

RACISM. no way.

Did you know? German communities set up the first ethnic schools in Australia in 1839

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An introduction to ISLAM in Australia

Islam is an Arabic word meaning peace and submission. Islam is the religion and way of life based on the complete acceptance of the teaching of God through his prophet. Muslims believe in all prophets of God from Adam and Abraham (*Ibrahim*) to Jesus (*Isa*) and finally Muhammad. Followers of Islam are called Muslims. All Muslims belong to the *Ummah*, the world-wide community of believers although there are some minor differences in the traditions of worship. Most Muslims are *Sunnis*, followers of the *Sunna* (example) of the Prophet Muhammad as recorded by his companions. Some Muslims are *Shi'a* Muslims who also follow the teaching of Muhammad, but as taught by his son-in-law, Ali and his household (*Ahlal bait*).

The *Qu'ran* (Koran) is God's word given to the Prophet Muhammad by the Archangel Gabriel in the early 7th century. He received his first revelation on Mount Hira near Mecca. It is the major source of all-Islamic faith and practices. Muslims believe that these revelations supersede those given earlier in Judaism and Christianity. Muhammad was illiterate and memorised the verses of the *Qu'ran* which were scribed by his followers under his supervision. The other sources of Islamic laws are the *Hadith* (tradition), the record of the Prophet Muhammad's sayings and the *Sirah*, the record of his actions.

The declaration of faith in Islam is "There is no true god but *Allah*, and Muhammad is His Messenger". This is called the *Shahadah*, and is spoken by Muslims many times each day. God, *Allah* in Arabic is absolutely one, sovereign, just and merciful. Arabic is the language of the *Qu'ran* and of prayer.

Muslims have five basic duties, the *Five Pillars of Islam*. They are: the declaration of faith (*Shahadah*), five prescribed daily prayers (*Salat*), contribution to charity (*Zakat*), fasting during the month of Ramadan (*Sawm*) and a pilgrimage to Mecca (*Hajj*). The consumption of alcohol and recreational drugs is forbidden as is engaging in any immoral act or behaviour. Moslems dress modestly. They do not gamble. They do not eat pork. Muslims reject racism in all its forms.

Islamic sacred sites include Mecca and Medina. Mecca is the birthplace of Muhammad. He migrated to Medina. He died and was buried there. Mecca is the site of the sacred mosque, *al-Masjid al-Haram* and the *Kaaba*, a small building believed to have been built by Ibrahim. Muslims perform the ceremonies of the *Hajj* at Mecca. Many also go to Medina to pray in the *Prophet's Mosque*.

Mosques are the most important buildings in Muslim communities often serving as schools, community halls and libraries as well as places of worship. A Mosque usually has a minaret or tower from which the people are called to prayer. Muslims may pray anywhere but they must face in the direction of Mecca.

The most important Islamic festivals are Id-ul-Fitr which ends the fasting of Ramadan and Id-ul-Adha which celebrates God's intervention in Ibrahim's sacrifice of his son Ismail.

There are about 1.3 billion Muslims worldwide i.e.22% of the population. Only 18% of the Muslim community live in the Arab world. The world's largest Muslim community lives in Indonesia. The 2001 Census indicated that there were 281,578 Muslims in Australia i.e. about 1.4% of the population. The Muslim population in Australia comes from over 70 different countries and makes up one of the most ethnically diverse religious groups.

Although most of Australia's Muslims have arrived in the last fifty years, Islam was well established in Southeast Asia by the beginning of the fourteenth century. There are indications that even earlier Muslim Arab explorations took place off northern Australia. The map of the Sea of Java of Muhammad ibn Musa al-Khwarizmi 820 CE shows, Cape York Peninsular, a "V" shaped Gulf of Carpentaria and a curved Arnhem Land. A later map, that of Abu Isak Al-Farisi Istakhari 934 CE, also includes an outline of the northern coast of Australia.

The first regular Muslim contacts with Australia were made by the Macassan trebangers from Indonesia who had converted to Islam in the early 1600s. They traded with the Aboriginal people living along the northern coast from about 1650 until the early 1900s and influenced their language and culture.

A few Muslim free settlers, some Muslim sailors and at least eight Muslim convicts arrived in the early years of settlement but little is known of them. The most significant early arrivals were the 'Afghan' cameleers who from 1860 to 1939 took part in expeditions to explore the interior. They were also involved in survey, construction and carrier work for the Overland Telegraph Line from 1870 to 1872, supplied the goldfields and provided an essential transport and communications network throughout Australia until they were superseded by rail, road and air services.

References:

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Theme: Cultural diversity and multiculturalism



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