

Frequently Asked Questions from Visitors

– For Mosque Staff/Volunteers



Key Principles for Interaction

When engaging with visitors in the mosque, it helps to remember these principles:

- **Avoid stereotypes** - Muslims are diverse in culture, ethnicity, practice, and opinion, wider society is also diverse. Visitors will be from different cultural backgrounds and with a broad range of worldviews.
- **Don't compare "our best" with "their worst"** – Don't fall into the trap of comparing examples of good practice amongst one group with negative behaviours from another, they don't represent the group as a whole. Comparisons between faiths should also be fair and balanced.
- **Acknowledge diversity** - both within the Muslim community and in wider society (including those of other faiths or no faith).
- **Respectful dialogue** - conversations should not be about converting or denigrating others' religions or beliefs.
- **Focus on common humanity** - shared values such as compassion, justice, and community service are central.

Part 1: Basic Questions

1. **Can a person who is not a Muslim visit a Mosque?**
Yes.
2. **Are children allowed to visit a Mosque?**
Yes, absolutely. We do ask that all children are accompanied by an adult.
3. **Can I visit a mosque when it's not VMM?**
Yes, Mosques are open 7 days a week. It is advisable to inform the Mosque of your visit as they will then be able to share further details as to when the daily 5 congregational prayers are taking place and other activities that may be of interest to you. Visit the Mosque website (if available) or phone them to make contact with mosque management.
4. **Would I need to wear anything special to be in a Mosque?**
While practice varies between mosques, generally women are expected to cover their hair with a scarf or head covering though they may ask to be excused from doing so if they do not wish to cover their hair. (Men are not required to cover their hair).

Both men and women are expected to dress modestly when entering a mosque, out of respect for the sacred space. For example: men should wear long trousers, women long skirts/trousers and cover shoulders. Some mosques may provide scarves or shawls.

This is similar to visiting historic churches, synagogues, or temples, which also often ask visitors to follow modest dress codes.

5. Would I need to take my shoes off at any stage of my visit?

Yes. Shoes may need to be removed on arrival or as you enter the prayer hall (the Mosque will advise on this when you are arranging your visit). Removal of shoes is required to ensure cleanliness is maintained as a number of prayer actions require hand and face being placed on the floor (such as prostration). If you cannot take your shoes off for any reason, plastic overshoes should be available for you.

6. Would I be allowed to eat or drink in the Mosque?

In some Mosques there be designated areas for this (these will be signposted or you will be informed on arrival), but either way cleanliness must be kept at all times so any litter needs to be disposed mindfully.

7. Can I shake hands with the people in the Mosque?

Yes, handshakes between people of the same gender are welcomed. Cross-gender handshaking (male to female, female to male) is generally avoided for religious reasons - not because of any idea of uncleanness, but out of religious etiquette and modesty. If you're unsure, it's best to wait and see how the other person greets you - it may be with a simple nod or placing the hand over the chest. This is considered a sign of deep respect and visitors should not feel offended if a handshake is not offered.

8. What can I expect to see in a Mosque?

It is a place of worship, and in fact the Arabic name is Masjid — meaning a place for prostration. So in essence, you will see people praying (if your visit coincides with a congregational prayer). You will also notice a prayer timetable showing the times of the five daily prayers. Other common features include:

- The mihrab – a small niche in the wall indicating the direction of Makkah (the direction Muslims face when praying).
- The minbar – a raised platform or chair from which the Imam (prayer leader) delivers sermons.
- Open prayer space – usually carpeted, with no pews or chairs, since Muslims pray standing, bowing, and prostrating on the ground.
- Separate areas for men and women – either different sections of the main hall or separate rooms.
- Copies of the Qur'an and Islamic books – often in Arabic and translated into other languages, available for reading.
- Shoes racks and wash facilities – since worshippers remove shoes before entering the prayer hall and often perform ritual washing (wudu) before prayers.

- Community noticeboards – with information about classes, charity projects, events, and interfaith activities.

In addition to worship, many mosques also serve as community hubs. They may host educational classes, family events, interfaith gatherings, youth programmes, charity collections, and support services for the local community.

9. What is the Ka’bah?

The Ka’bah is a cubical shaped building situated in Makkah, Saudi Arabia. Muslims believe it was originally built by Prophet Adam and then rebuilt by Prophets Abraham (Ibrahim pbuh) and Ishmael (Ismail pbuh) as the first place of worship. When praying, Muslims face the direction of the Qiblah (direction of prayer), facing towards the Ka’bah in Makkah.

10. Do Muslims worship the Ka’bah?

No. The Ka’bah simply signifies a convergence for all Muslims to pray towards. The prayer in fact is a direct communication between the Creator (Allah – God) and His creation (us human beings).

11. Would I see any idols or images of, for example, Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him, pbuh)?

No. Muslims do not worship or pray to Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) or to any other person or creature. Mosques do not have any images or statues of deities or prophets.

12. Will I be able to talk inside a Mosque?

Yes, by all means. You are welcome to talk and have conversations whilst in the Mosque, whilst keeping in mind that it is a place of worship and that there may be people praying so keeping the noise down is norm and expected.

13. Could I take photographs during the Mosque visit?

Yes, you are welcome to take photos of the Mosque and its contents. Please ask the Imam or the Mosque Management if you want to take photos of specific objects. Photographs of people in the Mosque can be taken if consent have been given by the individuals in the photo, as normally required in all such cases.

Part 2: Further Questions

14. Why are there mosques that don’t allow women?

Most large, purpose-built mosques are open to both men and women. Some smaller mosques lack resources or have cultural influences that mean women’s spaces are limited. Muslim Council of Britain encourages all mosques to accommodate both men and women.

15. Why do mosques have segregated areas for women?

Men and women line up separately during prayer due to the physical nature of the movements (bowing, prostration). In some mosques, this means separate rows in the same room, divided by a curtain; in others, adjacent rooms or a gallery for women.

16. Are mosques breeding grounds for extremism?

No. Mosques are community centres for worship, education, weddings, funerals, charity, and interfaith work. The core values taught are love, peace, and harmony.

Extremist views are rejected in mosques; research shows radicalisation mostly happens online, not inside mosques.

17. Does your mosque preach hate?

No. The message in mosques is one of peace, compassion, and coexistence.

18. Are Mosques and churches similar?

Both are places of worship, prayer, teaching, and community life.

Unlike Catholic and Protestant churches, there are no pews and the services do not have music. Anglican and Catholic liturgies, with their structured prayers and ritualised worship, are perhaps the closest comparison to Muslim daily prayers.

Muslims also make *du'a* (personal supplications) anywhere, at home, work, or outdoors, in addition to mosque worship.

19. What are the differences between Sunni and Shia Muslims?

The main difference originates from early Islamic history over succession after Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). Sunnis emphasise the community consensus and elected leadership, while Shia Muslims emphasise the family line of the Prophet (pbuh), beginning with his cousin and son-in-law Ali (Allah be pleased with him)

In practice, Sunnis and Shias share the same Qur'an, belief in one God, and core practices (daily prayers, fasting in Ramadan, pilgrimage to Makkah, charity). Differences are often in secondary practices, schools of law, and religious leadership.

In the UK, Muslims from all traditions often work side by side in mosques and communities, focusing on shared values.

20. Are Ahmadis considered Muslim?

Mainstream Muslims (both Sunni and Shia) do not consider the Ahmadiyya community part of Islam, largely due to differences in belief about prophethood. However, Ahmadis identify themselves as Muslims and follow their own teachings.

21. Do mosques have safeguarding policies to ensure children are protected?

Yes, they are required by law, and strongly encouraged by our community, to have robust child protection and safeguarding policies in place.

22. What about grooming gangs?

No, exploitation and abuse are crimes that affect all communities and should never be tolerated. All such crimes should be punished in a court of law. They are not allowed by any faith or religion and such behaviours are strongly condemned in Islam.

It is important not to stigmatise entire communities for the actions of individuals.

23. Does Islam allow child marriage?

In Islam, marriage is based on consent and maturity. Muslim scholars and communities today emphasise that marriage should only occur when individuals are of appropriate age and able to give full, free consent.

Forced or underage marriages are not supported and are illegal in the UK as well as in most Muslim majority countries.

24. What does Islam say about LGBT people?

Islamic teaching does not permit same gender sexual relations.

At the same time, mosques are spaces where everyone should feel welcome and respected as human beings. The focus is on treating all people with dignity and compassion, even where practices may differ.

25. What about domestic abuse?

Domestic abuse is a crime and is forbidden in Islam. The Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) said: "The best of you are those who are best to their women." Some mosques run awareness campaigns and support services for those affected by abuse.

26. What about forced marriage?

Islam requires free consent from both the bride and groom for a valid marriage. Forced marriage is against Islamic teaching and is illegal under UK law.

27. What about FGM (Female Genital Mutilation)?

FGM is a cultural practice, not an Islamic one. It has no basis in the Qur'an and is rejected by the majority of Muslim scholars. It is harmful, illegal in the UK, and strongly condemned.