

Islamic Museum of Australia

All about Ramadan

A new crescent moon marks the start of Ramadan; the month of fasting.

Ramadan is the ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar. It is also the holiest, for good reason. Muslims believe it is when their sacred scripture, the Quran, was first revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Approximately 1.8 billion Muslims around the world observe this rite annually through intense spiritual revival, self-discipline, and festivities. For some Muslims, it's a reminder to "reconnect with Allah and embrace my beautiful faith", and others see it as "a time for social connection; a friendly and peaceful month."

What is fasting and abstinence?

From the sighting of the new moon, Muslims practice fasting and abstinence for 30 days. Between dawn and dusk, no food or drink – including water – is consumed, and intimate relations pause.

"When I fast, it's a way of putting aside my needs and feelings of hunger and fulfilment, and concentrating on other things like body, mind, soul, and faith."

"Fasting means cleansing my soul and my heart."

While these activities are very personal and individual, they are also a powerful symbol of unity. Knowing that there are many Muslims around the world fasting at the same time creates an inspiring sense of solidarity and camaraderie.

Although all Muslims are required to take part in this tradition, there are special exemptions for those who are ill, pregnant or nursing, menstruating, and for young children and the elderly.

What does a typical day during Ramadan look like?

Morning twilight. A time that signals the *suhur*, a family meal shared before dawn. It's the last opportunity to eat and drink before fasting begins.

"I have coffee, more coffee, and a banana."

“I wake up an hour-and-a-half before prayer so that I can take my time with my *suhur* and allow my food to digest. I try to fit in as many food groups and superfoods as I can. Recently, I had a Turkish bread sandwich with chorizo, beetroot, egg, spinach, tomato and avocado, as well as coffee and copious amounts of water.”

After this, the day proceeds as usual. This includes work, school, or other routine duties. Australian Muslims are often found going about their daily business and earning their livelihood.

The thirst and hunger pains are relieved at sunset with *iftar*, a joyful, communal breaking of the fast.

“My family and I break our fast with dates. Then, we drink *khoshaf* (juice); a homemade compote of dried apricots, figs, plums, dates and blanched almonds.”

After *iftar*, Muslims will often go to pray the *maghrib* (sunset) prayer, and then return for a full dinner with family and friends. Special evening prayers called *tarawih* are later performed at mosques.

The last 10 nights of Ramadan are paramount. One of these nights is called the *Laylat al-Qadr* (Night of Power), which the Quran states is a night better than 1,000 months. Muslims attempt to seek the blessings of this night by spending the last 10 nights of Ramadan reflecting, praying, and reciting the Quran.

How does Ramadan help a Muslim to become a better person?

Just like the fasting and abstinence traditions we see in other religions – Ekadasi (Hindu), Yom Kippur (Judaism), and Lent (Christianity) – Ramadan helps to unburden Muslims from daily compulsions, and draw them closer to God and their conscience.

“I think the main thing for me is reinforcing empathy, given that an important part of fasting is understanding what those who are less fortunate go through.”

Despite the restrictions of Ramadan, it is an occasion that is eagerly anticipated by many Muslims. This is because it is an opportunity to experience an enriching, month-long spiritual odyssey which provides valuable lessons about life, endurance, spirituality, and morality: “Reading the Quran isn’t something I do every day outside of Ramadan. It’s nice to have time where I can dedicate myself to my faith.”

The long period of fasting and abstinence followed by nightly prayers teaches patience, self-restraint and discipline. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said it best: “There are people who fast and get nothing from their fast except hunger” (Ibn Majah, 1690). It’s a reminder of the importance of upholding a morally good character and reforming bad habits.

How can non-Muslims be an ally to Muslims during Ramadan?

Sharing this brochure with employers, colleagues, teachers and friends will help them understand the significance of Ramadan, its physical demands, and its time-based obligations.

It is also very important that Muslims are given time to attend *Eid al-Fitr* prayers at the end of Ramadan. *Eid al-Fitr* is as important to Muslims as Christmas and Yom Kippur are to Christians and Jews respectively.

What is Eid al-Fitr?

This is a massive celebration which marks the end of Ramadan. The first step in observing this occasion is paying a prescribed amount of money to charity, known as *Zakat al-Fitr*. Then, Muslims attend Eid prayers in the morning, visit friends and family, enjoy festive meals, and give gifts to children.