



WELCOME TO OUR MOSQUE. We hope you enjoy your visit.

**Q: WHAT IS A MOSQUE?**

A: A mosque is a place of worship used by Muslims. The English word "mosque" is derived from its Arabic equivalent, masjid, which means "place of prostration." It is in the mosque that Muslims perform their prayers, a part of which includes placing the forehead on the floor, as a gesture of submission to One Creator.

**Q: HOW IS A MOSQUE USED?**

A: Mosques play a vital role in the lives of Muslims. The primary function of the mosque is to provide a place where Muslims perform obligatory [five] daily prayers. A mosque also provides sufficient space in which to hold prayers on Fridays, the Muslim day of communal prayer, and on the two Muslim holidays, called Eids, or "festivals."

**Q: IS A MOSQUE A HOLY PLACE?**

A: A mosque is a place that is specifically dedicated as a place of prayer. However, there is nothing sacred about the building or the place itself. There is no equivalent of an altar in a mosque. A Muslim may pray on any clean surface. Muslims often pray in public places.

**Q: HOW BIG ARE MOSQUES?**

A: In North America, mosques vary in size from tiny storefronts serving a handful of worshippers, to large Islamic centers that can accommodate thousands.

**Q: DO MOSQUES WELCOME VISITORS?**

A: Mosques in North America welcome visitors. Tours can be arranged at most facilities. It is always best to call mosque administrators before arrival. They will want to make sure your visit is enjoyable.

**Q: WHAT ARE THE DISTINCTIVE FEATURES OF A MOSQUE?**

A: The musalla, or prayer hall, in each mosque is oriented in the direction of Mecca, toward which Muslims face during prayers. In North America, Muslim worshippers face northeast. Prayer halls are open and uncluttered to accommodate lines of worshippers who stand and bow in unison. There are no pews or chairs. Members of the congregation sit on the floor.

Because Muslim men and women form separate lines when they stand in prayers, some mosques will have a balcony reserved for the use of women. Other mosques will accommodate men and women in the same prayer hall (musalla), or they may have two separate areas for men and women.

**Q: WHAT ELSE IS IN THE PRAYER AREA?**

A: All mosques have some sort of mihrab, or niche, that indicates which wall of the mosque faces Mecca. The niche is often decorated with Arabic calligraphy. Its curved shape helps reflect the voice of the imam, or prayer leader, back toward the congregation. Many mosques also have a minbar, or pulpit, to the right of the mihrab. During the Friday prayer service, the imam delivers a sermon from the pulpit.

**Q: WHAT ABOUT CHILDREN IN THE PRAYER AREA?**

A: Children will often be present during prayers, whether participating, watching or imitating the movements of their elders. Their presence continues the tradition of the Prophet Muhammad, whose compassion for children was a legacy in itself. The Prophet sometimes carried one of his grandchildren on his shoulder while leading the prayer and was also known to shorten the prayer if he heard a baby cry.

**Q: WHAT MIGHT I HEAR DURING MY VISIT?**

**A:** You might hear Muslims exchanging the Islamic greeting, the Arabic phrase "as-salaam alaykum" ("peace be with you"). Muslims return this greeting by saying, "wa alaykum as-salaam" ("and with you be peace").

You might also hear the call to prayer. The call, or adhan, contains the following phrases (in Arabic):

God is most great, God is most great.  
God is most great, God is most great.  
I bear witness that there is no god but God.  
I bear witness that there is no god but God.  
I bear witness that Muhammad is a messenger of God.  
I bear witness that Muhammad is a messenger of God.  
Hasten to prayer, Hasten to prayer.  
Hasten to success, Hasten to success.  
God is most great, God is most great.  
There is no god but [the One] God.

All Muslim prayers begin with recitation of Al-Fatihah, the opening chapter of the Qur'an:

In the name of God, Most Compassionate, Most Merciful.  
Praise be to God, Lord of the Worlds.  
The Most Compassionate, the Most Merciful.  
Ruler of the Day of Judgment.  
Only You do we worship, Only You we ask for help.  
Show us the straight path.  
The path of those whom You have favored,  
not that of those who earn Your anger, nor those who go astray.

**Q: WHAT ABOUT THE REST OF THE BUILDING?**

**A:** Many mosques have a minaret, the large tower used to issue the call to prayer five times each day. In North America, the minaret is largely decorative. Facilities to perform wudu, or ablutions, can be found in all mosques. Muslims wash their hands, faces and feet before prayers as a way to symbolically purify and prepare themselves to stand before God. Wudu facilities range from washbasins to specially designed areas with built-in benches, floor drains and faucets.

Bookshelves are found in most mosques. They contain works of Islamic philosophy, theology and law, as well as collections of the traditions and sayings of the Prophet Muhammad. Copies of the Quran, Islam's revealed text, are always available to worshippers.

Calligraphy is used to decorate nearly every mosque. Arabic quotations from the Quran invite contemplation of the revealed Word of God. Other common features found in the mosque are clocks or schedules displaying the times of the five daily prayers and large rugs or carpets covering the musalla floor. Many American mosques also have administrative offices.

**Q: IS A MOSQUE USED EXCLUSIVELY FOR PRAYER?**

**A:** Though its main function is as a place of prayer, the mosque plays a variety of roles, especially in North America. Many mosques are associated with Islamic schools and day care centers. Mosques also provide diverse services such as Sunday schools, Arabic classes, Quranic instruction, and youth activities.

Marriages and funerals, potluck dinners during the fasting month of Ramadan, and Eid prayers and carnivals are all to be found in North American mosques. They are also sites for interfaith dialogues and community activism.

Many mosques serve as recreational centers for the Muslim community and may have a gymnasium, game

room and weight equipment, as well as a library and classrooms.

**Q: DO MOSQUES HAVE SPECIAL RULES?**

**A:** Men and women should always dress modestly when visiting a mosque, covering their arms and legs. Examples of inappropriate clothing would be shorts for men and short skirts for women.

Shoes are always left at the entrance to the prayer area so as not to soil the rugs or carpets. Shelves are usually provided to hold shoes. Women may be asked to cover their hair when visiting a mosque. Many mosques have scarves on hand for visitors to borrow, but it is better to bring a head covering in case none are available.

Visitors to mosques should behave as they would when visiting any religious institution, but they should feel free to ask questions about the mosque, its architecture, furnishings, and activities. Muslims are happy to answer questions about their religion.