

# Ramadan In Tunisia:

## Worship With A Spirit Of Solidarity

> Tunis - Nour-eddine Saoudi

The glorious month of Ramadan is special in Tunisia, where life takes a different course, marked with special customs and traditions. The families decorate the front of their houses and those caring for mosques give them an extra coat of paint and light up the minarets with lamps.



The Souk of Tunisia the capital  
سوق العاصمة تونس



Fresh dates at Tozeur Souk  
تمور في سوق توزر



Bakery at Sousse Market  
الخباز في سوق سوسة

**D**uring the month of Ramadan, there is a large increase in the number of worshippers in mosques throughout the country. Thousands of citizens hasten each day not only to say the Asr (afternoon) prayers, but also to take part in the circles of "dikr" and religious seminars organized daily in the mosques after the Asr and Maghreb (sunset) prayers. Even the optional prayer "tarawih", said after "Isha" (evening) prayers has become quasi obligatory for Tunisians. Many Tunisian families want to say it together to strengthen family ties. The mosques are frequently overflowing; they are so full that men, women and young people have to pray in the streets and neighbouring public spaces. I saw this myself in several mosques in the capital -especially in the famous Zaytouna mosque, located in the centre of Tunis.

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The Tunisian family is reunited and strengthens its bonds during this month, which the Tunisians call the “Month of Meeting”, because members of each family

find themselves around the same table every day at Futur (end of the fast). The bonds of solidarity and fraternity consolidate and people visit family and friends frequently. In this month the aim of Ramadan is manifested through a universal spirit of solidarity and fraternity. Many families residing close to a mosque offer worshippers milk and dates before prayers and the Futur meal after. In the cities, caravans of solidarity are organized to provide Futur for the poor and needy. ▶

Multiple services and trades flourish, especially in the cities where working women do not have time to prepare the required dishes and cakes. The streets of the cities are animated each evening as thousands of people congregate after prayers and enjoy the pleasant cool evenings in the company of family and friends.

### Particular provisions and activities

During the month of Shawwal, Tunisian families begin their preparations for Ramadan, on the moral and material levels, especially the women who are responsible for preparing meals for Futur, which must be tasty and of good quality.

They prepare "hlalem", a kind of traditional paste used for the daily "soup", "bssissa" a very nutritious mixture containing corn, coriander, chick-peas, sugar, olive oil and salt and the "brik", a triangular wafer stuffed with eggs, meat or fish and fried in oil.

The majority of cities organize various cultural and artistic activities during the long evenings, where a convivial family atmosphere prevails. The festival "Evenings of Ramadan in Tunis", which is held annually in the municipal theatre and some traditional venues in the capital, is certainly the major cultural event in this glorious month.

Towards the middle of Ramadan, women start to prepare cakes for the 26th night, "Laylate Al Qadr" (night of destiny). On this night, the mosques are filled with worshipers. Business is booming as in the evenings, the majority of the shops stay open late at night, because Tunisian families make a point of buying new clothes for their children for Eid el Fitr celebrations. This festival focuses on children. Throughout the night a festive mood prevails in shops in the major cities.

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Baklawa  
البقلاوة



Fresh fish at Sousse Market  
سمك طازج في سوق سوسة

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Every country has its own traditions. The Tunisians have two main meals: the first is Futur comprising of soup, the "brik" and a dish of meat and vegetables, or couscous with fish, or "tajine", a kind of salted cake, of meat, vegetables, cheese and eggs, cooked in the oven.

After taking time off to watch programmes specially dedicated to Ramadan on Tunisian television, most people go to the mosque or for a walk. Coffee shops are places of entertainment for the men, especially

when this month is in spring and summer.

When they come home Tunisians take the second meal, "suhour" traditionally consisting of "al-masfouf", couscous with hot milk and dates or "bssissa" accompanied by black tea. Those who are asleep are woken by the voice of the "msaharati" who goes from street to street calling people: "Awake to take Suhour".

It seems that the Tunisians, like the Moroccans, exert a considerable effort to reconcile the spiritual and religious requirements of this month and the evolution of modern life: Ramadan is a month of worship and festivities, which co-exist in a happy symbiosis. ■