ramadan is expected to begin around the **18.06.15 (Thursday)** although the date is only confirmed once the moon is sighted. The dates will vary dependent on which part of the world you are in, however, once Ramadan commences, the Muslim world observe strict timings for fasting and prayer, which will have an impact on operational capability in Muslim countries.

Care should be taken to respect religious and cultural sensitivities, rules and customs. In particular, people who are not fasting are advised to avoid eating, drinking and smoking in the presence of people who are fasting. In some Muslim countries during Ramadan, eating, drinking and smoking in public during the day is illegal and will therefore attract the attention of local authorities, (e.g. Brunei under the Syariah Penal code Order – this refers to both Muslims and non-Muslims and carries a fine of \$4,000 or a prison term for up to a year). You are advised to seek local advice when visiting these countries. The opening times for government agencies, the courts and businesses may be shortened.

Here is a general country to country guide:

- **Malaysia**

Just over half of Malaysia's population are Muslim therefore Ramadan has a considerable impact. Non-Muslims aren't required to fast, however, Muslim-run eateries won't open until mid-afternoon, but the vibrant *pasar Ramadan*, markets selling vast quantities of iftar sweets and savouries, are worth the wait. Public transport is awkward at best.

- **Indonesia**

As well as fasting and abstaining from smoking and drinking, many Indonesians also pay respects at family graves and royal cemeteries. Muslim-run restaurants remain firmly shut in daylight hours, but Christian, Chinese and Balinese businesses and facilities are open for business. Non-Muslims aren't required to partake in the fasting, but should be discreet in public areas. Finding food is likely to be most tricky in remote parts of west Java, south Sumatra and Aceh.

- **Kenya**

Islamic communities are found mostly on Kenya's coast and throughout the northeast, so any travel disruption should be limited to these areas. Most *hotelis* (small restaurants) close during daylight hours, and fasting is widespread. There is little pressure for non-Muslims to participate. Public transport and official business aren't generally affected in Mombasa and Malindi, but expect disruptions further up the coast.

- **Saudi Arabia**

Ramadan is observed with fervour throughout the kingdom, and public observance of the fast is mandatory. Non-Muslims are not expected to fast behind closed doors, but the *mutawwa* (religious police) patrol the streets to enforce abstinence. Eateries are closed during daylight hours – top-end hotels occasionally offer screened eating areas, but plan ahead. Evenings are lively, with people coming together to eat, drink, pray and shop.

- **UAE**

Everyone, regardless of religion, is required to fast in public. You'll find room service and screened eating areas in most large hotels, but prepare to be hustled away from public view. If offered refreshments by a Muslim, visitors should refuse initially to avoid offence. If the host continues to insist, agree or refrain at your discretion. Dance clubs remain closed, live music is prohibited, and camel racing ceases for the month. Bars are dry until sunset. The shopping

malls heave with customers after dark: this is one of a handful of annual occasions when wide-spread promotions and sales are permitted.

- **Egypt**

Although non-Muslim visitors are permitted to smoke, eat and drink, as a matter of courtesy such activities should be kept away from those who are fasting. Alcohol is not sold during Ramadan, and government offices tend close at 2pm. Look out for frenzied iftar feasts and buzzing street life as night falls, however – Luxor's Alub el Haggag mosque is the focus of vibrant celebrations throughout the month.

- **Oman**

Ramadan is taken very seriously in Oman; **non-Muslims should always refrain from eating, drinking and smoking in public.** Eateries and bars will be firmly shut, and daytime entertainment and shopping will be limited. Large hotels will offer food to travellers but you'll be restricted to screened rooms, tucked away from those who are fasting.

- **Jordan**

Ramadan is enforced by both religious and civil law. Restaurants stay closed until sunset, and shops operate shortened opening hours. It's illegal for supermarkets and restaurants to sell alcohol throughout the month – even Christian-run businesses. Travellers are expected to observe the fast publicly, but large hotels will serve daytime food to non-Muslims. Iftar celebrations tend to be more subdued than those in other conservative Muslim countries – a far cry from Egypt's street parties.

Local agents will be aware of the laws of their country and will plan the embarkation and disembarkation of crew accordingly. Just remember to be courteous and discreet and this way no one will be offended and no laws will be broken.

All Government departments within Muslim countries will operate on limited hours and that will inevitably have a direct influence on the speed of processing visas and other administrative matters.

For shipping movements and the embarkation and disembarkation of ships personnel, please gain advice from the local agent about how Ramadan may affect normal operations.

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