



MARRIAGES IN SAUDI ARABIA



With the compliment of
Saudi Students House in
Pittsburgh. PA.
&
Saudi Students Club in
Portland. Oregon

Saudi Students House in Pittsburgh hosting a Wedding Event to share a cultural practice and talk about visa problems

On the 21st of Decemebr, 2007 The Saudi Students House in Pittsburgh hosted a wedding reception according to Saudi Customs coinciding with the celebrations of End of pilgrimage festival which is the second of the two major Muslim holidays in a year

The objective of the event was to continue our efforts in sharing our culture with the Pittsburgh community hoping to foster better ties and relations with people around the world. Saudi Cultural Attaché Dr Mohammad Aleasa attended the event from Washington DC together with a delegation from the Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia.

*Background on the wedding:

In summer of 2005, King Abdullah signed an educational agreement with President Bush which resulted in a program that intends to provide 25000 scholarships from Saudi government in the next five years for Saudi students interested in studying selected technical fields in USA. Since then, the number of Saudi students attending US schools has significantly increased.

Despite this great interest in studying in USA , Saudi students around that nation are taking risks in returning back to Saudi Arabia during holidays. due to elongated visa renewal processes.

Approximately, 13 members of the Pittsburgh Saudi Student House who were attending local

schools last year as full time students went to Saudi Arabia during summer time but still have pending visa applications for many months.

Some of those students had only one or two semesters to complete their degree requirements but now they are still wondering if they can return to complete their study or should they seek to transfer their government scholarships to other countries.

This concern is what lead Mrs Alaa Aqeel to decide to come to USA on with few of her family members and decide to get married withher fiancé Mr Omar Bafakeeh over here in Pittsburgh. Had she not done that, then they both would have ended up waiting for 4-5 years before Mr. Omar could have completed his PhD and returned back to Saudi

Weddings ceremonies in Saudi Arabia

may be different depending on the location of the bride and groom. For example; families from the South may celebrate their wedding in a different way than Citizens of the West (Hejaz Area). But the basics are the same.

Marriages are arranged between families. A man would tell his mother, sister or one of his relatives what kind of woman he would like to marry. For example, he would say he wanted a lady with big eyes, long dark hair, not fat, not thin, but normal body, and someone who follows the rules of the religion. Finding just the right woman may take about a month or more, with some hits and misses in between. Once a perfect potential partner is found, they'll call the woman's parents and tell them they want to engage their son to their daughter. If the woman's parents don't refuse, they'll set a date for the man to come to their house with his parents. A groom and his family will propose to a bride's family, the groom might be from the same family or another family. The family of the bride will collect some information about the groom through family and friends to make sure, he is suitable for the bride. The bride will be free to make her decision of accepting the proposal.

Once the bride accepts the proposal, both bride and groom will meet in the presence of their families to see each other. This is part of the Islamic guidance for any couples getting married. It is to give them a chance to make their final decision to the commitment.

Melka (Engagement)

Saudi wedding receptions are conducted the traditional Muslim way, which means the men and women celebrate separately

party place.

Maheer:

During the writing of the marriage contract, the groom will present Maheer. It is a token of commitment of the husband's responsibility and may be paid in cash, property or movable objects to the bride herself. The amount of Maheer is not legally specified, however, moderation according to the existing social norm is practiced. Maheer is documented in the contract, and it is something that the bride owns it whatever amount it is going to be.

Wedding Reception:

This event will take place few months after the Engagement took place. The bride will take some time to buy new clothing and the groom will have the time to prepare the residence.

Preparations of the wedding (the same applies to the engagement) include the following:

Wedding Ballroom : The reception ballroom is 2 ballrooms one for ladies, and one for men. A designer is hired to set up the place.

Wedding Banquet: Guests at both ballrooms will be served with Arabic coffee, tea, chocolate, dates, and beverage. At the end of the reception a buffet will be served that has different dishes from all over the world, beside the traditional dishes like Kabsa (rice with meat).

The Cutting of the Cake

When the bride and groom start walking to the wedding cake, all the wedding guests move out of the way and look in anticipation at the bride and groom.

Then the groom holds the bride's hand carefully and together they hold the knife

that the couple have started taking care of each other and looking after each other.

Henna night:

or about three days before the wedding date, culminating in henna night before the big day, the bride will begin preparing for her wedding. the bride is joined by her sisters, cousins and female friends for henna night; a night of more music, dance, food and celebration. the bride would wear a number of dresses, including a traditional type of dress known as *zaboun* and a *yashmak*, embroidered with silver thread, over her face. It's a commitment to tradition that says that a bride should not be seen by anyone. The henna night represents the last night before her shift into a life full of responsibilities of a husband and future children.

Groom & Bride Zafa (Walk)

Towards the end of the reception usually past midnight, the zafa of the Groom * Bride will be announced. Women fetch their abayas and headscarves, wrapping them around them getting ready for the zafa.

The groom is dressed in traditional Arab male dress white thoub (long); the bride in radiant pure white wedding gown.

Both slowly made their way to the wedding throne (stage) while traditional music is on. Once they arrive many pictures will be taking. Then the pair share sipping juice from a huge, round, long-stemmed glass, while the guests clapped and ululated. At some weddings, guests would be entertained with a videotaped 'documentary' of the bridal couple's life, from when they were children, up to the day of their wedding.

Happily Ever After:

Once all of those formalities are over, the couple will go together to a hotel or their own