

What is Eid al-Fitr?

by Yusef Vanderkimpen¹



At the end of the fasting month Ramadan, Muslims around the world will celebrate Eid al-Fitr. Eid al-Fitr is celebrated on the first day of the Shawwal month² and Muslims across the globe pay their respect to Allah for bestowing them with strength and endurance during the month-long fasting period called Ramadan or Ramzan.

During the month of Ramadan, Muslims fast from sunup to sundown to honor the month that the Quran was revealed to the Prophet Mohammed. Eid al-Fitr celebrates the end of the month—and the end of the fasting. The prolonged fasting is not just about food—it also includes abstaining from taking medications, drinking any liquids (including water), smoking, and having sex. (See my article Ramadan³)

"Eid al-Fitr" is a literal translation of the event that is being celebrated: "Festival of the Breaking of the Fast," or "the Feast of Fast-Breaking." It is forbidden to fast on the Day of Eid.

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² Eid also marks the beginning of the month of Shawwal, which starts with a feast to end the period of the month-long fasting. Some Muslims, however, do observe six days of fasting during Shawwal (the day after Eid) as this period is considered equivalent to fasting all year round.

³ <https://yvanderkimpen.com/2020/04/22/questions-and-answers-about-the-fast-in-ramadan-for-dummies/>

Eid al-Fitr does not begin until the new moon appears in the sky (although traditionally, and still today for many Muslims, it does not begin until the barest sliver of a waxing crescent moon is seen). Technically, that means that across the world, Eid al-Fitr can start at different times and with one day of difference, depending on location. To make it more uniform, some Muslims celebrate Eid when the new moon appears over Mecca instead of their own locations.

The festival traditionally lasts for three days, but depending on how it falls on the calendar, the parties and festivities could last much longer. For example, if the three days fall mid-week, Muslims will likely still be celebrating over the weekend.

The first day of the feast there is a special morning prayer and before leaving to perform this morning prayers, Muslims wake up to cleanse their bodies in a ritual called "ghusl." Then, like getting new clothes for Easter Sunday, Muslims often don something new or grab their finest threads and decorate their hands with elaborate henna patterns. Some people wear traditional dress, while others opt for contemporary clothing. After getting dressed and ready for the day, Muslims gather for prayers in mosques or outdoor locations. Afterward, they may visit the graves of loved ones to pray and clean the gravesites.

Muslims are also encouraged to eat something sweet, usually dates, before heading to the prayer.

As ritual dictates praise Allah in a loud voice while going to the Eid prayer: Allāhu Akbar, Allāhu Akbar, Allāhu Akbar. Lā ilāha illā l-Lāh wal-Lāhu akbar, Allahu akbar walil-Lāhi l-ḥamd. Recitation ceases when they get to the place of Eid or once the Imam commences activities.

No call to prayer is given for this Eid prayer, and it consists of only two units of prayer with a variable amount of Takbirs⁴ and other prayer elements depending on the branch of Islam observed. The Eid prayer is followed by the sermon and then a supplication asking for Allah's forgiveness, mercy, peace and blessings for all living beings across the world. The sermon also instructs Muslims as to the performance of rituals of Eid, such as the zakaat. As an obligatory act of charity, money is paid to the poor and the needy (Arabic: Zakaat-ul-fitr) before performing the 'Eid prayer.

At the end of the sermon following the Eid prayer, Muslims wish each other "Eid Mubarak," which means "Have a blessed Eid!" Eid greetings also vary depending on the country and language.

In Indonesia, Eid is called Lebaran, so Indonesians would say "Selamat Lebaran", which means Happy Eid. Other variations are "Mutlu Bayramlar" in Turkish and "Barka da Sallah" in Hausa, a Nigerian language.

⁴ Allahu akbar, Allahu akbar, Allahu akbar

After a month of sacrifice, Eid al-Fitr is a time of abundance—and not just abundant food. Gifts are often given, especially to children. These gifts of money, accessories, home goods, or flower are called "Eidi."

It is common for Muslim-majority nations to decorate their streets with festive lights and hold carnivals to commemorate the end of the holy month.

Each country has traditional desserts and sweets that are prepared before Eid or on the morning of the first day. These foods range from special biscuits and bread to cakes and puddings.

Eid al-Fitr is also the time to share sweets with his neighbors whether they are Muslim or not.

I wish that if you have never attended an Eid you will certainly be able to do it some day.

