



THE THREE HOLIEST MOSQUES / MAKKAH

Masjid al-Haram

A sacred centre, held in the hearts of generations

MAKKAH, SAUDI ARABIA / A SANCTUARY SHAPED THROUGH THE CENTURIES



Against the pale sweep of the courtyard, the Ka'bah stands clothed in black and gold. Around it, footsteps flow like a river. Beyond rise arcades, minarets and the steep, crowded city of Makkah: a vast setting gathered around a building of remarkable simplicity.

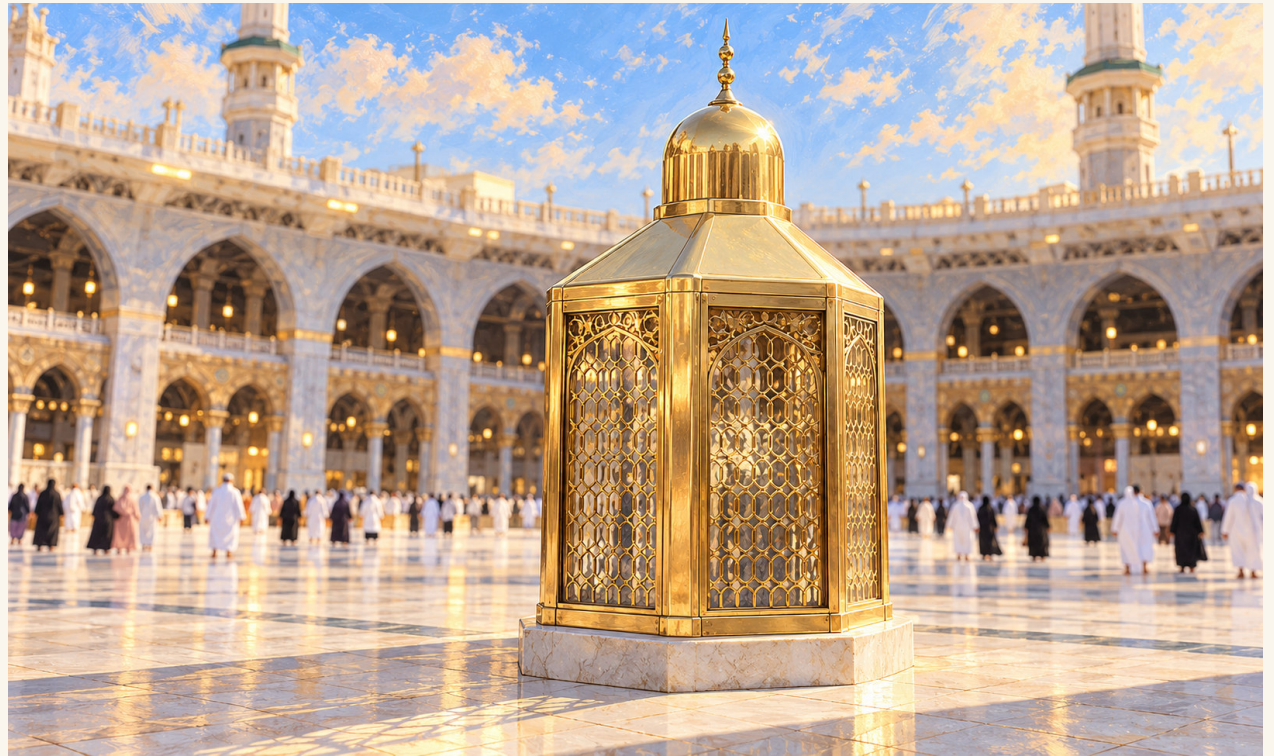
For a pilgrim arriving after years of longing, this first sight can hold more than words. Masjid al-Haram is a place of arrival and return. Its walls have widened, its roofs have risen, and generations have brought their prayers into its embrace.

Around the sacred House

Long before the marble galleries of today, the story of this place was already treasured. The Qur'an tells of Ibrahim and his son Ismail, peace be upon them, raising the foundations of the House and asking Allah to accept their work. Its beginnings carry the tenderness of a shared task and a prayer.

The surrounding mosque grew over many centuries. In the seventh century, Caliph Umar enlarged the space around the Ka'bah; his successor Uthman added colonnades, sheltered passages carried on columns. Successive generations built, repaired and made room for more pilgrims. The sanctuary became a work entrusted from one age to another.

Accounts: Qur'an 2:127; Sahih al-Bukhari 3364.



A small enclosure, an ancient remembrance

The present glass and metal enclosure protects Maqam Ibrahim, the stone associated with Ibrahim's standing place while building the Ka'bah. Its delicate enclosure is much newer than the story it recalls. Beside the great sweep of the courtyard, it offers a remembrance on a human scale.



Makkah around 1880: an interpretive painting informed by Muhammad Sadiq Bek's photograph. Colour and light are reconstructed.

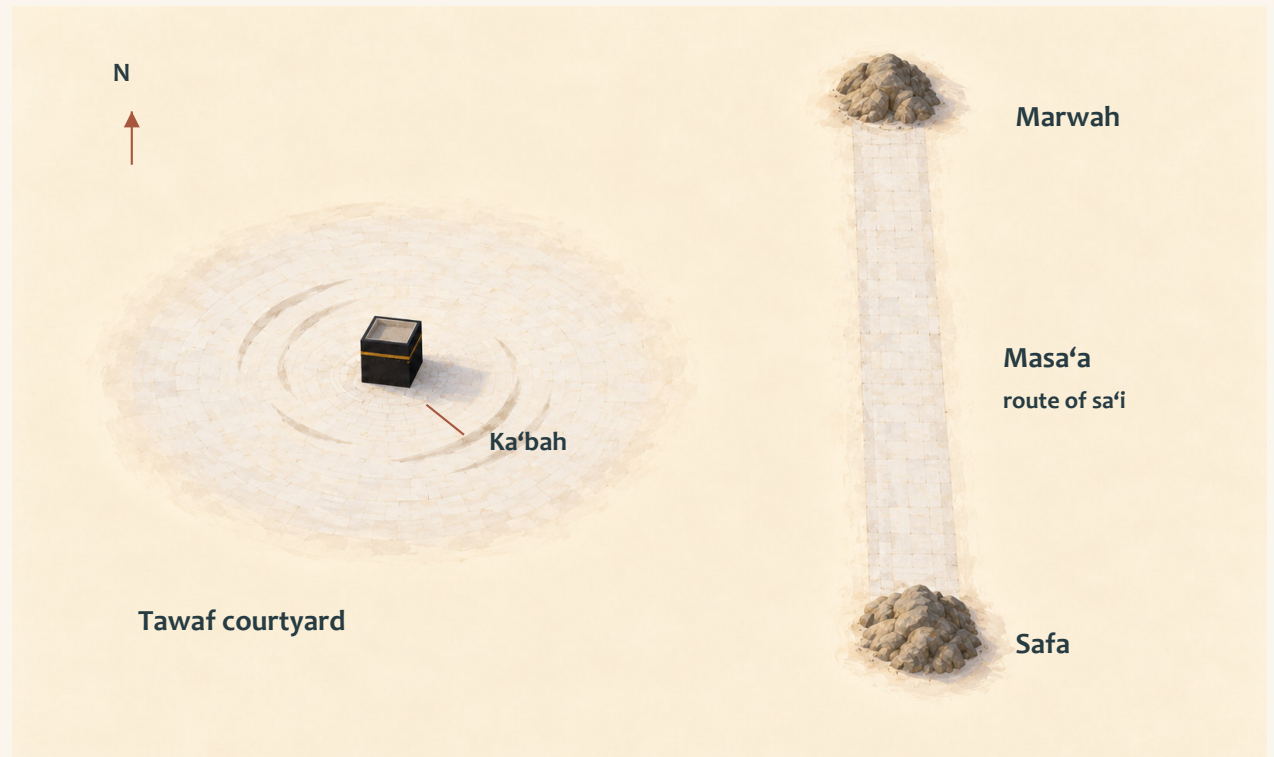


The covered Masa'a shelters the route between Safa and Marwah, east of the Ka'bah. Contemporary architectural interpretation.

Between the two hills

Beyond the open courtyard, another long space carries an older memory. The Masa'a is the passage between Safa and Marwah. Beneath its lights, pilgrims follow the route that recalls Hajar's search for water for her son. A mother's urgent journey is remembered in footsteps, again and again.

Once, this route lay outside the mosque. Later building brought it into the complex, with covered levels to shelter the growing numbers who came. Along its length, columns recede into the distance and light catches the pale floor. The architecture has changed; the two hills still give the journey its beginning and end.



Two journeys, two different spaces

This simplified guide places the tawaf courtyard beside the long route of sa'i. Safa lies towards the south and Marwah towards the north, on the eastern side of the mosque. The guide shows their relationship, not the building's exact plan or scale.

A garment for the Ka'bah

The Ka'bah's covering, the Kiswah, begins far from the courtyard, in the workshops of Makkah's King Abdulaziz Complex. Silk is washed and dyed, threads are woven into cloth, and separate pieces are carefully joined. What seems a single dark garment is the work of many skilled hands.

Its luminous embroidery requires another kind of patience. Gold-plated silver and silver threads are worked over cotton padding, lifting the design above the silk. Light rests on those raised surfaces. The finished covering brings together the strength of weaving and the delicacy of a needle's smallest movements.



What makes the embroidery rise?

Cotton padding gives the embroidery its raised shape; the shining thread covers it. This enlarged material study shows a short, unfinished sample beside silk and thread. On the finished Kiswah, the same method makes its calligraphy stand proud of the dark cloth.



An illustrative weaving study: black silk takes shape on a loom before the Kiswah's panels are assembled and embroidered.



Pale arcades shine against the night. This contemporary view celebrates the mosque as a place still being used and cared for.

An ever-growing welcome

In 1955, King Saud announced a great expansion of the mosque. More building followed in later reigns: new prayer spaces, passages and levels, answering the needs of pilgrims arriving in growing numbers. Makkah's skyline changed around the sanctuary, while the Ka'bah remained its heart.

Care also happens in quieter ways. Cleaning teams move across the marble, working around the people who have come to worship. Their labour belongs to the mosque's story too. Beneath the brilliant lights, a cleared path and a freshly washed floor are small acts of welcome, repeated for the next arriving feet.



The work between the footsteps

Teams use floor-cleaning machines and long-handled tools to care for the courtyard while pilgrims continue through the mosque. This illustrative scene brings an often-unnoticed task into view: keeping a shared sacred place ready for those who come after us.