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# What Muslims Do on Hajj, and Why

By DIAA HADID SEPT. 8, 2016



Muslim worshippers at the Grand Mosque in Mecca, Saudi Arabia, in July last year. The black cube at the center is known as the Kaaba. Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

JIDDA, Saudi Arabia — It is incumbent upon every able-bodied Muslim who can afford to do so to travel to Mecca, [Saudi Arabia](#), Islam's holiest site, at least once in his or her lifetime. The annual pilgrimage is known as [the hajj](#), and it is one of the five pillars of Islam, prescribed in the Quran:

And proclaim to mankind the hajj. They will come to you on foot, on very lean camel, they will come from every deep and distant mountain highway.

This year, 1437 according to the Islamic calendar, I am making my first hajj. I will be joining two million Muslims from around the world — though the writer [Abu Muneer Ismail Davids](#) joked that it may feel more like 10 million people. During the hajj, we must not swear, cut our hair or nails, have sex or crush a plant.

I will be chronicling my journey for The New York Times and on [social media](#). To better follow along, here's a glossary of terms, names and places that help explain the rites and rituals Muslims will participate in during the six days of the hajj, which begins

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will participate in during the six days of the hajj, which begins Saturday.

## Prophets and Forebears

**Ibrahim**, the prophet who, following God's commandment, left his wife, Hajar, and their son Ismail in the Arabian desert. (I am using the Islamic spellings for these figures, who also appear in the Judeo-Christian Bible as Abraham, Hagar and Ishmael.) It is with Ibrahim that one of the stories of the origin of Islam begins. For Muslims, like Jews, he is considered a patriarch of our faith.



### Postcards From the Hajj

Our correspondent Dina Hadid is one of millions of Muslims making the pilgrimage to Mecca

**Hajar** was Ibrahim's second wife. After she and Ismail were left in the desert, Hajar ran seven times between two hills, **Safa** and **Marwa**, searching for water for her thirsty son. Ismail is said to have kicked his leg in the sand, causing water to trickle out. This became the spring of **Zamzam**, from which we'll drink during the hajj.

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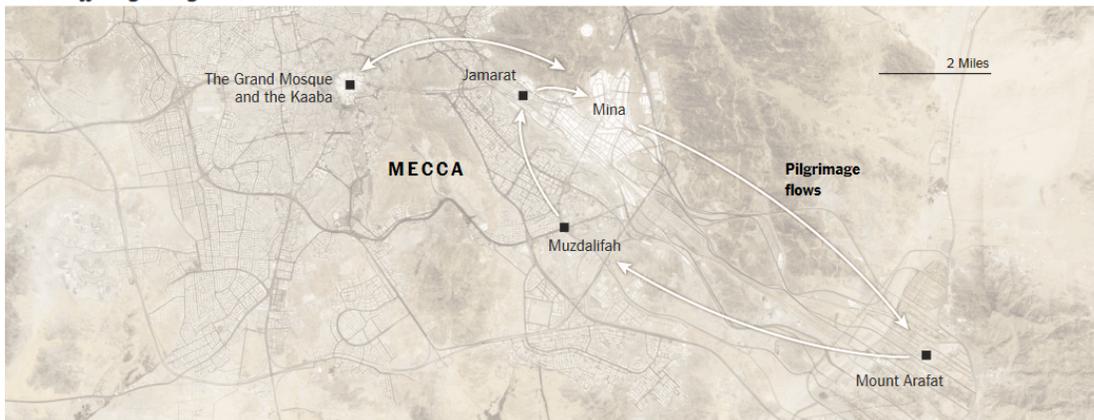
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**Ismail** is considered the ancestor of the Arabs. He was reunited with his father after many years when Ibrahim returned to the desert. Ismail is said to have helped his father build a temple, called the **Kaaba**, or cube, to honor his one God.

To test Ibrahim's faith, God commanded him to sacrifice Ismail. Three times the devil tried to tempt Ibrahim to abandon his mission, and each time Ibrahim hurled seven stones at the devil to ward him off. We'll re-enact the stone throwing during the hajj.

## The Hajj Pilgrimage Sites



By The New York Times

As the Quranic story goes, God replaced Ismail with a ram, which was slaughtered instead.

**Muhammad**, the prophet of Islam, made the hajj with his followers and wives in 632 A.D. Muslim pilgrims imitate what the Prophet Muhammad did on his journey, which is also called the "farewell pilgrimage"

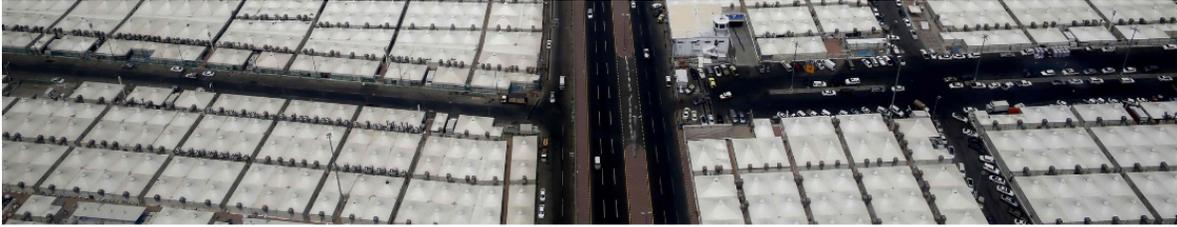
## Holy Sites



Pilgrims touching the Kaaba, a temple which Ismail is said to have helped build.  
Nariman El-Mofty/Associated Press

**The Kaaba**, which is also known as Bait Allah, or the House of Allah, is in the Grand Mosque of Mecca. It houses el-hajar al-aswad, or black stone, which is believed to have descended from paradise whiter than the color of milk, but was later stained by the sins of humans. At the start of the hajj, pilgrims dressed in white circle the Kaaba seven times, trying to kiss the black stone. This is one of the most iconic images of the hajj and is known as the **tawaf**.





An enormous tent city in Mina houses many pilgrims.  
Ahmad Charabi/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

**Safa and Marwa**, the two hills where Hajar searched for water, are now part of the Grand Mosque that includes the Kaaba. On the first day of the hajj, pilgrims will honor Hajar by walking seven times between the sites of the two hills, though our journey will be more comfortable than her trek: the marble-tiled walkways between Safa and Marwa are air-conditioned. Pilgrims will also drink water from the spring of Zamzam from taps installed in the mosque and sleep in an enormous tent city built three miles east of Mecca in **Mina**, where Ibrahim was to have sacrificed Ismail.



Men praying at the Mount of Arafat during the 2006 hajj. Muhammed Muheisen/Associated Press

**Mount of Arafat**, southeast of Mina, is where Muhammad delivered his final sermon on the first Muslim hajj, and it is the commemoration of this event on the ninth day of the Islamic month of Dhul-Hijjah — the Day of Arafat — that is the indispensable part of the hajj. All two million pilgrims are to visit Arafat on the second day of the hajj, before traveling to **Muzdalifah**, on the way to Mina, to pray and sleep.





Muslims entering the meqat, the area in and around Mecca that contains the holy sites, are required to announce their intention to participate in the pilgrimage.

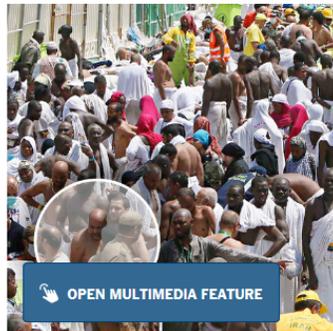
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**Meqat** is the entire area in and around Mecca that includes the holy sites of the hajj. Muslims entering the meqat are required to announce their intention to participate in the pilgrimage. Flights carrying Muslims to Saudi Arabia for the hajj announce when the plane is approaching the meqat so that passengers can make their intentions known. Men chant loudly, "Here I am, oh Lord, here I am," and women repeat this phrase audibly, but in a low voice.

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## Rites and Rituals





During the hajj, pilgrims throw stones at three pillars near Jamarat Bridge in a ritual that commemorates Ibrahim fending off temptation from the devil.  
Mohammed Al-Shaikh/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

**Jamarat** is a ritual that commemorates Ibrahim fending off temptation from the devil. On the third day of the hajj, pilgrims throw stones at three pillars near Jamarat Bridge that are meant to symbolize the devil's efforts to derail Ibrahim on his way to Mina to sacrifice Ismail. The ritual stoning is repeated daily for three days before pilgrims return to Mecca to circle the Kaaba one last time. Jamarat is a notorious choke point for hajj crowds. It was during the Jamarat ritual last year that hundreds, maybe thousands, of pilgrims [died in a crush of people](#).



A cattle market was set up for the Muslim holiday of Eid al-Adha, in Islamabad, Pakistan, this week. B.K. Bangash/Associated Press

**Hadi** is the ritualistic slaughter of a sheep, cow, goat or camel to commemorate Ibrahim's sacrifice of the ram. Muslims are

...forbidden from slaughtering animals during the hajj until after the Day of Arafat, when it their duty to do so. Modern pilgrims usually appoint a slaughterhouse near Mecca to do this for them.



Once the hajj is over, men are expected to shave their heads, and women snip off a piece of hair. Mohammed Al-Shalkh/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

**Ihram** is the traditional dress that men wear during the hajj and consists of two sheets of white fabric. Women dress modestly, and must cover their hair and body. Once the hajj is over, men are expected to shave their heads, and women are expected to snip a piece of hair.

**Correction: September 8, 2016**

*An earlier version of this article misstated the year 2016 in the Islamic calendar. It is 1437, not 1436.*

**Correction: September 9, 2016**

*An earlier version of this article misidentified the religious text that says God replaced Ismail on the sacrificial altar with a ram. That story is from the Quran, not the Bible. (In the Bible, Abraham is prepared to sacrifice another son, Isaac.)*

**Correction: September 13, 2016**

*An earlier version of this article misstated the day of the Islamic month of Dhul-Hijjah that the Day of Arafat falls on. It is the ninth day of Dhul-Hijjah, not the eighth.*

Diaa Hadid, a correspondent in The Times' Jerusalem bureau, will be chronicling her pilgrimage to Mecca over the next week. Follow her on [Instagram](#), [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#).

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