

Ramadan 2024 in Israel:

The holy month of Ramadan begins on March 10 in Israel and lasts through April 9. In recent years, Ramadan in Israel has been characterized by two opposing trends. Increasingly, it has been a focal point for shared society efforts, featuring inter-cultural tours, night-markets, Jewish-Arab Iftar meals and joint activities. In public and political discourse, however, it is most often emphasized as a national security issue, particularly around access to the Al-Aqsa Mosque in East Jerusalem. Concerns are that extremists will exploit the situation, that worshippers and security forces will clash, and that this will lead to broader escalations.

This year, with heightened tensions throughout Israel due to the war, public discourse about Ramadan as a security concern greatly overshadows that of its religious meaning or shared opportunity. Shared society activities are more cautious and public attention to the peaceful and devotional aspects of the holiday are diminished. Rather, public debate has centered on access restriction and increased security measures at the Al-Aqsa Mosque, where large numbers of Muslim worshippers from Israel and the West Bank go for prayers.

National Security Minister, Itamar Ben Gvir, known for promoting Jewish control over the site, sought to impose stronger access restrictions for Muslims during Ramadan, referring to worship as “ Hamas victory celebrations”. Thus far, the cabinet rejected these recommendations, but the framing and inflammatory atmosphere remains.

For many Muslims, intense restrictions are a provocation themselves, at worst part of a political agenda by national and religious Jewish activists challenging the status quo at the site. At best, they are seen as insensitive to sincere religious worship during this period, contributing to a hostile atmosphere in an already tense time.

In recent weeks, various groups have been advocating for a more accommodating and open approach to Muslim worship. In addition, shared society organizations are doing what they can to continue promoting Ramadan as an opportunity to express mutual support and appreciation between Jews and Arabs.

Al Aqsa Mosque and Ramadan

During **Ramadan**, Muslims worldwide observe fasting and religious practices with heightened devotion. It is one of the most anticipated holidays traditionally dedicated to prayers, good deeds, and community-wide celebrations. Muslims consider it a great honor and religious duty to visit holy sites during Ramadan. Many religious groups organize trips to Al-Aqsa Mosque—from within Israel, from East Jerusalem, and the West Bank—with special emphasis on Friday prayers.

The Al-Aqsa Mosque on the Temple Mount/ Haram Al-Sharif, the third holiest site in Islam, is managed by **the Waqf** since **the 1967 War**. In this arrangement intended to maintain calm, Muslim prayer is allowed but Jewish religious practices on the premises are not. The site is sacred to both Arabs and Jews.

In recent years, the site has become **a trigger point** in Jewish-Arab and Jewish-Muslim relations, in part due to **an increase** in the number of religious and national Jewish groups, collectively called **the Temple movement**, encouraging Jews to visit and pray at the site. At the same time, the large number of Muslim worshippers coming to East Jerusalem requires **additional security**.

The approach becomes increasingly complicated as large-scale deployments necessitated not only by genuine security concerns, but by the perception of Muslims as a security threat due to **political discourse**. **Challenges** to the status quo and **clashes** at Al-Aqsa reverberate throughout the Muslim world and streets of Israel, increasing tension in Jewish-Arab relations.

Concerns over Heightened Security Measures

During Ramadan in Israel, hundreds of thousands of Muslims gather at some of the most sensitive sites in Jerusalem, the Damascus Gate and the Al Aqsa Mosque on the Temple Mount. Perceived threats to Muslim access to Al-Aqsa Mosque during this period are particularly inflammatory at this time, therefore managing security concerns is complicated not only by the surge of people arriving at the site, but the potential for provocations to escalate.

As the sacredness of the holiday clashes with political provocations, the tense atmosphere of wartime Israel emphasizes the national security focus. There is potential for Jewish and Muslim extremists to exploit the situation during Ramadan, aiming to escalate the conflict in the West Bank and Jerusalem. Right-wing groups threatening to enter the Temple Mount during prayers, [Minister of National Security Ben-Gvir's provocative stance, and the potential for Israel to restrict access or deploy more forces](#), have heightened tensions.

[Yaacob Ibrahim](#), Co-Director of Public Affairs at the Abraham Initiatives notes that since the beginning of the war, access to Al Aqsa has been reduced without clear communication to the public. The lack of regularity and prepared infrastructure for the holiday has led to frustration, with Ibrahim expressing concern that the police's decisions are perceived as collective punishment.

Due to the extensive work of civil society organizations and [pressure from the War Cabinet, security officials have allowed worshippers to enter the Temple Mount](#) during the first week of Ramadan, with subsequent decisions based on weekly security assessments. This contrasts with Minister of National Security Itamar Ben Gvir proposal to limit entry for Muslim worshippers, including Palestinians and Israeli citizens.

In response, the Israeli government decided to revoke Minister Ben-Gvir's authority to manage the events surrounding Ramadan in Jerusalem, aiming to prevent further escalation. Prime Minister Netanyahu affirmed a commitment to preserve worship freedom, stating, "We will ensure the Muslim public can celebrate the holiday." Alongside ongoing calls for pilgrimage to the Temple Mount/ Har HaBait, Ben Gvir's actions continue to provoke strong reactions.

According to [JISS policy paper form 2023](#), the common assumption that Ramadan leads to increased Arab violence, particularly in the context of Israeli officials' warnings, is exaggerated. Data analyses from previous years 2015-2022 shows a weak or spurious relationship between Ramadan and Arab/Palestinian violence.

Civil Society Response

In the heightened and politically divided atmosphere of wartime Israel, Arab citizens and shared society activists express dismay over the shift in focus, seeing a cherished tradition of prayers, celebrations and joint events of Ramadan overshadowed by security concerns. Despite relative calm since October 7 in Israel, shared society leaders are concerned that such approach may reignite tensions reminiscent of May 2021.

To address challenges during Ramadan, civil society groups, including [the Givat Haviva Center](#)

and [the Abraham Initiatives](#), are actively working to deescalate tensions. Initiatives include meetings, Old City tours, and appeals to government ministries, religious groups and media channels regarding worshippers' entry restrictions. These efforts respond to threats from [Minister Ben-Gvir and extreme right-wing groups](#), urging the government to reconsider restrictions and prevent violence.

Despite media reports on the decision not to restrict entry to Al-Aqsa during the holiday, it is "critical to continue applying pressure on the government," as emphasized in the petition from [Sikkuy-Aufog](#). The petition states, "The citizens of Israel are in pain, Jewish and Arab relations are in a very difficult period, and Arab society has been under a campaign of persecution and incitement for months. At this time, the rights and freedoms of Arab citizens need to be protected, not restricted. We call on the government and cabinet ministers to guarantee freedom of movement and freedom of worship in Al-Aqsa Mosque during Ramadan. This is both the right thing to do and what will ultimately contribute to the security of all of us."

Local Shared Ramadan Activities

Ramadan is often a dynamic month for shared society organizations and municipalities in mixed cities, where joint efforts between Arabs and Jews mark unity and partnership. These activities include cultural meetings, joint Iftar dinners, and gatherings of clerics from different religions.

Traditionally, neighborhoods are decorated, events for the youth and Ramadan markets are organized. However, this year, [the impact of the ongoing crisis](#) has led to a more subdued approach with scaled-back holiday activities, while still trying to acknowledge the holiday and shared life opportunity it affords.

Conversations with organizations and municipal workers show a common trend: they are simplifying activities and Iftar dinners in light of the war. For example, the city of **Acre** will hold neighborhood Iftar dinner initiative for Arab and Jewish women. In **Lod**, [Ruach Tova](#), and allied organizations designed a Ramadan-themed initiative **across six cities**, including **Taybeh**, featuring tasting tours, [an Iftar dinner scheduled for March 18th](#), and the integration of the [Good Deeds Week](#).

In **Jaffa**, [the municipality is planning](#) to host an Iftar dinner. Another inspiring initiative in Jaffa is focusing on supporting local businesses through night tours coupled with tastings.

In **Haifa**, a city-wide array of events places deliberate emphasis on Arab neighborhoods, mixed localities, and shared community spaces. Activities range from workshops for parents and children to art and music workshops, culminating in community Iftar dinners.

[Drachim Shluvot \(Shared Paths\) program](#) by Merchavim offers **virtual events**. "Sorry for Asking: Ramadan" offers insights into Ramadan, creating a secure space for dialogue, questions, and providing practical tools for culturally sensitive navigation of the time. Another digital event, "Paths LIVE from Jaljulia", is a live broadcast from Al-Rawda Mosque in Jaljulia, including a rare glimpse into the muezzin's room and the call to the Iftar. The session features a short film about Jaljulia's people and Q&A session with a local guide.

[Hand in Hand](#) navigate the subdued war and post-elections atmosphere by organizing **Iftar meals and discussion circles** for its community members, recognizing the need for a more intimate and reflective Ramadan this year. [AJEEC-NISPED](#) has also decided to forgo public events and municipal activities, acknowledging the absence of the typical festive atmosphere. Instead, they opted for Iftar meals for colleagues and families only, working to reinforce strong Jewish-Arab relations through intimate and meaningful observance of Ramadan.