

# Ramadan

## Ramadan after dark: How the holy month transforms cities, culture and daily life

While Ramadan is often discussed mainly in terms of fasting, prayer and charity, another fascinating yet less explored dimension of the holy month is how it dramatically reshapes daily rhythms, urban life and even local economies. Across many Muslim-majority societies — and increasingly in multicultural cities around the world — Ramadan turns nights into vibrant hubs of activity while days become quieter, more reflective and slower paced. This distinctive reversal of routine offers a deeper understanding of how faith influences not only personal spirituality but also social habits, commerce, public life and cultural identity.

### Cities Come Alive After Sunset

As the sun sets and the fast ends, cities that seemed calm during daylight hours suddenly come alive. Restaurants fill quickly, street vendors prepare traditional delicacies, families head out for evening shopping, and cafés extend their hours well into the night. In many places, authorities adjust public services during Ramadan, with extended transport schedules, late-night markets and seasonal bazaars offering festive goods, sweets and clothing. For businesses, particularly in food, retail and hospitality sectors, Ramadan can become one of the busiest and most economically significant periods of the year.

### A Unique Night Culture

Nightlife during Ramadan develops its own cultural character, distinct from ordinary social evenings. Rather than focusing purely on entertainment, these gatherings combine spirituality with social connection. Families and friends meet after iftar for meals, conversations and reflection, while mosques and community centres host religious



Devotees gather to break their fast during the Islamic holy fasting month of Ramadan at the Badshahi Mosque in Lahore

talks, charity drives and Qur'an recitations. These interactions strengthen community bonds and preserve traditions that might otherwise weaken amid modern urban lifestyles. Younger generations are also reshaping these traditions through social media meetups, volunteering initiatives and food festivals, blending heritage with contemporary expression.

### Food Traditions in Transition

Food remains a central cultural element of Ramadan, but evolving lifestyles are adding new dimensions. Restaurants create special Ramadan menus and elaborate iftar spreads, often mixing traditional recipes with modern culinary creativity. While dates, soups and regional sweets remain essential, chefs

increasingly experiment with healthier options and international influences. The growth of food delivery services has also transformed how people break their fast, allowing convenience to coexist with long-standing customs.

### Changing Work and Lifestyle Patterns

Work patterns often adjust during Ramadan as well. Some organisations reduce working hours or introduce flexible schedules to accommodate fasting employees. Many people experience shifts in productivity, sometimes feeling more energetic at night than during the day. Sleep cycles may change due to late prayers, social gatherings and the pre-dawn meal, yet many individuals report

improved mental clarity and emotional balance, attributing it to the spiritual atmosphere and disciplined routine of the month. In diverse workplaces, there is also growing awareness of the need for cultural sensitivity during Ramadan, encouraging greater inclusivity and understanding.

### The Digital Ramadan Experience

Technology has quietly transformed the Ramadan experience. Mobile applications now assist with prayer times, Qur'an recitations, charitable donations and even virtual iftar gatherings. Social media has become a powerful platform for sharing charity campaigns, religious lectures and community initiatives, while also helping diaspora



Muslims gather to break fast during the first Friday of the holy month of Ramadan at the Mosque of the Divinity in Dakar

communities stay connected to traditions despite geographic distance. Digital connectivity has allowed Ramadan practices to evolve without losing their core spiritual significance.

### Sustainability and Social Awareness

Another emerging conversation around Ramadan concerns sustainability. Although the month emphasises moderation and gratitude, concerns about food waste during large iftar gatherings have prompted awareness campaigns. Many communities now promote responsible consumption, encourage donation of surplus food and advocate environmentally conscious practices. These initiatives align closely with Islamic teachings on balance, responsibility and stewardship of resources.

### A Broader Social Impact

Beyond individual devotion, Ramadan often acts as a social equaliser. The shared experience of fasting fosters empathy for those facing hardship, encouraging generosity and social solidarity. Public charity in-

creases, volunteerism rises and community outreach expands. Even in multicultural societies where Muslims form a minority, Ramadan often becomes an opportunity for cultural exchange, with neighbours, colleagues and friends participating in shared meals and learning about each other's traditions.

### More Than a Religious Observance

Ultimately, Ramadan's impact extends far beyond mosques and homes. It influences urban rhythms, economic patterns, cultural expression and social relationships. The holy month illustrates how faith can shape everyday life in profound yet practical ways, balancing spiritual devotion with community engagement and tradition with modern adaptation.

Perhaps this is what makes Ramadan truly remarkable. It is not only a fast observed from dawn to sunset, but a living social phenomenon that brings communities together, reshapes daily routines and encourages reflection, generosity and shared humanity for one meaningful month each year.

## Ramadan Recipe

## Cheese- or Walnut-Filled Crepes (Atayef)

Makes 24 crepes

### Ingredients

#### Walnut Filling

- 1 cup walnuts, chopped coarsely
- 5 Tbsp sugar
- Zest of 1 orange
- 2 tsp cinnamon
- 2 Tbsp orange blossom water

#### Cheese Filling

- 10 oz akkawi cheese (desalted) or ricotta mixed with half of the mozzarella
- 3-4 oz fresh mozzarella cheese, grated
- 5 Tbsp sugar
- 1 Tbsp rosewater
- 2 1/2 cups flour
- Pinch of salt
- 1 Tbsp sugar
- 1 tsp instant dry yeast

- 3 cups lukewarm water
- 1 tsp baking soda
- 2 cups of rose syrup
- peanut oil, for deep-frying
- 1/2 cup ground pistachios, to garnish

#### Step 1

To prepare the walnut filling, mix the walnuts, sugar, zest, cinnamon and orange blossom water. Set aside. To prepare the cheese filling, I start the process the night before. Desalt the akkawi cheese by slicing thin and immersing in cold water, leaving it to soak. Drain and change the water again after 1 hour, repeating five or six more times to get rid of all the salt. Taste the cheese before using it to ensure no saltiness



remains. Mix the 2 cheeses, sugar and rosewater and set aside in a colander to drain any excess water.

#### Step 2

Put the flour into a large bowl. Mix in the salt, sugar and yeast. Pour in the

water gradually and beat vigorously with a whisk.

#### Step 3

Beat in the baking soda. The batter should be creamy and pourable. Cover and leave aside to rise for 1 hour. Spread a clean lint-free tea towel on a cookie sheet and set aside. Heat a nonstick heavy-bottomed frying pan. Whisk the batter a little before ladling 1/4 cup in the pan to make 4-inch disks. Cook only on one side. Bubbles will start to form; they are ready when there are no more shiny wet spots on the top (about 1-2 minutes). Place each atayef, browned side down, on the tea towel to cool completely.

#### Step 4

Take one atayef and cup it in your hand. Fill it with either one of the fillings. Bring the edges together to form a crescent, pinching around the edges with a little firmness to keep the filling enclosed. Fill the remaining and set aside while you prepare your "workstation." Pour 2 cups of rose syrup in a deep bowl. Line a plate with paper towels. Heat the oil in a heavy-bottomed saucepan to 350°F on the thermometer. Deep-fry the filled atayef no more than four at a time until golden brown on both sides. Remove with a slotted spoon and place on the paper towels. While hot, slide a couple at a time into the cool syrup for 1 minute to absorb. Remove with another slotted spoon. Serve hot, garnished with pistachios.