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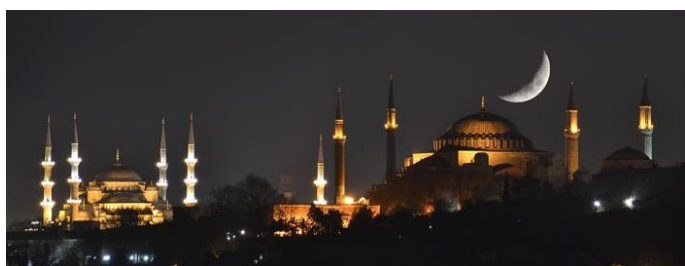


Hello everyone! "CIR's Corner" is my monthly article about international exchange and cultures around the world. I will introduce a variety of interesting international topics.

This Month's Topic: Ramadan

Currently, Muslims around the world are celebrating the month of Ramadan. Ramadan lasts from around February 28 until March 29 this year. Similar to [Lunar New Year](#), Ramadan is a holiday with dates based on a lunar calendar. However, unlike the traditional Chinese lunisolar calendar, the Islamic lunar calendar makes no adjustments for seasons, and is based solely on the phases of the moon. Therefore, the date of Ramadan on the Gregorian calendar shifts 11 days earlier every year.

Ramadan starts with the sighting of the crescent moon, but there are many interpretations of what that actually means. Some believe the crescent moon must be seen with the naked eye, some believe using a telescope is acceptable, and some even rely on scientific calculations of the moon phases to determine when Ramadan starts. However, the most widely accepted belief is that the crescent moon must be observed with the naked eye by a religious leader at the local mosque. For this reason, the start date can vary slightly by area. In addition, there are cases when the start of Ramadan is delayed by one day due to cloudy weather or conditions in which the crescent moon cannot be observed.



A crescent moon over Istanbul

There are not so many Muslims living in Japan, so Ramadan is still unfamiliar here. However, there are approximately 1.9 billion Muslims in the world, making up about a quarter of the world's population. The countries with the largest Muslim populations are: 1. Indonesia (242 million, 87% of the country's population), 2. Pakistan (233 million, 96.5% of the country's population), 3. India (200 million, 14.6% of the country's population), 4. Bangladesh (150 million, 91% of the country's population), and 5. Nigeria (97 million, 49% of the population). There are about 100 Indonesians and over 200 Pakistanis currently living in Ebetsu, so maybe some of your neighbors are celebrating Ramadan.

I wanted to learn more about Ramadan, so I asked Soban Farooq, a Pakistani resident of Ebetsu, a few questions. He is a local college student and works part-time at his family's authentic Pakistani restaurant, Ammo Night Restaurant, which is located in Nopporo Yoyogi-cho. In addition to Urdu, he can speak English and Japanese. My questions were in English, so you can read his answers below.

Q: What is Ramadan? Why is it important in Islam?

A: Ramadan is a holy month in Islam during which Muslims fast from dawn to sunset as an act of worship, self-discipline (it teaches us how to be patient and not to get greedy), and gratitude to God for all the things he has given to us humans. It commemorates the month when the Quran was first revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). It is one of the five pillars of Islam.

A Muslim's faith is not complete until he completes all five of them. (Note: the five pillars of Islam are: 1. Declaration of faith, 2. Prayer, 3. Charity, 4. Fasting, and 5. Pilgrimage). The basic meaning is to feel the actual pain and hunger that a poor person feels.

Q: How do you normally celebrate Ramadan?

A: We fast for 30 days. Most people mistake it as if we continuously fast for 30 days but we fast every day. I typically begin my day with a pre-dawn meal called suhoor with the very first prayer of the day before sunrise, fast during the day, and break the fast in the evening with a meal called iftar when it is time for the fourth prayer and sunset.

Q: Are there any special foods you eat during Ramadan? Are there any you can get or make in Japan?

A: In Pakistan, dishes like *pakor*as (fried fritters), *samosas*, *dahi baray* (yogurt snacks), and dates are common. In Japan, we adapt by making similar foods with available ingredients, and dates are easy to find and if you go to a mosque in Ebetsu every day. In Ramadan, anyone from the community volunteers to serve food, mostly naan or rice with curry and fruits and dates and sometimes other snacks and drinks.



Pakor



Samosas



Dahi baray



Dates

Q: Is there anything unique about how people in Pakistan celebrate Ramadan compared to other Muslim countries?

A: In Pakistan, the streets come alive with special food stalls, night markets, and community iftars. There's a vibrant sense of togetherness and generosity that's truly special. Ramadan is all about sharing and becoming one

as a community, and feeling the hunger which a person feels who doesn't have food to eat.

Q: How does the Pakistani population in Ebetsu celebrate Ramadan? Does Ebetsu or your restaurant have any special events during Ramadan?

A: The Pakistani community in Ebetsu gathers for iftar at the mosque or homes. At the Ammo Night Restaurant, we host iftar meals for the community. It's a great way to connect and share the spirit of Ramadan.

Q: Is it very difficult for you to fast all day? Do you have any special tips or tricks to deal with your hunger or thirst?

A: It can be challenging, especially in summer, but staying hydrated during suhoor and eating nutrient-rich foods helps. Keeping busy and focusing on the spiritual purpose of fasting also makes it easier.

Q: How can people of Ebetsu wish Muslim residents a happy Ramadan? Are there any greetings or phrases?

A: A simple greeting like "Ramadan Mubarak" or "Happy Ramadan" is perfect! It's a wonderful way to show thoughtfulness.

Q: Is there anything else you would like to say about Ramadan or Islam to my readers in Ebetsu?

A: Ramadan is a time of self-reflection, charity, and gratitude. It's also an opportunity for communities to come together and appreciate the values of kindness and understanding. It is must for a Muslim to give *zaka*t (charity) and some food to those who can't afford to eat and earn.



Many people visit the Badshahi Mosque in Pakistan during Ramadan.

Thank you so much Soban for explaining Ramadan to me! I hope the readers learned something new! ☺

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