

# Makkah – The World’s Holiest City

By Kimberly Ben  
Mar 15, 2006  
Viewed : 331x

**Most people know it as the Islamic world’s holiest city, where millions of Muslims gather each year for Hajj, the fifth pillar of Islam.**

While some have waited a lifetime to get there, others have visited so often that returning is like reuniting with a dear friend. The spiritual capital of Islam, *Makkah al-Mukarramah* (Makkah, the Honored) is both the birthplace of the Prophet Muhammed, peace be upon him, as well as home to Al-Masjid Al-Haram (the Sacred Mosque).



[E-mail this article](#)



[Post a comment](#)



[Print this article](#)

Located in the Valley of Abraham in the Hijaz region of Saudi Arabia, Makkah is 909 feet above sea level and surrounded by mountains on three sides. Its rugged, rocky granite terrain is evidence of the dry climate, accentuated by occasional sandstorms.

Although summers are hot, with temperatures averaging 92°F, winters are often up to thirty degrees cooler. Only about fifty miles from the Red Sea port of Jeddah, there are three main entrances to the holy city of Makkah: Al-Mu'allat, Al-Musfala and Al-Subaikah.

In the Qur'an, Makkah is mentioned as *Makkah*, *Bakkah* (the crowded city), *Al-Balad Al-Amin* (the safe town) and *Umm Al-Qura* (the mother of all towns).

## **The Ka'bah – A Symbol of Unity**

Within the Sacred Mosque stands the Ka'bah, a great (nearly) cubic building clothed in the finest of garments. The Black Stone, a corner stone located on the southeastern side of the Ka'bah, is believed to be one of the original stones used by Prophet Abraham and his son Ismael in the building's construction, while some speculate that the Stone is descended from Heaven.

Today, the stone marks the starting point for the seven circulations of the Ka'bah that every pilgrim must complete as part of the rites of Hajj. In a momentous act of unity, the world's 1.3 billion Muslims face the Ka'bah in prayer five times each day.

The Holy Mosque in Makkah is also referred to in the Qur'an by several names: *Al-Masjid Al-Haram* (the Sacred Mosque), *Al-Bait Al-Haram* (the Sacred House) and *Al-Bait Al-Ateeq* (the Ancient House). The mosque and the majority of the surrounding city of Makkah have great sanctity in Islam where no transgression or harm should befall anyone. Even the birds and animals are not to be harmed.

## **Makkah and the Prophet Muhammed - PBUH**

The Prophet Muhammed, PBUH, was born in Makkah in 571 CE. Jabal Hirah, located approximately two miles northeast of Makkah, is the cave site where he often sought peaceful contemplation. It was also at this very site that Muhammed, PBUH, at age forty, received the first verse of the Qur'an.

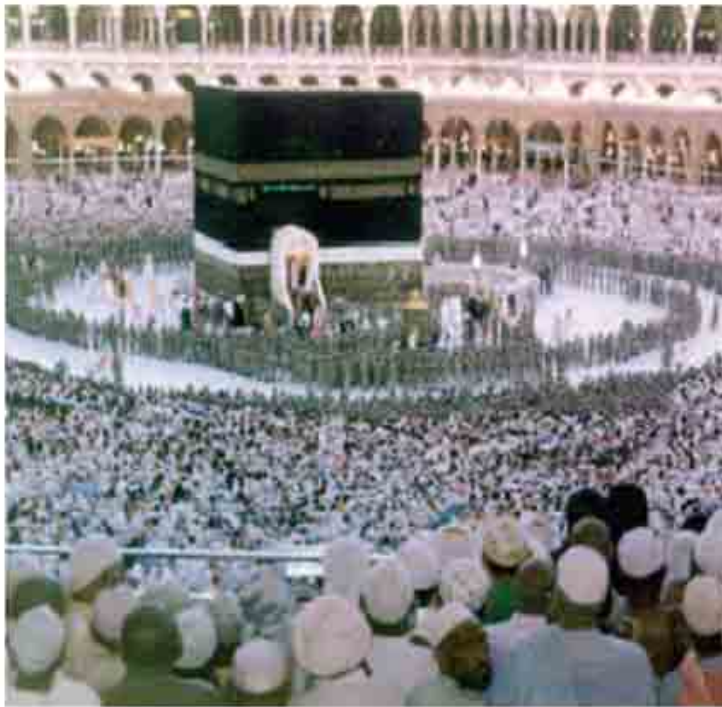
In 622, after suffering persecution and many attempts to end his life, Muhammed, PBUH, migrated to the city of Madinah. He later led the Muslims in a successful return to and conquest of Makkah, where he spared the lives of those who tormented him for so many years in one of the greatest acts of kindness, mercy and wisdom in human history.

### **Good Visitors Bring Good Food**

Dr. Hamza Baitalmal, a native of Makkah who left the city nearly eight years ago for Detroit, MI in order to study mass communications at Michigan State University, says that one of his fondest memories growing up in Makkah was “having the opportunity to give directions to someone visiting the city (and) to help them find food or lodging.”

While accommodations are easily accessible for one making plans to visit the city, whether it be for Hajj, *umrah* (a lesser pilgrimage), or just an impromptu visit, the city becomes significantly more crowded during Ramadan and Hajj, making it necessary to book hotel reservations well in advance. Many well-known hotels, such as the Hilton, are within walking distance of the Sacred Mosque and are also close to shopping and restaurants.

“You will find a lot of international restaurants in Makkah,” says Dr. Baitalmal, describing what he calls one of Makkah’s best-kept secrets. “There [are] people from all over the world: Asia, India, Africa, Europe, and so forth. The best thing about Makkah is that you have such a variety of cuisine (from which) to choose.”



*The Ka'bah has been rebuilt a few times, mostly due to flooding that occurs during the rainy season. This happened most recently during the rule of the Ottoman caliph Sultan Murad IV around 1039 AH.*

### **A Welcome That Never Wears Out**

According to a 2004 census, there are approximately 1,300,000 residents of Makkah. Each year, the holy city opens its doors to host some 2-3 million pilgrims from around the globe in order to fulfill the rites of Hajj, an important act of worship required of Muslims at least once in their lives, provided they have the resources necessary to make the journey.

The Qur'an specifically forbids non-Muslims from being near the holy sanctuary, and, thus, non-Muslims are not allowed to enter the city.

In a transatlantic interview via cell phone with Dr. Baitalmal as he stood on Mount Arafat during Hajj earlier this year, he explained what it was like growing up in Makkah. "It does get kind of crowded with everyone coming for Hajj, but we get used to it," he said.

"We know during the Hajj season that it will become busy, so we just switch over our thinking [to prepare]. We know we will get the reward from Allah [for our patience]."

In addition, Dr. Baitalmal described the residents of Makkah as "very peaceful" and said that "it is a most enjoyable thing for them to see all of the people come from all over the world for Hajj."