

📖 Topic Page: [Mecca](#)

Definition: **Mecca or Mekka** from *Collins English Dictionary*

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1 a city in W Saudi Arabia, joint capital (with Riyadh) of Saudi Arabia: birthplace of Mohammed; the holiest city of Islam, containing the Kaaba. Pop: 1 529 000 (2005 est) Arabic name: **Makkah**

2 (sometimes not capital) a place that attracts many visitors: *Athens is a Mecca for tourists*



Image from: [Map 8.1. 'Abbasid Caliphate Though the 'Abbasid... in Places of Encounter: Time, Place, and Connectivity in World History: To 1600](#)

Summary Article: **Mecca**

From *The Hutchinson Unabridged Encyclopedia with Atlas and Weather Guide*

City in Saudi Arabia and, as birthplace of Muhammad, the holiest city of the Islamic world and a place of annual pilgrimage (the hajj); population (2004) 1,294,200. Non-Muslims have been forbidden entry to the city since AD 630, when Muhammad made it the centre of the Muslim faith. In the centre of Mecca is the Great Mosque, in the courtyard of which is the Kaaba, the sacred shrine dating from pre-Islamic times and containing the black stone believed to have been given to Ibrahim (Abraham) by the angel Jibra'el (Gabriel). Because of the predominance of the religious functions of the city, industrial development is on a small scale, but includes some manufacture of textiles and furniture.

History Before the advent of Islam, Mecca owed its importance to its being a stage on the north-south trade route and, in addition, a religious sanctuary; it was a place of pilgrimage for neighbouring tribes and several markets were held nearby during an annual 'truce of God'.

Mecca also contains the well, Zam-Zam, associated by tradition with the biblical characters Hagar and Ishmael. Until the advent of air transport, most pilgrims came via the port of Jiddah, 80 km/50 mi to the west. Most of the approximately 2 million pilgrims on the hajj are foreigners.

The mosque The mosque is unique, being an open space, about 160 m/525 ft by 105 m/344 ft, round the Kaaba. This court is surrounded by arcades and a few small buildings stand in it. There are seven minarets and many officials and servants. In the 18th century, the servants were eunuchs. The door-keepers of the Kaaba are the descendants of those who held the office before the birth of Muhammad. As the mosque stands in the middle of the valley, it is occasionally flooded. The inhabitants of Mecca make money by letting accommodation to the pilgrims, acting as guides through the ceremonies, and as agents in any capacity.

Legend has it that the black stone in the shrine was originally white, but became black by absorbing the sins of countless pilgrims.

Seat of law Mecca is the seat of the Consultative Legislative Assembly, since Islamic religious law is the common law throughout Saudi Arabia.

Disasters Disaster struck the hajj to Mecca in April 1998 when more than a hundred people were crushed to death. In April 1997 more than 340 people died and 1,290 were injured in a fire that

engulfed their tent city as they attended the hajj. The casualties were mainly Indians, Bangladeshis, and Pakistanis. The cause of the fire was attributed to an exploding gas cylinder, used for cooking. The casualties were below those of 1990, when a stampede in a tunnel between Mina and Mecca led to 1,400 deaths. In 1994, another 270 people were crushed to death in a stampede. Saudi Arabia said it had spent £10 billion from 1987–97 on improving facilities for those attending the hajj.

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