

Welcome to Our Mosque

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.

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 may perform Islam’s obligatory five daily prayers as a congregation. 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 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, which indicates which wall of the mosque faces Mecca. The mihrab 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 minbar.

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, who behaved tenderly toward children. The Prophet sometimes carried one of his grandchildren on his shoulder while leading the prayer. He 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”).