



Our Communities, Cultures and Faiths

A BRIEF GUIDE

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PREFACE

Shropshire Council is working hard to improve the quality of life of everyone who lives and works in Shropshire. Our success as a council has been built on understanding the diverse needs of our communities and customers, and working with all local people to deliver excellent services.

For the Council the principles of equality and inclusion are core values that lie at the heart of everything we do. We should celebrate the diverse cultures of Shropshire and, whatever our backgrounds and beliefs, we should ensure we treat each other with respect and fairness.

This brief guide is designed to give you a better understanding of the many communities, cultures and religions which can be found in Shropshire today. But we should remember that people do not always fit neatly into categories. Faiths and cultures are in a constant state of change and whilst some people hold onto their beliefs and traditions, others embrace new ideas and standards.

I hope you enjoy reading this guide and that it will extend your knowledge and understanding. And thank you to all those who have contributed to putting this guide together.



Sheila Healy

Interim Chief Executive

Section one:

WELCOME TO SHROPSHIRE

- General Information
- Identifying People by their Ethnic Origin
- Communication Issues



Shropshire is a rural county with a population of 287,900 of which most live in the market towns. As the largest land locked county in England, rural sparsity is a real issue to overcome in the delivery of services. Approximately 36% of the population live in rural areas. The current population mix from Black Minority Ethnic (BME) has risen slightly from 0.7% in 1991 to 1.2% in 2001. (Figures taken from the 2001 Census).

Population

Shropshire's population has been increasing at a faster rate (7%) than England (4%) as a whole since 1991. Oswestry's population has experienced the highest level of growth (13%), compared with other Shropshire districts. Shrewsbury and Atcham population has experienced the lowest level of growth (4%) followed closely by Bridgnorth (5%).

Age

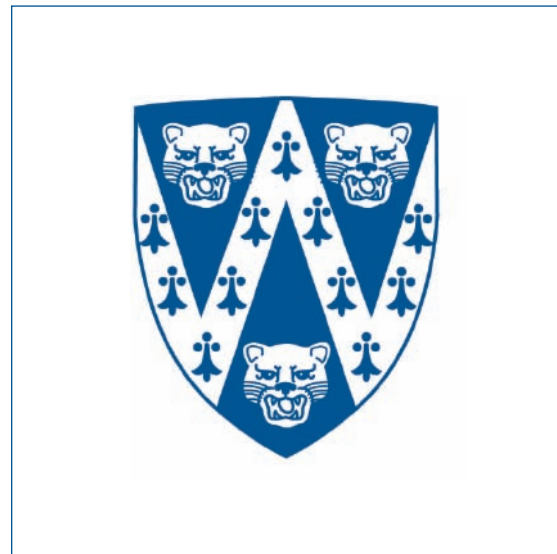
Shropshire has a relatively high concentration of people in the older age group. In 2004 about 46% of the county's residents were aged 45 or over, compared to only 40% nationally. Shropshire, like most parts of the country, has an ageing population. This is caused by greater longevity and the long term decline in the number of births.

Ethnic and Cultural Origins

1.2 % of the population are from black, mixed or other ethnic minority groups, which is significantly lower than the national figure of 9%. The Chinese population has seen the largest growth (37%), however to put this in to perspective this ethnic group represents only 0.4% of the county's population. The Pakistani ethnic group has the lowest representation in the county.

Religion/Belief

The dominant religion in Shropshire is Christianity at about 80% of the total population. The next most prominent religions/beliefs are Buddhist, Muslim and 'other religions'.



Gypsies & Travelling Community

Although the Gypsy and Traveller population of Britain comprises of a number of culturally distinct groups the local population is predominantly an English Gypsy and New Traveller one.

In Shropshire there are 4 permanent sites managed by the Gypsy Liaison Service based at the Shirehall in Shrewsbury.

SECTION ONE

IDENTIFYING PEOPLE BY THEIR ETHNIC ORIGIN

Classifying people according to their ethnic origin is information that is required by many organisations for various monitoring roles. The Race Relations Amendment (2000) Act places a specific duty on Shropshire Council to monitor its work force in term of ethnicity and our Equalities & Diversity Policy seeks to ensure that we do not discriminate on grounds that include ethnic origin and religious belief.

The terms below are regarded as general guidelines, and are always subject to an individuals own preferences.

African

This is used to describe black people from Africa, but again, individuals often prefer to identify with their country of origin and will use Nigerian, Somali etc.

African/Caribbean

This is often used as a general term to describe black people from the Caribbean Islands, and as such is not wrong. However, people often prefer to identify with their island of origin, e.g. Jamaican, Barbadian etc.

Afro/Caribbean is used less and is gradually being replaced African/Caribbean. Likewise, the term West Indian is a historical term that is not considered appropriate unless it is used as a title e.g. West Indies Cricket Team.

Asian

This is a general term but not very precise. It is far more acceptable to the people concerned, to be identified in terms of their nationality/religion/region, e.g. Indian, Pakistani, Mauritian, Bengali, or Sikh or Hindu etc.

Although terms such as South Asian or South Eastern Asian are sometimes used, many people may not be clear as to what is meant. Again, it is better to refer to people by their country of origin, such as Vietnamese, Malaysian, etc. By doing so, you are likely to reduce the risk of causing offence.

Black

Under the Commission for Racial Equality guidelines, the term black refers to African or African/ Caribbean people.

Black British

Although this is often seen on official documentation, when racial identity is an issue, people in general will refer to themselves as Black. Many people in South Wales will now classify themselves as Black Welsh.

British

This term is about citizenship, and doesn't directly relate to ethnic or racial origin. Nearly everyone born in Britain has a British Citizenship, regardless of colour or ethnicity.

Half-Caste

The use of the term half caste was widely used until recent times. It is now regarded as offensive by many people due to it's origins within the Hindu Caste system, in which being half-caste could mean social exclusion for the individual concerned. It is more acceptable to use the term 'Mixed Race'.

Shropshire Council is committed to engaging, involving and consulting with the people of Shropshire and we do recognise the need to be sympathetic and aware of the different customs and traditions of the diverse communities within Shropshire.

What we say and how we act, can have a direct result on how people respond to us on both an individual and collective basis. The following points should therefore be considered when working with, planning a meeting with or when in the company of people from ethnic minorities.

BE AWARE...	BE AWARE NOT TO...
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• seek advice and guidance if you are in any doubt.• be aware that in some communities, physical contact between people of different sexes is not common and a handshake is not always the custom when greeting people. This is especially so among Indian and Pakistani women.• be careful about using jargon or slang when speaking to people from minority ethnic groups. What you say may have a different meaning to your listener.• be aware that in some communities, a woman will not be comfortable or wish to be in a room alone with a man who is not related. Therefore if arranging a meeting advise them that there is no problem with them being accompanied by a friend or member of their family.• be aware that it is a sign of respect to remove footwear on entering the house.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• ask for a Christian name or surname. Ask for their first, personal or family name instead.• assume that not keeping eye contact in conversation is a sign of dishonesty or disrespect. In some communities, the opposite applies. And don't assume that if voices are raised that a person is becoming aggressive. In some communities it is common practice for people to speak loudly and to use body language and gestures to express themselves.• assume everyone has a religion. Many people seek to live good lives without religious beliefs

Section two:

PEOPLE & COMMUNITIES IN SHROPSHIRE

- African People
- Asian People
- Chinese People
- Eastern European People
- Gypsies & Travellers



Introduction to the Community

Covering about 22% of the world's total land area and having 54 nations, Africa is the world's second largest continent, with an enormous variety and diversity of languages, cultures, people and religions. For many people English may not be the spoken language of their community.

Culture

In African culture men and women have equal respect, but believe that both genders have specific roles and responsibilities to fulfil. The man is traditionally the head of the family, whereas the wife is the nucleus of the family and is given great respect.

In Africa, respect and status are gained through age and therefore parents tend to have unquestioned authority over their children. They enjoy close family relationships and a great sense of community spirit.

Beliefs

Many Africans are of the Christian faith, although the majority of people from northern Nigeria follow the faith of Islam, as do smaller numbers of people from Morocco and Algeria (North Africa), Ethiopia, Sudan, Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. People from East Africa are predominantly of the Christian faith, however Somalis are Muslim.



Festivals/ Dress/ Diet

All these will vary considerably, based upon the country of origin and individual's own religious beliefs.

On special occasions traditional dress is worn. For example, Nigerian women might wear a beautifully decorated; brightly coloured body cloth over a long sleeved top and a headdress. Men would wear a long loose flowing gown over trousers and a cap.

Introduction to the Community

The term Asian, as used here, includes India, Bangladesh and Pakistan. It can also include people from East Africa, Sri Lanka, Nepal and the state of Bhutan. India has the second largest population in the world after China, with about 1,018 million people and Sikhs and Hindus are predominantly from India and Bangladesh, whilst Muslims are from either Pakistan or Bangladesh to a lesser extent.

Many South Asian people came to Britain after the Second World War, particularly following the independence of India and Pakistan in 1947, in response to labour shortages in Britain, but also because of a variety of social, economical and political reasons.

There are many customs and traditions of the people from Asia but second and third generations of UK Asians have made many changes to their lifestyles in order to adapt and integrate into the Western culture and way of life. These changes have been in terms of their dress, socialising and marriage.



Language

- **Hindi** is the national language of India, but the Indian constitution recognises another 17 languages, including Bengali, Tamil, Urdu, Punjabi and Sanskrit. English is important for business and government and is the language of national communication.
- **Pakistan** people predominantly speak Urdu which is approximately 200 years old.

Culture

The traditional images of Asian communities are of extended families, arranged marriages, a traditional woman's role, particular diet, traditional clothes and a devotion to religion. These are still very important particularly to the older generation. These images or cultural representations, are not static however and are subject to constant change, influenced by political, social and economic factors in the UK as well as in their country of origin.

Beliefs

The main religions found in South Asia are Islam, Sikhism, Hinduism and Buddhism, although India is particularly tolerant of all religions.

Bangladesh has the second largest Muslim population in the world; about 87 % are Muslim

Visiting a Home

Pressing the palms together performs a traditional Indian greeting.

Diet

Indian food is generally very spicy and varies according to culture and region. Hindu's and Sikh's do not eat beef. Muslims do not eat pork.

Festivals

See sections on Islam, Hinduism and Sikhism.

Introduction to the Community

The Chinese have one of the oldest civilisations, with a population that is the largest of any country in the world. Most of the Chinese people in the UK come from Hong Kong.

Chinese people share a written language that is over 2000 years old, that has over 16,000 characters, each standing for an entire word. Traditionally Chinese is written vertically, but in Britain it has changed to read from left to right.

Beliefs

Many religions are practiced by Chinese but, the main ones are:

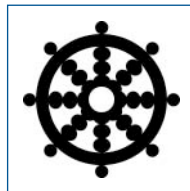
Buddhism: A way of life

Taoism: See life as compared to a balance of water, fire, earth, metal and wood. Illnesses occur when there is an in balance and treatment restores the balance.

Confucianism: This practice places emphasis on law and learning. It is an ethical system that preaches respect for authority and sees the law as essential to making life possible

Festivals

Yaun Tan (the Chinese New Year) is the most popular festival, as it marks the beginning of the lunar year. It usually occurs between mid-January and mid- February and is often a three day celebration. The years in the Chinese calendar are named after twelve animals, which follow one another in rotation.



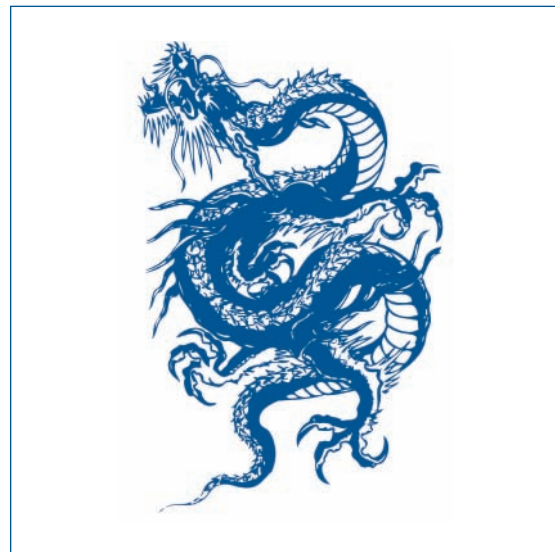
Buddhist Symbol



Taoist Symbol



Chinese writing; reads 'Happiness'



To the Chinese, the Imperial Dragon or 'Lung', is considered to be the primary of four benevolent spiritual animals.

Diet

This is influenced by Chinese cultural beliefs. There are few dietary taboos, but cold food is usually avoided and fresh food encouraged. Chopsticks are used for all meals in China, with food (which may include more than one type of main dish) placed at the centre of the table to be eaten with rice.

Visiting a Home

As with most communities, it is considered polite to address Chinese people by their title and family name.

The Chinese nod politely or bow slightly when greeting another person.

Although the extended family unit may have all but disappeared, elderly people are still respected, as according to an old Chinese proverb

"having an old family member is like having a treasure in the home".

SECTION TWO EASTERN EUROPEAN PEOPLE

Introduction to the Community

Many Eastern European people are here as a result of conflict and they include people from Poland, Ukraine, the former Yugoslavian countries i.e. Bosnia, Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia and also the Romanians.

Most Eastern European people coming to Britain do not speak English well. This is particularly so for older people.

The migration to Britain began at the end of the Second World War when the families of many Polish soldiers, who found themselves fighting under British command were displaced to refugee camps, where they stayed until 1948. The most recent migration has been as a result of the war in the former Yugoslavia during the 1990s between Bosnian Muslims, Serbs and Croats.

Beliefs

Most Polish and Ukraine people are Catholic or Orthodox but traditionally celebrate Christmas Day on 7th January each year. Many of the religions practiced in Bosnia and Herzegovina are Islam along with Catholic and Orthodox forms of Christianity. The Islam population is predominantly Sunni Muslim.



Traditional Polish costume

Festivals

Many Eastern European people are intensely proud of their heritage and form local groups and societies to keep their traditions alive. They tend to be deeply religious and festivals relating to their own faith i.e. predominantly Christian and Muslim, will be an important part of their lives.

Diet

The Eastern European diet is one that is based upon meat.



Orthodox Christian Church

Introduction to the Community

Although the Gypsy and Traveller population of Britain comprises of a number of culturally distinct groups the local population is predominantly an English Gypsy and New Traveller one. Many families are currently living in housing or have permanently settled on sites that no longer travel at all, or only travel occasionally. They identify themselves as Gypsies, having been born into a distinct racial group with its own history and culture.

In Shropshire there are 4 permanent sites managed by the Gypsy Liaison Service based at the Shirehall in Shrewsbury. They are at:

- Craven Arms (10 plots.)
- Prees (18 plots.)
- Oswestry (13 plots.)
- Crosshouses (5 plots.)

Education & Support

Local Gypsies and Travellers currently have access to the services of The West Midlands Consortium Education Service for Travelling Children, Sure Start and the Supporting People Service.

The W.M.C.E.S.T.C. coordinates, monitors, advises, supervises and assists the education provision for children from the Gypsy and Travelling communities throughout the West Midlands region.

There is still an ongoing situation with secondary schooling when the parents take the children out of main stream schools and opt for tutor services. The main reasons for this are that the girls learn to look after the younger siblings ready for motherhood themselves whilst the boys go out with their dads to learn how to bring money in for food.

Sure Starts primary role is to support families with children under the age of 5.

The Supporting People Government initiative is carried out by the Officers of the Gypsy Liaison Section.

Births

It is now common practice that all births are registered and christening services are held. These births are also recorded for future school starting purposes.

Medical Assistance

All the families on the sites are registered with local G.P.s. Like a lot of people they do have problems registering with a Dental Practice. Children are well covered by the school service and in addition regular visits on site are made by dental hygienist nurses under the "Keep Shropshire Smiling" initiative.

Section three:

MAJOR RELIGIONS & FAITHS IN SHROPSHIRE

- Buddhism
- Christianity
- Hinduism
- Islam
- Judaism
- Sikhism



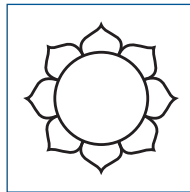
Introduction

Buddhism is based on the teaching of Siddhartha Gautama (later known as Buddha), who was born in the foothills of the Himalayas of Northern India in 563 BC.

Buddhism developed into several diverse schools, the most well known are:

- **Theravada Buddhism:** prevalent in Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, Cambodia and India.
- **Mahayana Buddhism:** spread to Tibet, China, Korea, Japan and Vietnam
- **Zen Buddhism:** is mostly confined to Vietnam, China and Japan.

Buddhists gather together to meditate and offerings of flowers are made to images and people may kneel before statues and light candles.



Lotus Flower Symbol



A Bronze Buddha Head

Beliefs

Buddhists do not believe in a divine being or creator and can be described as a system of thought and discipline, based upon practical advice. Buddhism maintains that a life cycle, with rebirth following death.

Festivals

Special days are celebrated, depending on the country of origin. The festival of Vaisakha Puja is celebrated in the month of Vesak, on the full moon (usually May) to commemorate the birth and enlightenment and death of Buddha.

In many countries Buddhists hang paper lanterns and flowers in their homes and light candles and burn incense in the temple. On such a day, food will be taken before noon, but not afterwards.

Dress

Buddhist monks wear robes of orange/yellow and go barefoot. They shave their heads and traditionally carry bowls or bags in which they receive gifts of food. There is no specific code of dress for ordinary Buddhists, who wear clothes relating to their country of origin.

Diet

Buddhists will usually be vegetarian, since their teachings are opposed to all forms of killing. However, diet can be also to reflect the country of origin and may include meat.

Place of worship

Buddhist temples (Vihara) vary in design but are built to symbolise the five elements i.e. Wisdom, Water, Fire, Air and Earth. Buddhists remove their shoes as a sign of respect when entering a temple. Visitors should do the same.



A Buddhist Temple

Introduction

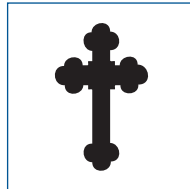
There are over 6 million Christians in the United Kingdom who regularly attend church.

Christians believe in one God who revealed himself as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, referred to as the Holy Trinity. Central to Christian belief is Jesus of Nazareth.

The sacred text for Christians is the Bible, which is comprised of two books (the Old and New Testaments).

Originating in Jerusalem (now Israel) and the surrounding area, Christianity later spread across the world, dividing into three broad groups i.e.

- **Roman Catholic,**
- **Eastern Orthodox**
- **Protestant.**



Crucifix Symbol

In England the largest denominations are to be found within the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church. Other denominations include Methodists, Baptist, Pentecostal and Orthodox churches e.g. Greek and Russian.



The Christian Bible



A Mosaic of Jesus Christ

Beliefs

Christians believe in the divine incarnation of Jesus, who was the Son of God. He was executed by public crucifixion in about 29 -32 AD. Christians also believe that he was raised from the dead (the Resurrection) and now reigns with God. (the Ascension).

The Bible's Old Testament includes principles called the **Ten Commandments** for all Christians.

Festivals

Days that are particularly significant for the Christians are Christmas Day, Good Friday and Easter.

Dress

There is no significant dress code for Christians (although modesty is generally taught) and people will therefore dress according to their country of origin/residence.

Diet

Generally Christians have no special dietary requirements.

Place of Worship

Churches and Cathedrals are places of worship and are often kept locked because of vandalism, theft and the lack of clergy and therefore prior notice of visits is sensible.

Introduction

The majority of Hindus come from India, East Africa, Malawi and Zambia. Another word for Hinduism is Sanatan Dharma (Sanatan means Eternal and Dharma broadly means doing one's duty).

Sanatan Dharma in western terms is at least 5000 years old which make sit the oldest religion in the world.



Hinduism Symbol

Beliefs

There are two fundamental aspects that relate to the death and suffering:

• One God

Hindus believe in one God or spirit (the Atma), who may have many paths/ways for Hindus to reach God. Although God is one, God is worshiped through various forms.

- Brahma – the creator of life
- Vishnu – the preserver of life
- Shiva – the destroyer of life

• Reincarnation

Hindus believe in reincarnation i.e. that after death the soul must then travel to the Creator – Brahma. There are many cycles that nature gives us by the way of examples i.e. water, food. Similarly, Hindus believe that the body is a precious gift from God in which to house the soul, which is in constant search of the Truth.

Festivals

The Hindu year is lunar and therefore timings of festivals may vary. The most important ones are:

Diwali: (October - November) also know as the festival of Lights, it celebrates the Lord Rama's victory over the demon king Ravana

Navratri: (September - October) A nine day festival with singing and dancing, called Ras Garba

Dashera: (September - October) Follows the nine days of Naratri. Traditionally in some parts of India the festival is concluded by burning an effigy of King Ravana.

Janmashtmi: (August) Celebrating the birth of Lord Krishna.

Rakshabandhan: (August) A day to celebrate family relationships and values when sisters tie a protective amulet called Rakhi round the wrists of their brothers, who take a pledge to protect their siblings from harm.

Holi: (March) The spring festival celebrated with throwing of colours and water on each other.

Dress

Hinduism does not require any particular type of dress. In Britain Hindus may wear either their western or Indian style dress.

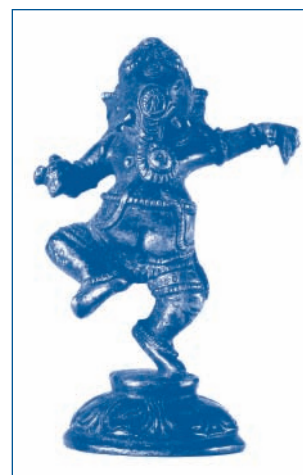
Traditional South Asian Hindu women may prefer to wear Saris or Shalwar and Kameez. Hindu women may have a bindi (red powder spot) on their forehead or, if married, may also have sindhur (red powder in the middle parting of their hair).

Diet

Hindus consider the cow a sacred animal and therefore do not eat beef. A majority of Hindus are vegetarian, who do not even eat eggs or fish.

Place of Worship

Hindus worship at temples (Mandir) and, before entering, shoes are removed and hands are washed. You may be expected to do likewise if visiting.



A figurine of the Hindu Lord 'Ganesh'

Introduction

Islam is an Arabic word, which means 'peace' and it is about a person's whole outlook and perspective on life, placing emphasis on forming a personal and loving relationship with God, as well as harmonious relationships with all other people. This is emphasis is demonstrated by the greeting of Muslims who say '*Assalamu alaikum*' (Peace be with you) whenever they meet.



A Muslim at Prayer

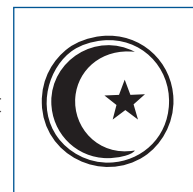
Muslim is the word for someone who follows Islam. The majority of Muslims who live in the UK originate from the Asian sub-continent (particularly Pakistan and Bangladesh). There are also a sizeable number from the Middle East, Africa and Turkey.

Islam is not confined to a particular race, nationality or ethnicity. A simple declaration of faith and a commitment to follow the principles of Islam as all that is required. Islam teaches that God (Allah in Arabic) is the Lord of all people, not just Muslims.

Beliefs

Muslims believe that Allah has offered guidance to people from different nations at different times, across the centuries, through various prophets who taught people about Allah and the nature of his existence.

Muslims believe the Torah and Bible to be divinely inspired books and believe the Prophet Moses and Jesus to be very important and respected messengers of Allah. There is therefore a very strong and respected continuity between Islam, Judaism and Christianity.



Islamic Symbol

Muhammad is viewed simply as the last of a series of prophets. As with other prophets, although he acted as a spiritual guide, he is not considered divine in any way. He is however believed to have been given the last divine revelation, known as the Quran (the Islamic holy book). His life and manners are held up as examples of how it is possible to lead a truly spiritual life connected to the Creator, whilst meeting the demands of an earthly existence.

Festivals

There are two main festivals in the 12 month, lunar-based calendar, which are Eid ul Fitr – marking the end of fasting during the month of Ramadan and Eid ul Adha – which takes place at the end of Hajj.

The Hajj takes place every year and consists of a number of acts of worship and remembrance of God that are performed in the company of a vast crowd.

Dress

Islam encourages modesty in dress for both men and women in public places. The purpose of wearing modest clothing is to take away the emphasis of trying to appear physically attractive to the opposite sex, so that interactions between men and women are more about who they are and what they think, rather than what they look like.

As long as they are covered, Muslims are free to wear whatever they like. This is reflected in the very different types of clothes worn by Muslim people around the world. Thus, a Muslim living in England will feel equally comfortable in a suit and tie, or a shalwar kameez (the trousers and long over shirt). Many Muslim women feel more comfortable wearing a **hijab** (headscarf), sometimes coupled with a veil (**nicab**) and overcoat (**juba**).

Diet

Practising Muslims adhere to strict dietary requirements. The terms Halal and Haram are frequently used in connection with food.

- **Halal:** denotes all permissible food and drinks
- **Haram:** means forbidden

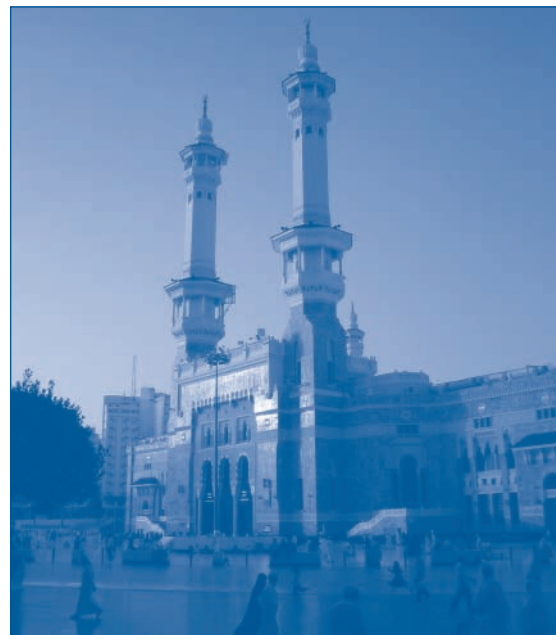
Halal meat comes from correctly slaughtered animals and an example of haram food is meat from a pig (and related products).



The Quran

Place of Worship

A typical Mosque has a large prayer room that has no chairs or benches, a pulpit for teaching and a lectern for the Quran. Some Mosques may also have a minaret, which is a tower used for calling the faithful to prayer. There will be separate entrances for men and women. Midday Friday is the busiest time, as all Muslims men must congregate at the Mosques for prayer.

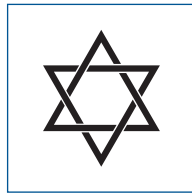


A Mosque

Muslim men tend to cover their heads for prayer and women should cover their head, arms and legs. Within some Mosques there may be a school for educating young scholars and where they can read the Quran.

Introduction

Judaism is a religion dating back over 4000 years to God's call to Abraham. The descendants of Abraham were subsequently enslaved in Egypt and then freed through God's chosen Prophet Moses. After receiving the Ten Commandments from God whilst at Mount Sinai, Abraham's descendants settled in the land of Israel.



The Star of David

The Jewish holy books are the Torah, that contained five books of Moses (including the Ten Commandments) the rest of the Old Testament Bible and rabbinic writings, explaining the laws and commandments. Because originally the Torah and Bible were written in Hebrew language, Jews are still taught to read and speak Hebrew.

As an ancient religion, Judaism predates Christianity and Islam, and none of their festivals or divergent beliefs are to be found in Judaism. Therefore, Jews do not celebrate Christmas, Easter, Eid etc.

In the UK, Jews are likely to be either:

- **Orthodox:** Jewish people who believe in the divinity and authority of the Torah and Bible i.e. that the laws and teachings must be followed today, exactly as they were passed down from God in the time of Moses.
- **Conservative of Reform:** Jewish people who believe that some of the Torah's teachings can be adapted to be more relevant to the needs of living in a modern society.

The Sabbath (the Jews most holy day of the week) begins at sunset on Friday and until dusk on Sunday).

Beliefs

Jews believe there is no one Eternal Sovereign God for the whole world. There are no images, pictures or statues in synagogues or Jewish homes.

Jews also believe that Moses was the chief prophet, followed by people who wrote the books in the bible.

The Jewish belief in God is contained in the prayer/commandment called Shema which is recited twice a day.



Hannukah Candles

Festivals

Because the Jewish day starts in the evening, it affects the timing of their festivals. Some principal ones are as follows:

- **Pesach:** Passover in April, which celebrates the Jewish exodus from slavery in Egypt.
- **Pentecost:** Occurring in June, it celebrates the giving of the Ten Commandments to Moses.
- **Rosh Hashana:** The New Year, which usually occurs in mid to late September.
- **Yom Kippur:** The Day of Atonement (the most holy day of the year) that occurs in mid to late September is a day for prayer and fasting and occurs 10 days after the New Year.
- **Israel's Independence Day:** Celebrated in May, it marks the establishment of the Jewish state in 1948.

Dress

Whilst most Jewish people dress in the same way as their non-Jewish neighbours, some Jews retain the traditions of the Jewish communities of the middle-ages or Eastern Europe i.e. men wear dark clothing, consisting of long coats and a wide brimmed black hat. A fringed prayer shawl called a **tzitzith** is worn on top of their clothes as a reminder of the Commandments.

Jewish men are required to have their heads covered when in the Synagogue and this is usually accomplished by wearing the **Kippah/kappel** (skull cap).

Diet

The faith of Judaism sets out as a part of its rules for life, strict dietary laws known as the **Kashrut**. Depending on the religious beliefs that the communities follow, these rules may vary.

Orthodox Jews will be strict about dietary laws, to the extent of only eating in orthodox homes, or restaurants under rabbinic supervision.

Certain animals, birds and fish are either **Kosher** (permitted) or **Treif** (forbidden) as follows:

- Meat – animals that split the hoof and chew cud are permitted i.e. oxen, cow, and sheep but NOT pig meat.
- Birds – domesticated birds are permitted..i.e. chicken, duck, turkey. Birds of prey are NOT allowed.
- Fish – fish that have both fins and scales i.e. cod, plaice, haddock, but NOT eels. Shellfish are NOT allowed.

Jewish law forbids the mixing of meat and dairy foods e.g they cannot eat cheese-burgers. Neither may milk products be eaten directly after a meat meal.

Place of Worship

As with other faiths, Jewish people can pray anywhere, but Jews tend to come together to pray and study or just meet as a community, in synagogues.

In Orthodox synagogues men and women sit separately, with the women often sitting in an upstairs gallery, or in a separate area, with see through curtains.

There is usually a main prayer hall containing the Ark (a cupboard that is the central feature of the synagogue, containing the holy hand written Torah scrolls), which is situated on the eastern wall, facing the holy city of Jerusalem. Above the Ark there is an 'eternal lamp' known as the **Ner Tamid** (representing the fire on the altar in the Jerusalem temple).

Many synagogues have a Rabbi who teaches the community about interpretation of the Torah and Talmud.

Non- Jews are welcome to visit a synagogue and may be asked to wear some form of head covering. Both sexes should ensure that they are modestly dressed.



A Jewish Synagogue

Introduction

Most Sikhs living in the UK are of Indian origin, either having come directly from the Punjab region, or via former British colonies. Both Punjabi and English languages are spoken widely throughout the community.

The link with the UK has been a long one. Renowned for their bravery and martial tradition, many Sikhs served in the British military and gave their lives for the British Empire in the First and Second World Wars.

Beliefs

The Sikh faith is a distinct religion revealed through the teachings of the ten **Gurus**. (Guru means spiritual leader), the first of whom, **Guru Nanak Dev Ji**, was born in 1469 BC in Lahore, which is now Pakistan.

The Gurus were the Divine Light who conveyed **Gurbani** (word of God).

Sikhs believe that there is one supreme God for all people, not just Sikhs. God is regarded as **Nirgun** (transcendent), **Sargun** (immanent), **Nirankar** (formless) and **Akal** (eternal).

The objective of a Sikh's life is to develop God-consciousness and ultimately receive God's grace. Human life presents the opportunity to do this by realising the will and love of God through truthful living and **Seva** (dedication to service), in the context of normal family life.

Set prayers are said daily, in the morning, evening and at night before going to sleep.

Sikh men and women, particularly those who have taken **Amrit** (been baptised), always wear the following articles of faith that are popularly known as the **Five Ks**:

- **Kesh**: A Sikh's uncut hair
- **Kangha**: A wooden comb that is worn in the hair underneath the Turban
- **Kara**: A steel bracelet, worn from birth on the right wrist
- **Kirpan**: A curved sword
- **Kacherra**: A pair of under-shorts that are tailored in a special manner



Sikhism Symbol

Festivals

There are many Sikh festivals, but the most important are:

- **Birth of Guru Nanak**: the founder of the Sikh religion, born on 14th November 1469
- **Vaisakhi**: Celebrating the date of 13th April in 1699, when the **Khalsa** (the code of conduct) and the Five K's were introduced



A Sikh Gentleman in traditional dress

Dress

Most traditional Sikh men wear a turban, as will some Sikh women. But it should be remembered that although it has become an important symbol of the Sikh faith, not all turban wearers are Sikhs, as people from other faiths may also wear a turban.

Diet

Observant Sikhs are likely to be vegetarians. They will also exclude from their diet egg, fish and any food containing these.



Golden temple: the holy Sikh shrine in Amritsar, India

Place of Worship

When visiting a **Gurdwara** and before entering the worship room, you will be expected to cover your head, remove your shoes and wash your hands.

It would be appreciated if you went forward to bow to the holy book (the Guru Granth Sahib)

If invited to eat at the Gurdwara, you should not offer to pay for the food, as it is free for everyone, but you could make a donation prior to departure. If you do eat, your head must remain covered.

Please do not take cigarettes, alcohol on to the premises, as this would cause offence.

Section four:

OTHER INFORMATION

- Useful Contacts



Guru Nanak Sikh Temple Telford:

01952 411730

Hindu Forum of Britain:

0208 965 0671

www.hinduforum.org

Minority Ethnic Christian Affairs:

020 7529 8132

www.churches-together.org.uk

Muslim Council of Britain:

0208 432 0585

Race Equality West Midlands:

0121 250 3859

www.rewm.rewm.org

Telford Christian Council:

01952 291904

www.donnagriffin@staytelford.co.uk

The Birmingham Chinese Society:

0121 773 0099

West Midlands Buddhist Council:

0121 449 3296

www.birmingham@dechen.org

West Midlands Faiths Forum:

0121 359 9480

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