

Hajj 2019: A Fact Sheet

What is Hajj?

Hajj is the annual pilgrimage to Makkah in western Saudi Arabia that every Muslims is expected to perform at least once in their lifetime, provided they have physical and financial ability to undertake the spiritual trek.

When does Hajj take place?

Hajj takes place each year in the last month of the Islamic (lunar) calendar, Dhul Hijjah. Hajj officially starts on the evening of the 8th of Dhul Hijjah (Friday August 9th) and pilgrims can conclude the rituals either on the 12th (Tuesday August 13th) or the 13th of the same Islamic month of 1440 Hijri year (2019), corresponding to Wednesday August 14th. Hajj coincides with **Eid Al Adha**, or the Feast of Sacrifice, a major holiday for Muslims. Eid begins on the 10th of Dhul Hijjah, or August 11th (Sunday).

Where is Hajj performed?

Hajj takes place in Makkah, the birthplace of the Prophet Muhammad and Islam's holiest city. Hajj rituals are performed in the Haram (which includes the Great Mosque of Makkah) and the other holy sites such as Mina, Mount Arafat and Muzdalifah.

How many people perform Hajj annually?

In total, more than two million people, mostly from abroad but including Saudis and expatriate residents of the Kingdom, will perform Hajj this year. More than 2.37 million Muslims made the journey to Makkah in 2018, including 1.75 million from abroad. All Muslims are invited to Makkah to participate, but the Saudi government, in order to control crowds, issues a certain number of visas to pilgrims each year. Muslims who have performed Hajj are called Hajjis. Some even add the title as a prefix to their names to denote their accomplishment.

Why do Muslims go on Hajj?

Hajj is one of the five pillars of Islam. It is the annual pilgrimage to Makkah, Islam's holiest city.

Muslims from around the world, regardless of their ethnicity, colour, social status and culture, gather in Makkah to follow the footsteps of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and his followers on their first pilgrimage.

What are the other pillars of Islam?

The other four pillars of Islam are:

- **Shahada** (confession of faith)
- **Salat** (prayer 5 times a day)
- **Zakat** (charity)
- **Sawm** (fasting during the Holy Month of Ramadan)

What are Hajj prayers, rituals and chants?

During the performance of the Hajj rituals, the pilgrims recite aloud the **Talbiyah** that opens with the verse: "*Labbeika Allahumma Labbeik*" meaning "*Here I am, O God, here I am.*"

- Day 1: The pilgrims head from Makkah to the nearby Holy Site of Mina.
- Day 2: It is known as the **Day of Arafat**, which is considered to be the climax of the Hajj when the pilgrims perform **Sa'i**, the ritual of brisk walking between Safa and Marwah hills.

"Hajj is Arafat," is a well-known Hadith of the Prophet Muhammad signifying that standing in Arafat is an essential part of Hajj. Scholars interpret the saying thus: "Whoever misses the standing (in Arafat) has missed Hajj". Once at Mount Arafat, the pilgrims stand in contemplation, one of the most solemn segments of the pilgrimage. They pray and ask God for forgiveness of their sins and listen to clerics delivering sermons.

- Day 3: Pilgrims perform the symbolic 'stoning the devil' at the Holy Site of **Muzdalifah**. During this ritual, they throw seven stones or pebbles at the largest of the three pillars known as **Jamrat Al-Aqabah**. Men then shave their heads or get their hair cut, while women too get a haircut. The slaughter of sacrificial animals also takes place on the third day, which also marks **Eid Al-Adha** (Feast of the Sacrifice).
- Day 4: Pilgrims return at noon to stone all the three pillars at Jamrat Al-Aqabah.
- Day 5: The pilgrims throw pebbles at the pillars for a third time, after which they are free to leave Mina for Makkah before sunset.
- Day 6: Some pilgrims continue the pilgrimage for a **sixth day** on the 13th of Dhul Hijjah (August 14, 2019).

Circumambulating the Kaaba

One of the key rituals is to perform Tawaf, where the pilgrims walk around the Kaaba seven times counter-clockwise.

Tawaf Al Wada, or Farewell Tawaf, is the last rite of Hajj.

Significance of Hajj

Here are some points highlighting the importance of Hajj:

1. **A pillar of Islam:** Hajj is the fifth pillar of Islam. Every adult Muslim is required to perform Hajj at least once in their lifetime if they are physically and financially able to undertake the journey.
2. **Unity of Muslims: It unites Muslims from across the world, regardless of their sect, ethnicity, social and financial status, and nationality.** Pilgrims wear a two-piece white garb, so they appear as equal before Allah.
3. **Purpose:** The purpose of the pilgrimage is to have a renewed sense of purpose in the world.
4. **Humility:** By giving up all markers of social status and pride during Hajj, Muslims feel the importance of life on Earth and hereafter.
5. **Tranquility:** Muslims from all over the world gather at one place in a show of mutual love for each other and bond among themselves.
6. **A fresh start:** Hajj is a chance to wipe clean one's life of sins, errors and shortcomings. The Prophet said: "One who comes to this House for Hajj and avoids all lewdness and sins returns as he was on the day his mother gave birth to him." (Bukhari & Muslim).

History of Hajj:

1. Hajj is associated with the life of Prophet Muhammed (PBUH) but the story behind the ritual of the pilgrimage to Makkah began around 2000 BC when Hager, the wife of the Prophet Abraham, got stranded in the desert with their infant boy Ishmael, who was close to dying of thirst. Desperate to find water, Hager went running back and forth between the hills of Safa and Marwah until the angel Gabriel showed her a fresh-water spring. It is that spring that came to be known as the Well of Zamzam, which exists to this day.
2. Commanded by Allah, Abraham built a monument at the site of the spring. It is known as Kaaba, which lies at the center of the Grand Mosque of Makkah in the Haram. The first official Hajj took place in 630 AD when the Prophet Muhammad led a group of Muslims there to destroy idols worshipped by polytheists and rededicated the site in the name of Allah.

Where do the pilgrims come from?

Pilgrims come from across the globe and representing all ethnicities and nationalities. More than **1.84 million** pilgrims travelled to Makkah from abroad so far to perform the Hajj this year. They will be joined by hundreds of thousands of pilgrims from inside Saudi Arabia, comprising both Saudis and foreign residents of the Kingdom.

Logistics of hosting Hajj

Saudi Arabia has invested billions of riyals to improve facilities for pilgrims since the 1950s. The country is increasingly relying on design engineering and technology to meet security, health and safety needs for the visitors. Numerous apps have been created to assist pilgrims in their journey. The movement of pilgrims between the holy sites, especially on the climactic day, is a major logistical challenge that the Kingdom successfully undertakes each year. During Day of Arafat, the more than two million pilgrims cram into a 33 square-kilometre area.

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