



THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA
COLLEGE OF SOCIAL & BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES

Center for
Middle Eastern Studies

Fact Sheet on Ramadan

Ramadan is the ninth month in the Arabic calendar. The Arabs have a lunar calendar that is shorter than our solar calendar so the month of Ramadan comes at a different time every year (sometimes in the summer, sometimes winter, etc.). The holiday is celebrated by more than a billion Muslims worldwide.

Fasting during Ramadan is so important that it is one of the 5 pillars of Islam.

- The purpose of fasting is to practice self-denial and focus one's thoughts on God.

- During the month of Ramadan, Muslims fast during the daylight hours. They don't eat or drink ANYTHING – even water – when the sun is up. (This is especially hard when Ramadan falls during the summer because the days are long, and people get very thirsty.) When the sun goes down, people eat a big meal. And they usually get up very early in the morning, before the sun comes up, to eat breakfast.

- The whole pattern of life changes during Ramadan. People get up early to eat – and then stay up late – so they often rest more during the day. Businesses may be open limited hours during the day and/or may stay open late at night. You could find yourself picking up laundry or shopping at midnight!

- Children don't fast until they are teenagers. If they want to start fasting earlier, like their parents, adults will sometimes make modifications for them. (For example, a Muslim reflected on his first fasting experience as a boy. After one of the midday prayers, his grandmother handed him a glass of water. When he reminded her that he was fasting, she replied, "God told me you needed this.") People with health issues, such as pregnant women or people with diabetics, are not supposed to fast.

- If you are not Muslim but are visiting a Muslim country during Ramadan, you are not expected to fast. (In Oman, a rather conservative country, our fasting guide, who was himself unable to drink anything even though the temperature was 109 degrees, handed us ice-cold bottles of water. When we hesitated to drink in front of him, he said, "Drink! You are not Muslim and don't need to fast. It doesn't bother me.") However, even a non-Muslim should never eat or drink publicly during the daylight hours of Ramadan. (It would be rude!) You just eat or drink in your room or in a special room in a restaurant or in a bus with the curtains drawn.

- Ramadan ends with the sighting of the new crescent moon, which marks the end of the month of fasting. There is a big holiday, Eid al-Fitr, which marks the end of the fast. People get

dressed up in their best clothes and celebrate with friends and relatives. There is a lot of feasting – in contrast to a month of not eating regularly.

For More Information on Ramadan:

Sabur, Rozina. “Ramadan 202: Fasting, Prayer and How Muslims Celebrate the Revelation of the Koran.” *The Telegraph*. 6 April 2020. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/0/ramadan-2020-fasting-prayer-muslims-celebrate-revelation-koran/>

“Ramadan.” *Calendarlabs.com*. <https://www.calendarlabs.com/holidays/islam/ramadan.php>

”Ramadan Information Sheet.” *ING*. <https://ing.org/ramadan-information-sheet/>

“What is Ramadan?” *BBC News*. 5 May 2019. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/23286976>

“Ramadan Facts and Information.” *National Geographic*.
<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/culture/holidays/reference/ramadan/>

“30 Children’s Activities for Ramadan.” *Good Tree Montessori Homeschool*.
<https://goodtreemontessori.wordpress.com/2008/08/22/30-childrens-activities-for-ramadan/>