



YOUR GUIDE TO UNDERSTANDING  
**RAMADAN**  
**2024**



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# WHAT IS RAMADAN?

Ramadan (Arabic: رمضان) is the ninth and most important month in the Islamic lunar calendar. It commemorates the time when the Quran (the Islamic sacred book) was first revealed to the Prophet Muhammad. Muslims believe, during this month, God revealed the first verses of the Quran on a night known as "The Night of Power" (or Laylat al-Qadr in Arabic).

During Ramadan, Muslims fast from dawn to sunset for approximately 30 days. The dates change each year depending on the sighting of a New Moon. Ramadan begins with the sighting of the Newcrescent Moon (called Hilal) and lasts either 29 or 30 days depending on the moon cycle. **In Bahrain, the moon-sighting committee will convene at the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (SCIA) headquarters a day before and announce the start of Ramadan through the Bahrain News Agency (BNA) and other official social media channels.**

# WHEN IS RAMADAN?

**Ramadan 2024 in Bahrain is likely to begin in the evening of Sunday, March 10 (Fasting begins on March 11) and end in the evening of Wednesday, April 10. Dates may vary depending on moon sighting.**

# WHAT IS FASTING?

Fasting during Ramadan means abstinence from all food, drink, chewing gum and smoking from dawn to sunset. Fasting includes abstaining from immoral acts and behaviors, staying away from foul words and bad gestures.

**Fasting start time in Bahrain: ~04:31am (at dawn with the morning call to prayer)**

**Iftar (breaking the fast): ~05:44pm**

<https://www.islamicfinder.org/ramadan-calendar/40559060/bahrain-islands-ramadan-calendar/>

# WHY MUSLIMS FAST?

Islam is based on five core principles (referred to as the five pillars of Islam); believing in these principles is key to being identified as a person of the Islamic faith. Fasting is one of the pillars and is mandatory for all able Muslims. It is considered a spiritual act for purification, reflection and devotion and a way to cultivate concern for those less fortunate. While the emphasis of Ramadan is on abstinence from food and drink, it is also meant to be a time of spiritual discipline and deep contemplation of the relationship with God. Increased prayer, charitable work and intense study of the Quran are all part of Ramadan.

# DO NON-MUSLIMS HAVE TO FAST?

Non-Muslims do not have to fast in Ramadan. However, in public, they must abstain from eating, drinking, smoking and chewing gum. (Please refer to the "How to behave during Ramadan" section to further understand host nation laws.)

# WHAT TO EXPECT DURING RAMADAN IN BAHRAIN?

As expats living in a Muslim country, it is important to know what to expect during Ramadan. Here are some of the things that you may notice during this period:

- Most businesses and government offices will have shorter operating hours (around 8am to 2pm).
- Some shops will be closed during the day, but will open at night for longer hours (past midnight).
- Cafes and restaurants will be closed during the day and will open only for Iftar or remain open later.
- Restaurants will not serve alcohol. Most restaurants during this month will be closed, and instead, there will be Ramadan tents, restaurants in hotels and cafes open from Iftar time till late hours at night. There are some exceptions for restaurants that serve expats so check your local guide for open restaurants or food outlets during the day in hotels and sport clubs. Food delivery services will also operate normally.
- Supermarkets remain open and operate normally during Ramadan.

If you have any local or Muslim friends, expect them to be fasting and dress more conservatively or even in traditional outfits. You will notice a shift in local attire as females will dress more conservatively switching to "abayas" and "jalabiyas" and sometimes even covering their hair during this month. Men will wear the traditional "thoub" more often. You will also notice increased activity in mosques with their speakers on during prayers. Additionally, you may find increased charitable work and volunteers at many traffic lights giving away food during "iftar."

## WHAT AND WHEN IS IFTAR?

Iftar, also called "futoor" in Bahrain, is when Muslims get to break their fast as the sun sets. The time of Iftar is with the "maghreb adhan" (sunset call to prayer). You will know it is Iftar time when you hear the call to prayer or when you hear the cannon "midfa al Iftar," meaning "cannon for breaking the fast." This is an ancient tradition that still continues in Arab countries. Minutes before the maghreb adhan, a cannon will fire a single shot to notify people the time of Iftar in Ramadan.

Following iftar is the "Ghabga," translated as 'gathering' in Arabic and is a Ramadan tradition of socializing and getting together for a late-night meal served after 9 p.m.

Three cannons are located in Bahrain, which are usually fired daily at the Riffa Fort, Arad Fort and near The Avenues Mall.

Many hotels will host buffets, traditional food and Arabesque-themed Ramadan tents with hanging lamps and live Oud (traditional Middle Eastern instrument) and music playing where both Muslims and non-Muslims can gather for memorable Iftars and Ghabga outings.

Iftar time: ~05:44 p.m. - ~08:00 p.m.

Ghabga time: ~09:00pm - ~02:00am

# HOW TO BEHAVE DURING RAMADAN?

Ramadan is a solemn period of fasting, prayer, and reflection. Muslims observe it with great humility and diligence, and it is important to know how to behave during this time. Here are some guidelines on what to do during this month:

- Abstain from consuming food/water/smoking/chewing gum during the fasting period in public view. This includes your car, balcony or anywhere where you can be seen publicly. This is considered extremely offensive for Muslims and under articles 309 and 310 of Bahrain's Penal Code (insulting a recognised religious community, its rituals, or religious symbols) is a criminal act with a term of imprisonment of up to one year or a fine not exceeding 100 Bahraini dinars (\$265). The law applies to Muslims and non-Muslims, all residents and citizens of Bahrain, as well as visitors.

Please also note that Article 309 criminalizes speaking loudly in addition to consumption of food in public, so speaking loudly can also attract imprisonment or a hefty fine.

If you forget and you are seen eating or drinking, don't panic, just apologize immediately and put the food away. If an individual wants to eat or drink in daylight hours during Ramadan it must be done indoors and out of sight.

- Refrain from listening to music loudly during fasting hours in Ramadan, as it may offend those who are fasting. Play music on your headphones so that it is not audible to those around you. Try to avoid playing loud music on balconies or within your house. Music is still played in cafes and Ramadan tents in the evening.
- Public displays of affection and use of offensive gestures or words during Ramadan are prohibited, although we all know that this applies at all times, not only during Ramadan.
- Although there is no official communication or host nation rules about dress codes it is strongly recommended that both men and women dress conservatively during the month out of respect for the local culture and to avoid offending those fasting. This is especially important in more conservative areas outside Juffair.

Individuals can wear shorts and short-sleeved shirts during Ramadan but are advised to refrain (out of respect for the culture) from wearing revealing or tight clothing (shorts or skirts above the knees, deep necks showing cleavage) and at the very least ensure shoulders and knees are well covered. Females DO NOT need to cover their head or wear an abaya (A loose over-garment or robe-like dress, worn by some women in parts of the Muslim world). For additional questions regarding appropriate attire while stationed in Bahrain, contact your chain of command.

# RAMADAN KEY TERMS

SIYAM or SAWM: Fasting

IFTAR: Breaking the fast

GHABGA: Translated as “gathering” in Arabic and is a Ramadan tradition. It usually serves as a late-night meal after 9 p.m. and may go until 2 a.m. Culturally, it is more than just a meal and is usually a gathering on the weekends for family and friends.

SUHOOR: Known as the pre-dawn meal, suhoor is a significant element for Muslims during Ramadan. It is the last meal before the sun rises and the day of fasting begins. This meal is very important to prevent feeling weak or dehydrated.

IMSAK: Refers to a period of time, about ten minutes before the dawn prayer, fajr, begins. This is when some worshippers begin their fast. It is not mandatory, and some Muslims prefer to wait until the fajr call to prayer.

Laylat-Al-Qadr: Translated as “night of power” commemorates the night on which God first revealed the Quran to the Prophet Mohammad through the angel Gabriel. It is believed to have taken place on one of the final ten nights of Ramadan in 610 CE, though the exact night is unclear. Expect to hear a lot of praying through mosque speakers during the last ten nights of Ramadan.

MAJLIS: Translated as “council” or “assembly” has been an essential part of social and political life in the Arab world. It serves as a forum for the community to discuss issues and to raise important matters with elders and Sheikhs. During Ramadan, it is normal for people to have open Majlises in their houses to celebrate tradition from a modern perspective.

EID: Translated as “festival” or “feast” marks the end of a fast or fasting period.

# WHAT IS EID? WHY ARE THERE TWO?

“Eid” means celebration or festival. Eid Al-Fitr and Eid Al-Adha are the main two annual Islamic celebrations. Eid al-Fitr translates as the “festival of breaking the fast” and happens immediately after Ramadan. In Eid al-Fitr, families visit each other and gather in celebration and the elders in the family give the children money “ediyia.” The same way gifts are exchanged during Christmas, eidiya is given to kids to celebrate and go buy gifts and toys.

Eid al-Adha is the second celebration in the year and translates as the “festival of sacrifice.” Traditionally during this time, animals like sheep and goats are slaughtered. It is approximately 70 days after the end of Ramadan, and marks the end of the Hajj, the annual pilgrimage to Mecca (another pillar of Islam). Traditionally, one third of the meat is kept for the family, another third is given to friends and relatives, and the last third is given to the less fortunate.

Both Eids are national public holidays that typically last three days (often longer for some sectors), so expect government departments, shops and businesses to be closed.

## WHEN IS EID AL FITR?

**Eid al-Fitr 2024 is expected to begin in the evening of Wednesday, April 10 (first day of Eid April 11) and ends in the evening of Friday, April 12. Dates are determined by moon sighting announced on the same night.**

## CAN NON-MUSLIMS GET INVOLVED?

Definitely, here are a few ways you can get involved!

- Exchange Ramadan greetings, especially at the beginning of the month. Use greetings such as “Ramadan Kareem” and “Ramadan Mubarak” which both indicate blessings and prosperity for the recipient. The word “Kareem” in the phrase “Ramadan Kareem” is the equivalent to “generous.” The expression means “Wish you a generous Ramadan.” “Mubarak” in the phrase “Ramadan Mubarak” means “blessed.”
- Charity is one of the five pillars of Islam and is even more significant during Ramadan. Non-Muslims can also give during Ramadan. There are plenty of charitable initiatives to contribute to, including Ramadan camps, iftar camps, care packages and more.
- Fast with Muslim colleagues and break the fast together. Join your friends in Iftars or Ghabgas or even a late night Suhoor. This will be a great opportunity for you to learn more about Muslim culture and tradition.
- Partake in the traditional Ramadan dishes via food delivery or cook Iftar with your household.

# USEFUL PHRASES

Impress your Muslim colleagues and friends with a few of these (reasonably) easy to use phrases during Ramadan:

Ramadan Mubarak = Blessed Ramadan  
Ramadan Kareem = Happy / generous Ramadan  
Iftar shahy = Have a good Iftar  
Mubarak aleik al shahr = May you get the blessings of the month  
Kil aam wa int be kheir = May each year pass and you be well

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