

**LIVING IN  
A MUSLIM  
COUNTRY**

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Registered Charity No. 204802



## LIVING IN A MUSLIM COUNTRY

*About Corona Worldwide*—Formerly the Women’s Corona Society, Corona Worldwide evolved to promote knowledge and understanding of peoples and cultures of different parts of the world, and to help and advise men and women going to live and work overseas. Over the last 65 years, the Society has developed a valuable network of members, branches and contacts, and through these lines of communication, is able to give practical, current advice and assistance: in many countries it can also provide an introduction to one of its own branches or a branch of a like-minded organisation. Corona offers, at very reasonable cost, telephone or email briefings for countries where we have contacts. These normally cover advice on health, the home, local customs, and all the day-to-day information needed to cope with living in a different country.

For more information about Corona Worldwide, and how to join the Society, contact Headquarters at the address below, or visit our website.

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To someone brought up in Western culture, moving to a Muslim country will seem very different. In the West we are able to choose to what degree our faith influences our lives. We are also able to choose to have no faith at all. In contrast, the Islamic faith is a complete way of life. However, just like other faiths, there are many sects within Islam; some are very strict, others less so. In some countries, the old cultural traditions are incorporated into the Faith, especially the rôle of the woman within the family and society. This means that not only does Islam differ from country to country, but it can also be interpreted differently within a country.

Muslims believe that God, or Allah, transmitted his law to mankind by sending prophets to reveal his word. Among the prophets are Noah, Abraham, Moses and Jesus. The prophet Mohammed was born in 570AD—and is known as ‘The Prophet’, and he brought the final command of God. The holy book called the Qu’ran, is sacred to every Muslim. It is God’s word, as revealed to the Prophet Mohammed. It is also the basis for Shariah Law, which guides the life of all Muslims. There are over 900 million followers of Islam (an Arabic word meaning ‘Submission to God’). They have the same basic beliefs which require them to keep certain rules of religious observance. The obligatory practices include:

- 1. The testimony that there is no God but Allah and that Mohammed is his prophet*
- 2. Prayers are to be said five times a day; worshippers must pray on a clean place or mat, and ablutions are necessary beforehand*
- 3. Fasting during the month of Ramadan, when no food, drink or tobacco etc. is taken between dawn and dusk. Ramadan is a lunar month, which falls eleven days earlier each year. When it falls in the heat of summer, it is an endurance test when Muslims exert their spiritual will against their basic instincts, and become more appreciative of the life Allah has offered them, and more aware of the hunger and suffering of the poor.*

4. *Almsgiving and paying a percentage of income to charity annually (Zakat)*

5. *If one can afford it, the pilgrimage to Mecca (the Haj), which should be striven for by every Muslim. The sacred mosque in Mecca houses the Ka'aba, which symbolises the covenant between man and Allah. Mecca is forbidden to non-Muslims but for every Muslim it offers purification of man and repentance.*

Muslims believe in the Day of Judgement and life after death. Stealing, murder, adultery and blasphemy are among the forbidden acts. The religious leaders are called 'Imam' and 'Sheikh' though this last title is usually given to those learned in the books of the Qu'ran rather than to those performing a priestly office. In some countries there are also Qadis, who try religious cases in the courts. Two of the main sects of Islam are Sunni and Shi'ite; of these Sunni is the larger. Within the Sunni sect there are sub-sects, and in Saudi Arabia the main sect is Wahabism, and it is very conservative. The Shi'ites, though smaller, are a very strict sect, and observe a month of mourning called Muharram which commemorates the death of Imam Hussein, who was the grandson of the Prophet and the son of Imam Ali. The massacre took place in the 7th century and is commemorated by processions and public manifestations of mourning.

Within your household, respect must always be shown for your staff, colleagues, visitors and friends. When they are in your home, they should be offered the opportunity to carry out the prescribed ablutions and daily prayers. Remember that alcohol, pork and shellfish, are forbidden to Muslims and should not be offered. Your staff might not want to prepare them either, though it may not bother others. Therefore, it is best to enquire before asking them to do it. During Ramadan, Muslims are not allowed to eat, drink or smoke between dawn and dusk. Before dawn each day, they have a meal called seri, and break the fast each evening with iftah. You may be invited to break the fast with your Muslim friends. Muslims are friendly, and like to share the experience of Islam with their friends.

There are certain things that should be remembered when you are out and about. The dress code for women is different in the different countries, but it is necessary for women to dress modestly when in a Muslim country. Remember to cover your arms and legs. No figure-

hugging outfits, low-cut tops and shorts. This will apply in your own home to a degree, as appearing to dress immodestly will influence your staff's opinion of you. In some countries, like Saudi Arabia, you will be advised to wear the abaya. In others, just dressing with thought for their values will do.

You should not enter a mosque unless invited, and remember that there are areas within a mosque that women do not go. If you do get invited, remember to dress appropriately, and to take off your shoes. Whoever is showing you around will guide you on what to do.

Taking photographs can be a problem. It is wise to ask permission before you do, because it can cause offence. In some areas it is considered unlucky to have your photo taken.

In western culture, shaking hands is done without thought. It is a polite and normal way to greet people. In Muslim countries this is not the case. As a westerner, man or woman, do not proffer your hand to be shaken unless the other person has proffered their hand first. It will cause embarrassment on both sides when the hand is not taken, and it is left extended in the air! Also, do not enquire which sect of Islam a person is from. They will tell you if they want to.

If you remember that you are a guest in an Islamic country, and accept the restrictions on your Western way of life, you will enjoy your stay, and learn a lot while you are there. Do not judge with a Western viewpoint, or try to proselytise. It will not be welcome, and can cause you trouble. Just enjoy your stay, and be as polite and friendly as your Muslim neighbours. You will learn a lot, and have a rewarding stay.

Prepared by members of Corona Worldwide who have themselves lived in Muslim countries, or countries where there is a strong Muslim community