

180,000 Muslims pray peacefully at Al-Aqsa Mosque on first Friday of Ramadan

Israel eases restrictions on travel from West Bank; police deploy hundreds of officers to ensure worshipers can mark the holy month at the Jerusalem flashpoint



Muslim worshipers pray in the al-Aqsa Mosque compound at Jerusalem's Temple Mount on May 10, 2019 on the first Friday prayers of the holy fasting month of Ramadan. (Ahmad GHARABLI / AFP)



Palestinian Muslim worshipers pray in the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound at Jerusalem's Temple Mount on May 10, 2019 on the first Friday prayers of the holy fasting month of Ramadan. (Ahmad GHARABLI / AFP)



Muslim worshipers pray in the al-Aqsa Mosque compound at Jerusalem's Temple

Mount on May 10, 2019 on the first Friday prayers of the holy fasting month of Ramadan. (Ahmad GHARABLI / AFP)



Palestinians pray at the al-Aqsa mosque compound during a holy month of Ramadan, at the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, Friday, May 10, 2019. (AP Photo/Mahmoud Illean)



Palestinians walk towards the Qalandia checkpoint between the West Bank city of Ramallah and Jerusalem to attend the first Friday prayers in Jerusalem's al-Aqsa mosque on the Temple Mount, during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, Friday, May 10, 2019.(AP Photo/Majdi Mohammed)



Muslim worshipers pray in the al-Aqsa Mosque compound on Jerusalem's Temple Mount on May 10, 2019 on the first Friday prayers of the holy fasting month of Ramadan. (Ahmad GHARABLI / AFP)

Tens of thousands of Muslims, including many from the West Bank, prayed peacefully at Jerusalem's Al-Aqsa Mosque compound on Friday, the first in Islam's holiest month of Ramadan, officials said.

The Jerusalem Islamic Waqf organization which administers the site estimated that there were 180,000 worshipers, some 50 percent higher than last year, when around 120,000 people attended the first Friday prayers. Israeli estimates varied between 135,000 and 180,000.

Azzam al-Khatib, director general of Waqf, said the crowds reached the site "despite checkpoints and a large security presence." The prayers ended without any major incident, he told AFP.

Israel Police said that they had deployed hundreds of officers and Border Police "to ensure that tens of thousands of worshipers could reach the site and at the same time prevent any incidents throughout the day."



Israel Police@israelpolice

Police units in Jerusalem secured the first Friday events for Ramadan in the old city. @IL_police forces secured over 135,000 people that took part in the prayers on the Temple Mount

The Al-Aqsa Mosque is the third holiest site in Islam and sits atop the Temple Mount, the most sacred site in Judaism and revered as the home of the ancient Jewish Temples. It is often a major flashpoint in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

An AFP photographer at the Qalandiya checkpoint between Jerusalem and the West Bank saw thousands of Palestinians — including elderly people in wheelchairs — queuing to enter the city early Friday morning.



Israel Foreign Ministry@IsraelMFA

Measures taken to enable the passage of Muslim worshipers to Jerusalem for the prayers of the first Friday of #Ramadan month at the al-Aqsa mosque.

180,000 worshipers attended the prayers.

Coordination between Palestinian and Israeli authorities had improved at the checkpoint this year, the photographer said, making access to Jerusalem easier.

This was largely due to Israel opening a new crossing at the site in February that is designed to reduce friction at one of the largest crossing points between the West Bank and Jerusalem.

The IDF said some 75,000 people from the West Bank crossed into Israel for the prayers.

Israeli restrictions on Palestinians from the West Bank are eased during the month of Ramadan, which began on Monday.



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Men over the age of 40 and children under 12 will be allowed to enter the city on Fridays during Ramadan, while there are no restrictions on women, the Israeli army announced.

Israel views the whole of Jerusalem as its capital while the Palestinians see the eastern part as the capital of their future state.

Source:

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