

Ramadan is the Muslim holy month. So, what goes on during Ramadan and what does it mean? Young Muslims from the UK tell us why Ramadan is important to them.

Ramadan in the UK

There are around 1.5 million Muslims in Britain, making Islam the second biggest religion in the country. London alone has Muslims who originate from over 30 different countries. During the month of Ramadan, many Muslims in Britain join Muslims all over the world in observing a month of fasting during daylight hours.

What do people do?

Fasting Muslims do not eat or drink anything between dawn and sunset. They also give up bad habits, and try to be model human beings for the whole month of Ramadan. Many people give money to charity during Ramadan. For many, Ramadan is a chance to have more time to think and reflect. It is also a time of prayer and people coming together, especially to share Iftar, the evening meal just after sunset.

‘Ramadan is about praying, family time and thinking about and giving to people less fortunate.’
Izzy, aged 19

‘Ramadan is a time for me to reflect and appreciate what I have.’
Amz, aged 18

‘Ramadan is about asking for forgiveness, and all that lovely food your mum makes, lol!!!’
16-year-old, anonymous

When is it?

Ramadan is the ninth month of the Islamic calendar, and the start date is based on the appearance of the crescent moon. As the Islamic calendar is slightly shorter than the Western calendar, Ramadan comes earlier and earlier every year.

The length of daily fasting also changes. When Ramadan falls in the British summertime, the hours of fasting are quite long because Britain is far north of the equator and has around 16 hours of daylight in summer. In winter, though, daylight hours are much shorter. There are other challenges too.

‘In the school holidays it’s harder. It’s actually easier when you’ve got school. You’re busy so you don’t think about eating and drinking as much.’
Sami, aged 17

Does everyone have to do it?

Children, pregnant women and people who are sick are not expected to fast. Young people normally start fasting when they are teenagers. In special cases, you can make up the days of fasting at a later date. For example, if you are pregnant or on a tiring journey during Ramadan, you can do the fast later, when your circumstances are different.

Ramadan and sport

If Ramadan coincides with a major sporting event, Muslim athletes have to face competing without food and liquids. In the London Olympics there were around 3,000 Muslim athletes. Many of them observed the fast strictly, while others decided to delay the fast until a later date. Mo Farah, who became double Olympic champion, made the difficult decision to make up the days of fasting after the event. For the athletes who were fasting, the Olympic Village dining room was open 24 hours a day and stocked with special Ramadan foods such as dates, Halal beef and Halal chicken.