

Sacred Sites: Mosques

1. A mosque is a place of prayer for Muslims, or followers of the religion of Islam. The first mosque was the courtyard in the home of Muhammad, Islam's founder. Today many mosques are large buildings with beautiful towers and domes.
2. The inside of a mosque always includes an open space for worship. Rugs or mats may cover the floor. A nook in one wall, called a mihrab, shows the direction of Mecca, Islam's holiest city. To the right of the mihrab is a platform or small tower, called a minbar. Religious leaders climb steps up to the minbar, where they speak to the worshippers. Every mosque must also have a source of running water for washing. Muslims are required to wash before prayer.
3. Outside most mosques is a tall tower, called a minaret. From the minaret a crier, or muezzin, calls Muslims to prayer. Some mosques have up to six minarets.
4. Mosques are different in some ways from churches and synagogues. They do not have chairs or seats. The worshippers stand together, barefoot, in rows. They bow down and kneel when praying. Men and women



- worship separately. Mosques never contain statues or pictures, and music and singing are forbidden.
5. For many Muslim people, a mosque is more than a place of worship. Muslims worship, study and discuss Islam, and do many other things in a mosque and on its property. Many mosques are used as community centers for events and also to teach about Islam. Religious festivals and gatherings are held in mosques. Weddings are one example. Mosques have rules to control what people do inside. One of these



is that it is considered rude to disturb another person who is praying. Many mosques are known for their architecture. The earliest mosques, opened in 7th century were open-air spaces. Later Mosques were buildings that were specially designed. Nowadays, mosques are in every continent, except Antarctica.