



Buddhist dorje

Religious Clothing and Artefacts: a guide for security screeners

Marcia Adair provides a short primer on some of the world religions and the potential problems security screeners may face when presented with unfamiliar customs or religious artefacts. Whilst, in most cases, polite requests and respectful treatment of the passenger goes a long way towards screening in an effective manner and without causing offence, cultural awareness training for front line staff will better equip them to make reasoned decisions and comprehend the nuances of the various faiths they may encounter.

It is impossible to outline a firm set of guidelines as to how best handle followers of any one faith since adherents of the same religion can vary immensely in their application of rules regarding clothing and artefacts.

For the sake of this article, granted the limited space available, in religions where there is a significant difference between orthodox and liberal practice, I have erred on the side of orthodoxy to illustrate the most extreme situations.

There are of course many faiths with many followers around the globe. Here we look at (in alphabetical order) Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, Sikhism, and Zoroastrianism.

Buddhism

Founded in India in the 5th century BCE by Siddhartha Gautama, who became and is acknowledged by followers to be Buddha, the Awakened One or the Enlightened One, Buddhism has since become a majority religion throughout much of Southeast Asia. The 376 million followers of the Buddha worldwide are divided into three main strands: Mahayana, Theravada and Vajrayana.

Lay Buddhists don't have any prescribed clothing relating to their religion. Monks and nuns generally wear robes comprising of a tunic and skirt over which they wear an uncut piece of cloth wrapped like a sari,

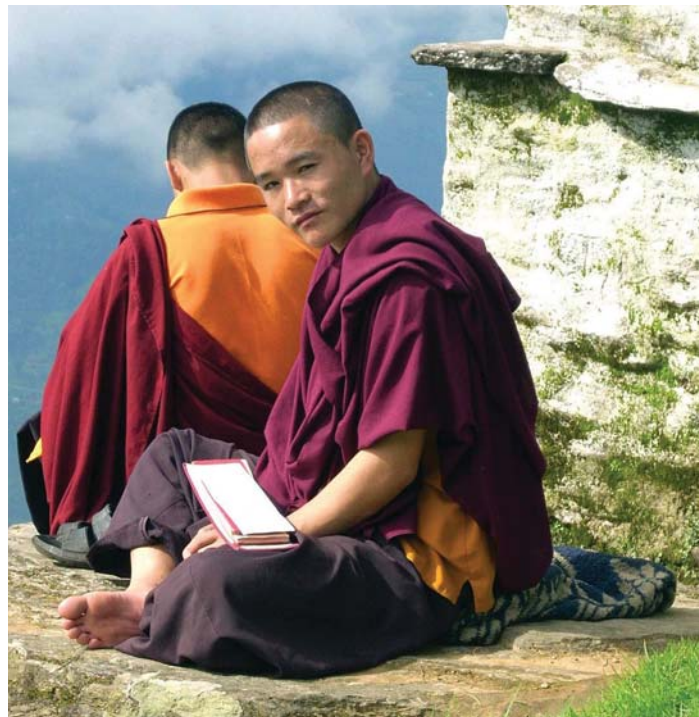
although those residing in the West are just as likely to wear Western clothes when outside of the monastery.

Buddhists may carry a metal or wooden image of **Buddha** in their carry-on as well as a **mala**, which is a rosary-like string of 108 wooden beads used to count mantras.



Mala

Tibetan monks will likely also have a **vajra** or **dorje** in their possession. These small metal objects can be anywhere from four to 14 inches long and, although initially conceived as a weapon, it is now a symbol of all that is indestructible, enduring, powerful, invincible, and irresistible. In most cases, the vajra is paired with a small bell, also made of metal.



Buddhist monks

Buddhist custom dictates that a person "never touches a monk or nun unless they first touch you", however most are aware of the need to be checked at the airport and will happily allow security personnel to carry out their duties. Furthermore a monk should never touch a woman, nor vice versa, although screening by a female security guard using a hand-held magnetometer is acceptable if no male guard is available.

Christianity

With over 2.1 billion adherents worldwide, Christianity is the largest world religion by a fair margin. While broadly true, it would be a gross generalisation to claim that all Christians have the same set of beliefs. There are hundreds of denominations, each with their own interpretation of the Bible, doctrine and dogma.

The most basic division is Catholic and Protestant. Over the past 400 years, the two groups have fought bitterly with each other over politics and power throughout Europe. The situation has changed considerably over the last 50 years or so as democratic and increasingly secular states has made a person's religious affiliation less and less relevant.



Rosary and crucifix

Clergy or other more observant Christians may have in their possession **crucifixes**, **rosaries**, Bibles, holy water or anointing oil. Rosaries are usually made of wood, so should not cause any security problems. Most Christians will not be bothered if you have to handle their Bible while carrying out a bag check.

Holy water and anointing oil are carried by ministers, priests and those who have



Catholic priests

completed a pilgrimage to a religious site. Holy water is simply water that has been blessed by a Roman Catholic priest. It is most often used for baptism although water collected from religious shrines and pilgrimage sites is often believed to have special healing properties.

Anointing oil is much less common, particularly among Protestants for whom the substance is merely a symbol. Roman Catholics consider the oil (usually olive) to be a sacrament due to its role in the Anointing of the Sick.

Passengers who plan ahead will stow the water and oil in their checked baggage. Those that forget or choose to carry on these items should not run into a problem since it is unlikely that the items will exceed the volume permitted for liquids.

Hinduism

900 million adherents make Hinduism the most common religion after Christianity and Islam, with the most concentrated populations in Nepal, India, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh.

Some Hindus may carry the **vajra** and bell like Buddhists, but, for the most part, there are no items of clothing or artefacts that are strictly identifiable as religious. Many Hindu women wear a **sari** but this is cultural rather than religious. Hindu women from the Punjab region of India wear the same tunic and trouser set as Sikh women. The rules governing the removal of these items are the same as the rules for any Western woman.

Islam

The youngest of the three major Abrahamic religions, Islam, is currently second only to Christianity in terms of the number of followers.

There has been a great deal of controversy in the world press about all aspects of Islamic life but no subject gets more column inches than women's clothing. Despite the massive coverage, there is still much confusion regarding what the rules are exactly as well as their purpose. Part of the problem is that Islam itself does not have a central ruling body to uniformly interpret the Qur'an. Each cleric is charged with the task of coming up with his own interpretation as to what the practical implications of the Qur'an and Sharia law are, making his answer as much cultural as it is religious.

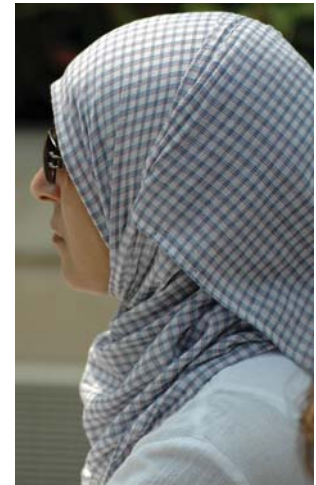
Women

According to Farzana Hassan, President of the Muslim Canadian Congress, women are required to, "guard their modesty from certain categories of men who are classified as coming in the prohibitive degrees of marriage." While it is clear that this refers to any man with whom the women could potentially have a sexual relationship, what is unclear is how modesty is maintained.

The most basic requirements are that nothing from the wrists to ankles is exposed and that the hair be covered. This can mean anything from jeans, a long sleeved shirt and a **hijab** to a full **burqa**.

Which she will choose is dependent mostly on the woman's culture and geographic location.

Hassan indicated that the burqa was an, "extreme expression of modesty". It is customary in Islam to err on the side of caution when the answer is not clear and more and more Muslim women are choosing to wear it. In terms of airport security, it would appear that the burqa is



Hijab

problematic, since it is very difficult to identify a person when no identifying characteristics are visible. In practice, even the strictest interpretation of the Qur'an does not require a woman to cover her face, so there are no moral implications to a woman lifting her veil, providing a female security guard conducts the inspection, in



Burqa

private if the passenger so requests. Asking a woman actually to remove her hijab or otherwise uncover her hair in public is unacceptable. In a private room with a female screener, removing any head covering is no problem.

Men

Muslim men are required by the Qur'an to be covered from "the navel to the knee," which means they don't have any modesty restrictions that are not also part of the Judeo-Christian rules already in place. Especially devout men may be wearing a knitted prayer cap called a **kufi** (or **topi**), but since it is not mandated dress, removing it if necessary is not a problem.

Both men and women may be wearing an amulet, (as do followers of other faiths) containing a religious prayer/verses, on their arm, wrist, neck or waist. The amulet may be affixed by a chain or even a simple piece of string. Whatever, the amulet may be removed if a screener respectfully requests the passenger to do so.

Judaism

Judaism is one of the oldest religions still currently practiced. Its origins as both a religion and a culture date back to 2000 BCE when Abraham made a covenant with God. There are approximately 14 million Jews scattered throughout the world with the highest concentrations in the United States, Israel and Russia.

Just as in Islam, Jews take their direction straight from the holy scripture rather than from a central person such as the Pope. While all Jews are encouraged to read and study the scriptures, it is up to the rabbi (a community's religious leader and teacher) to come up with an interpretation when there are grey areas or questions. As such, each synagogue may have different dress codes or rules regarding religious observances. From most conservative to most liberal, the four main denominations are Orthodox, Conservative, Reform and Reconstructionist.

Men

Orthodox Jews adhere to a strict interpretation and application of the laws of Torah (bible), which they believe to be Divine. In principle, this is similar to Evangelical Christians who believe the Bible is the literal Word of God. Orthodox men often wear black suits and a black hat. According to Rabbi Herschel Gross of New York, the hat is a stylistic choice rather than an article prescribed by the Torah, so it is "not a problem to remove it if required to by security personnel."

Underneath their hat, they also wear a **kippah** (also called a skullcap or yarmulke). Jewish men are only required to cover their heads while praying and most Reform and Conservative Jews don't wear a kippah at any other time. "Orthodox men", says Rabbi Gross, "wear it at all times, even while we're sleeping". It should be noted that since it is only a piece of cloth, velvet or leather laying flat on the head, the security risk is negligible. That said, there is no problem asking him to temporarily remove it as long as he is standing still.

One other item that may cause some confusion for security personnel is the **tefillin** (also known as phylacteries), which are a pair of small black leather boxes containing scrolls of parchment inscribed with biblical verses. The boxes are attached to a pair of leather straps that are wrapped around the left arm and the head during prayers. As tefillin are only worn during times of actual prayer, they will be encountered only in carry-on baggage and never on the person whilst they are actually going through a checkpoint.

It is acceptable to remove the tefillin from a bag if absolutely necessary although it would be appropriate to let



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Kara, Kanga and Kirpan

a private room to do so as appearing in public without a turban is considered embarrassing and degrading. It is considered as equivalent to a partial strip search. Removing the turban will take a few minutes since it is normally unwound rather than removed like a hat. The person will be happy to let you examine the cloth visually; if it is critical that the screener handle the cloth, it should be done in a respectful manner. After the inspection, the person will need about ten minutes and a mirror to retie the turban properly.

Some Sikh men will wear their beard in a net. Removing the net is not a problem although the person should be given the option to do so in private should they so wish.

The **Kara** is a bracelet made of iron or steel. It does set off a metal detector but because it is part of a Sikh's physical identity, they are loathe to remove it. Security personnel are encouraged to examine the kara, if they feel it necessary, whilst it is on the passenger's wrist. The kara is often a gift from a Sikh's spiritual teacher and, as such, it is respected, revered and loved.

The **Kanga** is a wooden comb worn underneath the turban that symbolises cleanliness and the importance of looking after the body God created.

The **Kachha** (also Kachh or Kachera) is a pair of breeches worn next to the skin as a symbol of chastity.

The **Kirpan** is a ceremonial sword worn by all Sikhs. It is a defensive weapon, used historically to protect the weak from tyranny. Usually carried on a cloth belt, the kirpan may be dull or sharp and can be anywhere from a few inches to three feet long. As with the other four Ks, the kirpan should be worn at all times. Many Sikhs, however, recognise the problem this creates at airport security and will stow the kirpan in their checked baggage for the duration of the flight. If they have forgotten and have it on their person, it is permissible for security personnel to examine it and to request that the passenger place it in their checked luggage. Under no circumstances should it be confiscated, like other bladed items; a practical solution must be found because the kirpan is considered an essential part of a Sikh's identity.

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Zoroastrianism

At roughly 2,600 years old, Zoroastrianism is one of the oldest world religions. It is based on the teachings and philosophy of the priest Zoroaster, also known as Zarathustra. Despite being the dominant religion in Iran at one time, the number of followers in the present day numbers about 250,000 throughout the world.

At the time of confirmation, Zoroastrians are given a cotton undershirt to wear (sudreh) and a woollen belt (kusti) that are worn at all times. According to Ervan Jehan Bengali, President of the North American Mobed Council, the **sudreh** and **kusti** are “invested up on the individual when they are brought into the religion as marks of identification of a Zoroastrian.”

Neither the sudreh or kusti are visible, as they are worn underneath a Zoroastrian’s regular clothing. Because they are made of natural fibres, these garments pose a negligible security risk. Zoroastrian priests may wear a prayer cap called a **paghdi** but its removal is not a problem.

Conclusion

Naturally, when it comes to religion one has to be sensitive, but equally one cannot grant exemptions from screening any person or any items on religious grounds. What happens if the person is behaving suspiciously? What

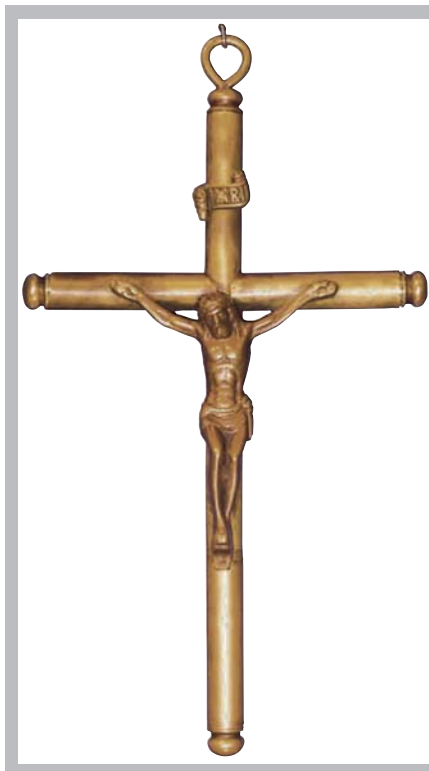


Zoroastrian woman

if an individual were to try to use religious clothing as a disguise or diversion? And, as one faith leader put it, "it is not beyond some religious people to exploit their status as pious to nefarious ends. No one can put their religious sensitivities above the safety and security of passengers and the country". There are no exemptions, just healthy doses of respect and common sense.

The author is a freelance journalist based in Canada.

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Regrettably, some groups have decided to use religious artefacts to disguise weapons. This is the Crucifix Gun, a 9mm centre-fire single-shot pistol, 33cms in length. The image originally appeared in Volume XXI of PCW Review and is reproduced here with permission of PS5 Ltd. The images are part of the PS5 Weapons Awareness and Recognition information service.

