

The Mosque

A mosque is a Muslim place of worship. Use this information sheet to find out about the main features of a mosque.

The Features of a Mosque

The Qur'an gives no requirements for what a mosque should be like. A mosque can therefore be any clean place set aside for prayer. Some mosques are simply converted houses which are owned by a Muslim community. However, where possible, Muslims like to have purpose-built mosques. Though the style of these differs from country to country, they usually have the following features:

- **A minaret** – The first thing people will see when going towards a mosque is its large, ornate tower. This is known as a minaret. These are used by the muezzin to call the people of the community to prayer (see right).
- **A dome** – The second most noticeable feature of most mosques are their often intricately patterned domes. As Islam originates from very hot countries, these have the useful effect of keeping the mosque cool. They also remind Muslims that the whole universe belongs to God.
- **Wash rooms** – These are built to help Muslims perform wudu.
- **A prayer hall** – This is a carpeted space which is kept very clean. This allows large numbers of Muslims to pray together. Some mosques may have two prayer halls, one for each gender.



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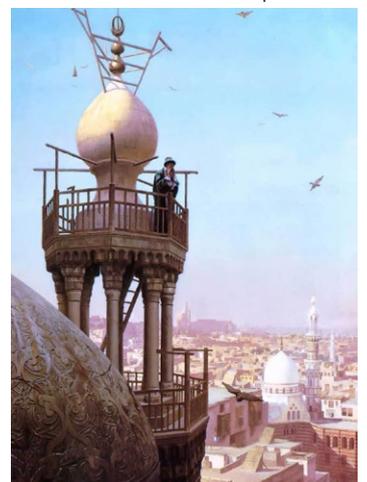
• **A mihrab** – This is a small alcove in the qiblah wall of the mosque that points in the direction of Makkah (see image). Muslims will pray towards the qiblah wall.

• **A minbar** – This is a raised podium which the Imam uses to give a sermon.

People at the Mosque

The Imam is the person who leads prayers. Anyone can lead prayer, but Imams are usually well-qualified men who are able to recite the Qur'an. Imams can be volunteers, but it is common in the UK for it to be a paid position appointed by the local community. Imams will often take on other duties such as managing the mosque, providing counselling, officiating funerals and teaching at the madrasah.

The muezzin is the person responsible for the call to prayer (adhan). This is done at each of the five prayer times during the day. Any Muslim male can act as a muezzin. In the past, the muezzin would have made the call from the top of the minaret to maximize its impact. Nowadays, it is more common to use loudspeakers to amplify his voice.



Jean-Léon Gérôme. A Muezzin Calling from the Top of a Minaret the Faithful to Prayer

Activities at the mosque

Prayer is the main activity that takes place at a mosque. Jummah prayer every Friday is particularly important in the Muslim community and usually attracts the largest crowds.

Besides prayer, mosques can also have spaces for events such as weddings, funerals and the celebration of festivals like Id-ul-Fitr.

Many mosques also have a madrasah or school attached. These teach Arabic lessons so people can learn to read the Qur'an in its original language.



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