

Etiquettes for visiting a Mosque

Visitors are welcome in most mosques throughout the year. Many mosques are not only places of worship, but are used as community and education centers as well.

Most mosques request both male and female visitors to observe a simple, modest dress code such as long sleeves, and either long skirts or trousers. Neither men nor women should wear shorts or sleeveless tops. In most mosques, visiting women are required to cover their hair. In some Mosques scarves are provided for those who come unprepared.

Before entering a prayer area, you will be requested to remove your shoes. There are shelves provided outside the door to place them on, or you may bring a plastic bag to hold them with you until you leave.

Men and women usually pray in separate areas, either in separate rooms or divided by a curtain or screen. Female visitors may be guided to the women's area, while male visitors may be guided to the men's area.

As people enter the mosque, you may hear them greeting each other in Arabic: "Assalamu alaikum" (peace be upon you). If you choose to reply, the return greeting is, "Wa alaikum assalaam" (and upon you be peace).

During prayer, you will see people standing in rows, bowing, and prostrating/sitting on the floor in unison, following the leadership of an Imam. You may also see people making these movements in individual prayer, before or after the congregational prayer.

During prayer, visitors should not talk or laugh loudly. Mobile phones should be switched to silent or turned off. The congregational part of the daily prayer lasts between 5-10 minutes, while the Friday noon prayer is longer as it includes a sermon.

It is disrespectful to walk in front of someone who is praying, whether they are participating in the congregational prayer or praying individually. Visitors will be guided to sit quietly in the back of the room to observe the prayers.

When meeting Muslims for the first time, it is customary to offer a handshake only to those of the same gender. Many Muslims will nod their heads or place their hand over their heart when greeting someone of the opposite gender. It is advisable to wait and see how the person initiates the greeting.

Visitors should refrain from smoking, eating, taking pictures without permission, argumentative behavior, and intimate touching – all of which are frowned upon inside a mosque.

When visiting a mosque, it is not essential to be overly concerned with the details of etiquette. Muslims are usually very welcoming and hospitable people. As long as you attempt to show respect for the people and the faith, small missteps or indiscretions will certainly be excused. We hope that you enjoy your visit, meet new friends, and learn more about Islam and your Muslim neighbors.