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# Mosque iftar converges worship, practicality and belonging

The Malaysian Reserve, Malaysia



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by AKMAR ANNUAR & SHAUQI WAHAB

ACROSS the Klang Valley, mosque breaking-of-fast (*iftar*) programmes are drawing large crowds as families, students and urban workers lean on organised *iftar* meals that blend worship with rising living costs, time pressure and the search for community.

Checks by *The Malaysian Reserve* (TMR) found that the pattern was consistent, such as queues forming early, volunteers moving quickly and worshippers arriving with reasons that were as practical as they were personal.

Mosque *iftar* programmes have long existed as part of Malaysia's charity culture during Ramadhan, but the practice is now expanding into a routine for city residents who live away from family, juggle multiple jobs or classes or simply want a calmer place to break fast than a bazaar or food court.

Some worshippers treat the month as "mosque-hopping", moving between different locations for variety, atmosphere or proximity to public transport, while others return to the same mosque daily because it anchors the evening around prayer and removes the cost and labour of cooking.

What TMR observed is a form of nightly urban infrastructure that is not formally described as such, but functions like it.

The mosques provide food and space, the public provides donations and volunteer labour and a wide mix of people use the system in ways that reflect the realities of city life.

## Masjid Al-Sultan Abdullah: Landmark Mosque Beside PNB 118 and Merdeka Stadium

Masjid Al-Sultan Abdullah, located between Merdeka Stadium and the PNB 118 Tower, has quickly become a central *iftar* stop for commuters as it sits within a dense public transport corridor.

The mosque's architecture is modern, with triangulated patterns that reference strength and contemporary design language and a minimalist prayer hall shaped by a grand internal dome.

The interior is designed to interact with light, with sun tunnels that shift shadows across the space as the evening approaches.

While Masjid Al-Sultan Abdullah is a place of worship, it is also designed as a community space within the PNB 118 precinct and its *iftar* programme reflects that scale through volunteer-led, structured distribution.

A PNB volunteer told TMR that the mosque typically caters for about 1,000 people daily, with food handed out at around 6.20pm. The crowd made up largely of workers and students who can walk in easily from the monorail, while those who miss the first round can still buy food at a nearby Ramadhan bazaar.

For Nur Iffah Najwa Jasmi, who lives alone in Kuala Lumpur (KL) and works nearby, the mosque's location makes it an easy stop after work. Breaking fast there feels less isolating than eating by herself at home.

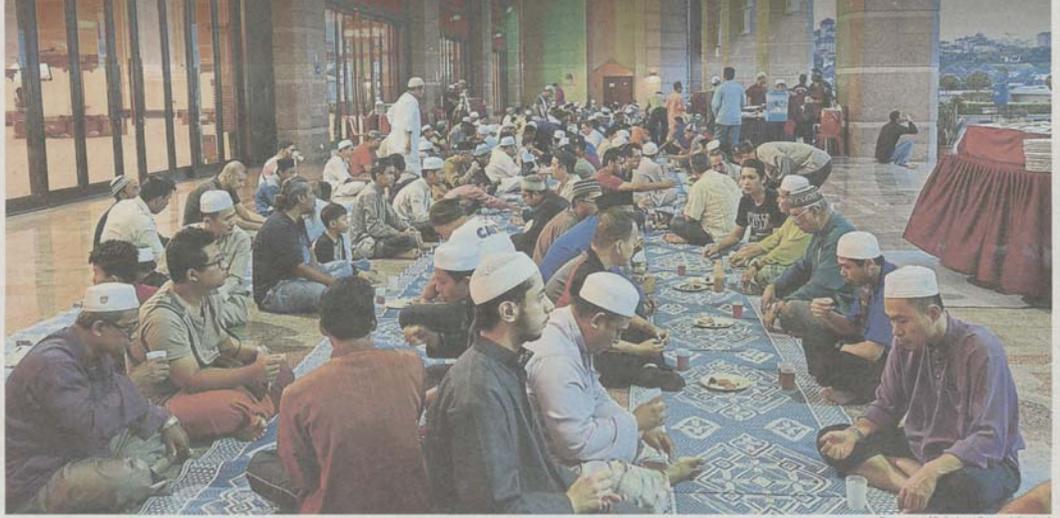
"My family is far away, there is no one to talk to at home," she shared with TMR.

Nur Nannah Mahadzir also prefers mosque *iftar* because it fits the routine of working in the city, offering a calmer setting and the chance to meet friends before *maghrib*, followed by prayers in the same place.

"It is easy for workers like me," she said. Families were also seen breaking fast at the mosques, especially when they want a fun outing without leaving behind their Ramadhan routines.

A father of four who only wanted to be

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Picture courtesy of Perbadanan Putrajaya Facebook

known as Maein, said his family has made it a habit to break fast at mosques.

His wife, Fifi, said they had broken fast at Masjid Batu Muda near their home and decided to try Masjid Al-Sultan Abdullah for the first time, partly because it allows them to eat and then proceed straight into *maghrib* prayers without travelling elsewhere.

"The children like going out and for me, I don't have to cook and can close the kitchen," she told TMR.

The mosque's commuter-friendly location has also shaped the wider crowd pattern, with many treating *iftar* as a practical stop between office and home, turning mosque meals from an occasional charity offering into a city routine.

## Masjid Damansara Perdana: In-house Cooking, Larger Target of 600 Servings Daily

Masjid Damansara Perdana, built by MK Land Holdings Bhd under the late Tan Sri Mustapha Kamal Abu Bakar's Emkay Group Sdn Bhd, has become a new community focal point in the township, including during Ramadhan when it runs daily *iftar* programmes.

The mosque was launched by the Sultan of Selangor on April 5, 2024, and can accommodate up to 3,200 worshippers.

Imam Ustaz Abdus Salam Mahmud told TMR that mosque officers monitor preparations each year.

"This year's concept is to cook in-house instead of relying on catered food, to save on food management costs," he said.

Cooks come from the local congregation, supported by volunteers including Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM) students and members of the mosque community.

The change is not just operational, but also symbolic, because it frames the *iftar*



Adree, Hazir and friends at Masjid Wilayah Persekutuan

programme as something produced by the community rather than delivered to it.

The imam said the mosque is preparing *iftar* and *moroh* (supper) for about 600 people daily this year, up from roughly 350 to 400 people a day last year.

He said the increase reflects both higher demand and stronger logistical capacity.

The expansion is visible on the ground, with longer seating areas and a wider spread of people arriving from surrounding neighbourhoods.

A mother who attended with her two children said it was her family's first time *iftar* at Masjid Damansara Perdana and she was surprised by the crowd.

The family often chooses nearby mosques for *iftar* because it makes the evening flow easier.

"We prefer breaking fast at mosques instead of restaurants, because after that we can pray *maghrib* together straight away," she said. From her home in Kepong, she did not find the distance too far and they had broken fast at a mosque near their home the previous night.

"Sometimes we stay for *tarawih* and *moroh* as well, but if the children get restless we go home and do *tarawih* on our own," she said.

The parent's explanation reflects a broader family logic in mosque *iftar* culture, where facilities and comfort determine whether worship continues beyond *maghrib*.

Younger adults attending the same mosque described a different logic, centred on living arrangements and personal schedules.

Ostina Abdul Halim, who works a walking distance away, told TMR she chooses the mosque because she lives alone and does not want to cook daily.

"I am single, so it is easier to *iftar* at the

mosque and not have to cook," she said, adding that *iftar* at the mosque makes it easy to continue into *tarawih*.

Her friend Shaf Azhar, who also lives nearby, said she sometimes changes mosques during the month.

She noticed differences in how food was served this year compared the previous one, and she linked it to the increase in crowd size.

She shared that last year, Masjid Damansara Perdana handed out a container per person whereas this year, they share their meals in the *dulang* (large platters).

Shaf preferred eating from the *dulang* because it encourages worshippers to mingle and get to know one another.

That point surfaced repeatedly among those who treat mosque *iftar* as more than a meal.

## Masjid Wilayah Persekutuan: Student-led Programmes, Search for Belonging in The City

Masjid Wilayah Persekutuan in KL is one of the city's most recognisable mosques and during Ramadhan it also becomes a site for organised student participation.

Students linked to the Majlis Agama Islam Wilayah Persekutuan (MAIWP) and Universiti Antarabangsa MAIWP (UniMAIWP) described the mosque and its programmes as a way to cure homesickness during the month, although it initially began as a way to save costs.

Muhammad Hazif Mohd Fair, a MAIWP-linked university student, said saving money is not the only reason he comes to break fast at a mosque.

"Saving money is honestly a bonus, but it is not the only reason, because I come as the



Food for 4 at Masjid Damansara Perdana

environment calms me," he told TMR.

He said *iftar* with others at the mosque is more meaningful compared to eating quickly between classes or alone in a hostel room.

He "mosque-hops" daily because the university organises programmes at different mosques throughout Ramadhan.

"I like going to different mosques because the vibe and the people are different each time," he said.

For Muhammad Hazif, the *iftar* meal is only one part of the programme, while the bigger draw is the feeling of being included in a community.

Additionally, he reflected that the absence of mosque *iftar* would likely push him into a more solitary routine of buying bazaar food and eating alone.

Another MAIWP student, Muhammad



Nafhan (left) and Hakimi, adopt 'mosque hops'



Masjid Al-Sultan Abdullah has quickly become a central iftar stop for commuters



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Iftar at Masjid Wilayah Persekutuan

Pics by Akmar Annuar & Shazq Wabidi

Adree Mohd Arif, said his relationship with mosque iftar changed over time.

"At first, saving money was definitely the main reason because student life can be quite tight financially," he said.

However, after a few visits, it became a more personal routine for him rather than just a practical option.

"It feels comforting, it feels like home, even among strangers," he said.

He added that without the mosque iftar programme, Ramadhan would feel quieter and more routine.

Like Muhammad Hatif, he said he would likely buy food, eat alone and return to assignments, with less of the community and spiritual atmosphere that comes with mosque iftar.

Driven by practical or community reasons, the student experience highlights how mosque iftar intersects with the city's cost-of-living pressures.

### Shah Alam's Blue Mosque: Ramadan Hub for Families, Students

Shah Alam is known for its abundance of mosques and prayer halls, with nearly every neighbourhood anchored by a sarau or masjid that comes alive during Ramadhan.

Yet despite the wide choice available, many students consistently gravitate towards the iconic Masjid Sultan Salahuddin Abdul Aziz Shah in Shah Alam for iftar.

Affectionately known as the Blue Mosque, it has become more than just a landmark for the locals while its popularity has attracted outsiders.

It is a Ramadhan hub where young people gather not only for the convenience of a well-organised breaking of fast, but also for

the atmosphere, facilities, overall space capacity and sense of community that set it apart from the rest.

Ismail Naufal Al-Bakri Ishaq travelled from Rantau Panjang to iftar at the Blue Mosque after discovering its family-friendly facilities on TikTok.

The father of a three-year-old son said the mosque's childcare service was the main reason he decided to come.

"So far, I think the Sultan Salahuddin Abdul Aziz Shah Mosque is the best, because one of them is that it has a caretaker for your kids. The second thing is that its facilities are very good," he told TMR.

For Ismail Naufal and his wife, the availability of a supervised childcare room allows them to perform their prayers, including tarawih, with peace of mind.

He said the registration and pass system ensures only parents can collect their children, boosting his confidence in leaving his son under the mosque's care.

He also commended the mosque's spacious and air-conditioned environment which makes it easier for families and friends to gather comfortably.

While he may consider visiting other mosques, Ismail Naufal believed that Shah Alam currently offers the best overall experience for families.

He also welcomed the trend of students iftar at mosques.

"The practice of students iftar at the mosque should be promoted so that they can save on their daily income," he opined.

Ismail Naufal encouraged more Muslims to embrace the culture of iftar at mosques, especially students, as it strengthens bonds within the community during Ramadhan, while encouraging oneself to make going to

the mosque a habit.

Meanwhile, two first-year software engineering students from the Multimedia University (MMU) Cyberjaya, Nafhan Nazrudin and Hakimi Halmishabri, were among the many young people drawn to Masjid Sultan Salahuddin Abdul Aziz Shah this Ramadhan.

Currently staying at their hostel in Cyberjaya, the duo described this year as their first experience trying out the "mosque-hopping" trend, popular among students during this holy month.

Nafhan said the idea was driven by personal initiative rather than recommendation.

"It is so that we can be closer to God because in this month of Ramadhan, we are more eager to collect rewards. At the same time, we can strengthen our relationships with others," he told TMR, acknowledging that the mosque atmosphere allows them to build connections beyond campus life.

Their visit to Shah Alam was partly spontaneous after their initial plan to study in KL fell through when public libraries were closed.

From there, they stopped by Raja Tun Uda library before heading to the mosque for iftar.

Hakimi highlighted the financial relief mosque iftar programmes provide for students managing tight budgets.

He said while allowances from Majlis Amanah Rakyat's (Mara) scholarship are helpful, students still need to cover hostel and university fees.

Both students said their Ramadhan routine remains flexible, depending on mood and circumstances, but agreed that the strong turnout at mosques reflects how popular communal iftar has become among youths.

### Exciting Quiz Activities at TNB Bangsar Mosque

Another popular option in the list for mosque-hopping is the Tenaga Nasional Bhd (TNB) Mosque in Bangsar.

Also known as Kompleks Balai Islam An-Nur, it is a large, modern mosque complex situated on a 1.67 ha site within the TNB headquarters campus, able to accommodate up to 2,850 worshippers at a time.

With ample parking spots available, the mosque is heavily guarded and ushers guests to empty parking spots around the mosque.

Around 6.30pm, TNB staff volunteers begin a daily quiz to fill the waiting time before iftar.

The trivia covers Quran-related knowledge and Islamic topics, with winners receiving TNB's limited-edition Touch 'n Go card loaded with RM50.

Similar to the Sultan Salahuddin Abdul Aziz Shah Mosque, the TNB Mosque serves pre-packed meals for the guests to avoid disproportionate servings.

Yusnorizam Yusof praised the mosque for its family-friendly facilities, which make iftar convenient and comfortable for parents and children alike. Visiting the mosque for the second time this Ramadhan, he highlighted the ease of access, ample parking, and welcoming atmosphere.

"Sometimes we want to bring our child along so he can experience breaking fast at the mosque. He really enjoys it. Also, the TNB Bangsar mosque is very comfortable and all the staff are very friendly," he shared with TMR.

Yusnorizam was also amazed at how the supportive staff and well-organised facilities create a safe environment for families, such as providing playground areas for children, with supervision from the staff members.

He also appreciated the mosque's provision of meals and childcare support, which allows parents to perform prayers without worry.

"To make fasting easier for everyone, I believe initiatives by corporate bodies like TNB and the mosque, which provide meals, really help parents who want to focus on their worship," he said.



'mosque-hopping' trend to save money for university bills



Yusnorizam's 2nd time of iftar at TNB Bangsar Mosque