

Module: North Africa and Southwest Asia
Topic Content: Cultural Influences of Southwest Asia

Cultural Influences of Southwest Asia



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Introduction

Introduction

Click **NEXT** to search the hashtag **#ArabNations**

In this interactivity, you will learn about the cultural influences of Southwest Asia by following different social media conversations.

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#ArabNations

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Although many Arabs are also Muslim, the term has nothing to do with a religious or racial background. [#ArabNations](#)

The term Arab describes people from a cultural region where the Arabic language is spoken. [#ArabNations](#)

Turkey, Israel, Iran, and Afghanistan are some of the main exceptions. [#ArabNations](#)

Most of the countries in Southwest Asia are unified by a shared Arab heritage. [#ArabNations](#)

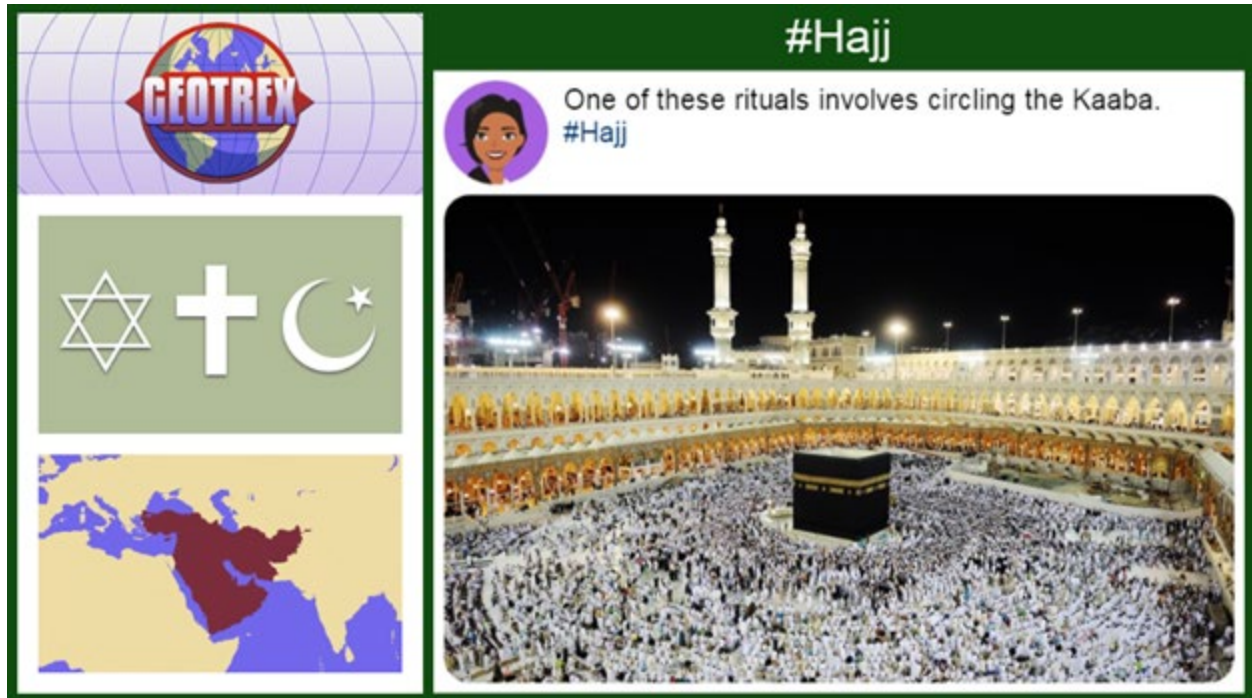
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The term Arab describes people from a cultural region where the Arabic language is spoken. Although many Arabs are also Muslim, the term has nothing to do with a religious or racial background. Arab people are racially diverse and many Arabs identify as Christian, Jewish, or atheist.

Click next to search the hashtag [Hajj](#).

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#Hajj



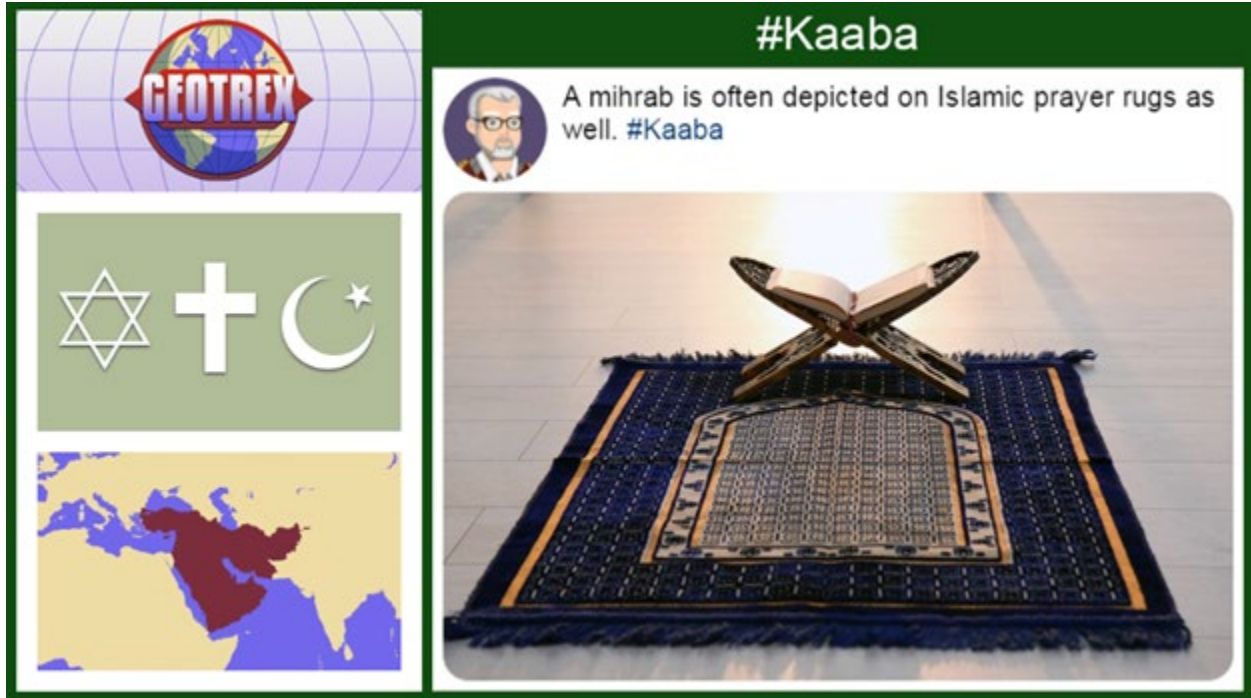
The Hajj is an Islamic pilgrimage to the city of Mecca, Saudi Arabia. It is also one of the Five Pillars of Islam. All adult Muslims are expected to complete the Hajj at least once in their lifetime, if they are physically and financially able.

This pilgrimage occurs once every year during a five-day period determined by the Islamic calendar. During this period, Muslim worshipers carry out a series of rites and rituals. One of these rituals involves circling the Kaaba.

Click next to search the hashtag Kaaba.

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#Kaaba



The Kaaba is considered the holiest site in the Islamic faith. The Kaaba is a black cube-shaped shrine located in the Great Mosque of Mecca. Wherever Muslims are in the world, they face toward the Kaaba during prayer.

You may have noticed semicircular alcoves in Islamic mosques. This architectural element is called a mihrab. A mihrab indicates the direction of the Kaaba, and therefore the direction of Islamic prayer. A mihrab is often depicted on Islamic prayer rugs as well.

Click next to search the hashtag Jerusalem.

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#Jerusalem



The city of Jerusalem is one of the world's oldest cities and a religious heritage site for Jews, Christians, and Muslims. The Church of the Holy Sepulcher, the Dome of the Rock, and the Western Wall are all important religious sites in the city.

Christians believe the Church of the Holy Sepulcher is built at the site where Jesus was crucified, buried, and resurrected. The Church of the Holy Sepulcher was first built by the Roman Emperor Constantine the Great in 335 A.D. (C.E.). The structure has been destroyed, rebuilt, restored, and remodeled many times throughout history.

The Dome of the Rock is an Islamic shrine located on a hill in Jerusalem known as the Temple Mount. The shrine has a golden dome and contains a large rock, called the Foundation Stone. Muslims believe that Muhammad, the founder of Islam, rose to heaven from this location.

In Judaism, the Temple Mount is believed to be the location of the ancient Temple of King Solomon. The Second Temple of Jerusalem was built on the Temple Mount, but all that remains is the Western Wall. The Western Wall, also known as the Wailing Wall, is a sacred prayer site for Jews. Visitors traditionally wedge strips of paper with prayers into the cracks between the stones of the wall.

Click next to search the hashtag Hagia Sophia.

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#HagiaSophia



Hagia Sophia is located in Istanbul, which is situated on the Bosphorus Strait between Europe and Asia. This structure demonstrates the cultural diffusion typical of Southwest Asia.

Hagia Sophia was constructed in the sixth century by the Byzantine Emperor Justinian I. Istanbul was named Constantinople at the time, and was the capital of the Byzantine Empire. Hagia Sophia functioned as an Orthodox cathedral and featured an impressive dome and mosaic art.

The Ottoman Empire conquered the city of Constantinople in 1453 A.D. (C.E.). The city was renamed Istanbul, and Hagia Sophia was converted to mosque. During the renovation, many of the mosaics were painted over and a mihrab replaced the altar. Four tall minarets were also built outside the original cathedral for the Islamic call to prayer.

In 1934, the Turkish government converted Hagia Sophia into a secular museum. It has become a popular tourist attraction and a monument to the history and culture of Istanbul.

Click next to search the hashtag religious art.

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#ReligiousArt



Southwest Asia is the birthplace of three of the world's major monotheistic religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. This religious diversity is reflected in the art found throughout the region.

A mosaic is artwork created by arranging colorful pieces of stone, tile, or glass. Mosaics have been used to decorate Jewish synagogues and Christian churches for thousands of years. This thirteenth century mosaic of Jesus is found in Hagia Sophia.

Mosaic is also used to decorate Islamic mosques. Instead of depicting a religious event or figure, colorful tiles are arranged into elaborate geometric patterns.

Islamic art also has a rich tradition of calligraphy that can be traced back to the Quran. The Quran is considered a sacred book, so Muslims took great care when writing the Arabic text. Over time, Islamic calligraphy developed into a unique art form of its own.

Stained glass windows are another example of religious artwork found throughout Southwest Asia. This colorful glass is often associated with churches, but can be found in synagogues and mosques as well. This stained glass window decorates a synagogue in Jerusalem.