

Religion

plays a vital role in the lives of Indonesians. The first canon of *Pancasila* is the belief in God. Islam is the religion of about 85% of the population. About 10% of Indonesians are Catholics and Protestants; 3% are Buddhists; and 2% are Hindus. Each religion confesses to have a supreme God. Indonesians believe strongly in religious tolerance and all religions are practiced freely. Religion is intertwined with politics, business and family life, not compartmentalized as it is in much of Canadian society.

Canadians must learn to appreciate that prayers play an important role in the lives of Muslims. You can hear the mosques call Muslims to prayer five times daily, at dawn, noon, mid-afternoon, sundown and in the evening. Muslims try to perform the prayers at the beginning of each prayer time, the earlier the better. You should schedule breaks at prayer times to show respect. When you invite people to dinner, give your Muslim partner enough time to arrive after the sundown prayer.

Since Muslims eat no pork, be sure not serve it when you are hosting your Muslim partner. Should there be a dish that contains pork, make certain you tell your Muslim guests which one it is. Also, keep in mind that Muslims should not drink alcohol.

Canadians should be aware that Muslims fast from dawn to dusk during the month of Ramadhan. From before sunrise until after sundown they abstain from eating, drinking, smoking and sex, and they refrain from showing anger and thinking or expressing ill-feelings towards others. As a foreigner, you are not expected to fast; however, it is important to respect those who do. Being aware of the challenges they face, and refraining from eating, drinking, smoking or expressing anger in public will aid your cultural understanding and relationships. Since Muslims go to a special evening prayer, you should consult your partners when you plan to hold an evening activity. They may be willing to attend, but they will also appreciate your sensitivity to their religious practices.

Idul Fitri, which follows Ramadhan, is a big holiday for Indonesian Muslims. It is a time when people get together and celebrate. On *Idul Fitri*, people ask for and give forgiveness to others. Although it is culturally enriching to visit Indonesia immediately following Ramadhan, don't expect to get much business done. Since family is paramount to Indonesians, they usually take leave during this holiday and return to their hometowns to be with their families and friends. You would be surprised to see how quiet Jakarta is during the *Idul Fitri* holiday.