



PHOTOS BY TERRY BOYD/Stars and Stripes

For Westerners, the sight of women wearing head and face coverings is disconcerting. Nearly all Yemeni women — though not all Muslim women working there — cover up. But it's common to see stiletto heels and blue jeans peeking out underneath the black material.

Unpredictable Yemen

BY TERRY BOYD
Stars and Stripes

There was a time not too long ago when merely being an American guaranteed a warm reception whether you were traveling to Tijuana or Timbuktu. Now when we think about destinations, we think in terms of where bad things are likely to happen, and where they likely won't.

Using that unfortunate guideline, Yemen should be near the top of no-go lists, just behind Lebanon.

Yemen, homeland of the bin Laden family, is rated a high-risk destination by people who keep track of that sort of thing. And of course, the bombing of the USS Cole in Aden in 2000 killed 17 U.S. sailors, presaging the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks. The State Department extended a travel warning for the



PETER JAEGER/Stars and Stripes

country in April after 23 convicted Islamic fundamentalists escaped from prison in February, though many have since been recaptured.

The reality seems far less dire.

Sana'a, the capital, is the most exotic place I've visited: a place where metastasizing modernity hasn't swept away the storybook magic. Where good-humored merchants lure you into tiny chambers along the tunnel-like inner sanctums of

SEE YEMEN, PAGE 26



Life in Yemen revolves around "khat," a mild stimulant/euphoric that is highly addictive. Nearly all Yemeni men, and many women, chew the bright green leaves beginning after lunch.

KNOW & Go

Getting there

Getting to Yemen is not easy. Theoretically, tourists can get an entry visa at the arrival terminal at the Sana'a airport. But a Yemeni official in Washington advised me to get the visa in advance.

The fee is \$30, and you have to send the Yemeni embassy your passport, two passport-sized photos plus the fees for express mail return. It took me about three weeks, even with express delivery service. The fact I have a Status of Forces Agreement stamp didn't seem to matter.

Flights from Europe connect through the international airport at Frankfurt, Germany, with a stopover in Doha, Qatar. The leg to Doha takes about four hours. I had a four-hour layover in Doha, then a two-hour flight to Sana'a. Both Qatar Airways and Yemenia Airways make daily flights.

Security

The U.S. Embassy asks American travelers to Yemen to register with the warden program of emergency security alerts: <https://travelregistration.state.gov/ibrs>.

Staying there

The best hotel in Sana'a by a mile is the new Movenpick Sana'a. It's not cheap — rooms start at \$150 per night — but it's gorgeous and comfortable, with all the five-star amenities.

The hotel to avoid is the Sheraton, which is rundown. It is also the party center of Sana'a, attracting quite a few smarmy locals, as well as foreigners looking for whatever "action" there is in a town many call "a living museum."

Money matters

Surprisingly, I found a lot of restaurants that would take credit cards, and there are a few ATMs in the center of the city.

— TERRY BOYD

Sana'a has some of the best bazaars in the world. A spice dealer, at left, sorts bulk beans for the legendary Yemeni coffee, perhaps the best in the world.

