

# Virginia-Based American Muslim Explains What Happens During Hajj in September

## Pilgrimage to Mecca provides once-in-a-lifetime experience for Muslims around the world

Fairfax, Va. —This month more than two million Muslims from all over the world will make their way to the Saudi Arabian city of Mecca, completing much of the final journey on foot, to live in the tent city of Mina and pray together in a holy mosque. All Muslims who can afford to do so are asked to make this holy pilgrimage once in their lifetime in order to complete the fifth pillar of Islam.

In 2008, Fairfax resident Sam Mak and her husband took their then 12-year-old son on the journey known as Hajj; it was nothing short of a life-changing experience for them. Mak who had dreamed about making Hajj her entire life, spent four days living in the five-mile long tent city of Mina where as many as two million people at a time find temporary living quarters. “Somehow,” she said, “they are fed and clothed and have a place to sleep.” She said that some people have applied to the Saudis for as many as 20 years before they are lucky enough to be given a visa.

Mak and her family reached Mecca at midnight, expecting that it would be less crowded. It was not. It took an hour for her family to make their way into the mosque and another hour to leave after finishing their prayers. “When you walk into the mosque there is an electric current. You can feel the energy of praying with millions of people,” she said.

Mak is available for commentary on:

- Why so few Muslims can afford to make hajj and the incredible lengths some of them go to in order to make the pilgrimage.
- What she experienced in the 50-mile journey from the airport to Mecca.
- Sharing a tent with 40 women for four days.
- The similarities between Islam, Christianity and Judaism and how Hajj compares to the pope visiting the United States.

### **ABOUT SAM MAK**

Sam Mak is an experienced diversity and multicultural trainer and facilitator who has developed a video series that answers commonly asked questions about Islam. She also speaks to community groups and international organizations about the rights of Muslim women.

**AVAILABILITY:** Fairfax, Va., nationwide by arrangement and via telephone

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