

## ETIQUETTES OF VISITING A MOSQUE

Muslims would usually be delighted to show others their place of worship. It is the sharing of what they hold very dear to their heart. It is hoped, however, that the visitors observe certain basic rules of conduct.

The term Mosque is commonly used by non-Muslims to define the Muslim place of worship but its correct name is Masjid and this is the term used by Muslims. It would be preferable for non-Muslims to adapt to this correct terminology. Before going to visit a Masjid, it is important that visitors give some thought to how they feel. The Muslims being visited would not want visitors to feel unease. Likewise, they would not want to be made ill at ease themselves by criticisms of their way of worship or of their religion. Questions are always welcomed but negative comparisons with the visitor's own customs are unlikely to promote a friendly relationship.

Whether visiting alone, or as a group, it is important to follow the guidelines for clothing and behaviour so as not to cause offence. For groups, it is important not to talk loudly, thus disturbing anyone who may be at prayer. If any group members have special needs, let the place being visited know in advance so that they can prepare to help. For example, although the custom of the Mosque is to sit on the floor, chairs can often be provided for elderly, infirm or disabled visitors.

### Clothing in a Mosque

Clothing should be modest for both men and women. For men, shorts and sleeveless shirts should be avoided. For women this means an ankle length skirt or trousers, which should not be tight or transparent, together with a long sleeved and high-necked top. A headscarf is usually essential for women. Shoes are removed before going into the prayer hall and put on the racks provided. Clean and presentable socks, stockings, or tights are therefore a good idea. Also avoid clothing which has animate objects printed on it.

### Entering a Mosque

Where women attend the Mosque, men and women usually enter the prayer hall by separate entrances. Visitors may be greeted by the Arabic greeting "Assalamo Alaikum" which means "peace be upon you." The answer, if the visitor would like to use it, is "Wa 'alaikum-as-salam", which means "peace be upon you too". Do not offer, or expect, to shake hands with people of the opposite sex. Before entering the prayer hall or prayer room, Muslim men and women perform wudhu or ablutions if they have not already done so earlier or from home. This is not necessary for the non-Muslim visitor who will not be joining in the prayer.

### Entering a Mosque Prayer Hall

Go quietly into the hall, and sit on the floor, avoiding pointing the feet in the direction of the Qibla (the wall with the niche or alcove in it, indicating the direction of Makkah), unless a medical condition makes this the only possible posture. If visiting as a group during a time when prayers are taking place, sit together toward the rear of the hall.

### Worship in a Mosque

When Salah (Arabic) or Namaz (Persian/Urdu), one of the five daily prayer is in progress, non-Muslim visitors are welcomed to simply observe rather than to join in. If arriving at such a time, find a place near the rear wall and sit quietly observing the prayer. No sacred or blessed food will be offered, nor will visitors be expected to make any physical gesture of respect to holy objects (except removing their shoes and acting respectfully in the prayer hall).