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Cape Town's Circle of Islam – A prophesy fulfilled

According to local legend, a prophesy made 250 years ago foretold that a “Circle of Islam” would embrace Cape Town.

Today, there are numerous Mazaars or Kramats sited around the peninsula, where pilgrims can pay their respects. Most of the Saints who are laid to rest in these shrines were revered leaders in a revolt against the Dutch invasion of Ceylon, India and the Javanese Islands during the 17th and 18th centuries. Unfortunately, many revolutionary leaders were captured and, together with their followers, banished to the Cape as slaves or indentured labourers. This was also the fate of Malaysian Muslims who supported the revolt.

Among these early political prisoners were the pioneering Saints who first brought Islam to the Cape, and who were instrumental in the eventual spread of Islam into Southern Africa. Since practising Islam in the Cape was illegal at the time, their achievements were so highly lauded by their followers that their graves came to be regarded as Kramats. It is the positioning of these Kramats that is said to fulfil the old prophesy of a “Circle of Islam” at the Cape, and legend has it that those living within the circle are protected from natural disasters such as earthquakes and plague.

The circle starts with the Kramats on the slopes of Signal Hill in the Bo-Kaap, travels to the top of Signal Hill, then proceeds along the coast to Bakoven and Oude Kraal, from where it spirals round the mountain to Constantia. The circle then continues to the most renown of the Kramats, that of Sheikh Yusuf, in Macassar, and is finally completed by the historical shrine on Robben Island.

Etiquette when visiting a Kramat

These guidelines are for the benefit of visitors who may not be entirely familiar with traditions surrounding visits to holy shrines. Firstly, shoes should be removed. Also, please don't sit on, lean on, or put your feet on the grave. Stand or sit respectfully, facing the grave. Avoid loud conversation. Your sole intention should be to derive spiritual upliftment from the holy shrine.

Tana Baru Cemetery in the Bo-Kaap

1 – Tuan Guru

Of the three Auliya buried in the Muslim cemetery in the Bo-Kaap, Imam Abdullah ibn Kadi Abdus Salaam (better known as Tuan Guru) is perhaps the best known. He was a prince from Tidore (in Eastern Indonesia) and a descendant of the Sultan of Morocco. He was accused of conspiracy against the Dutch, captured, and brought to the Cape as a state prisoner in 1780, after which he was imprisoned on Robben Island for 12 years. While there, he authored a book on the philosophy and study of Muslim law. Upon his release, he established the Dorp Street Madrasah, where he taught Free Blacks and Eastern slave children to read and write Arabic. Hence, he acquired the nickname Tuan Guru which means “Mister Teacher”.

2 – Tuan Sayed Alawie

Tuan Sayed Alawie hailed from Mokka in Yemen, originally, but spent many years in Indonesia as a missionary, teaching and spreading Islam. In 1744, he was banished to the Cape, classified as a “Mohammedaansche Priester” (Islamic Priest) and sentenced to 12 years in prison. On his release, he became a policeman in Cape Town, not to collaborate with colonial authorities, but to gain access to the guarded slave quarters. Local legend has it that he would enter the slave lodge every night, supposedly on duty, with a Qur'an in hand to teach and spread Islam, and later, he would return with food for the slaves. He died in 1803, a missionary to the end.

3 – Tuan Nuruman

Tuan Nuruman was also known by two other names: Imam Norman and Paay Schaapie de Oude. He was brought to the Cape as a slave and lived as a slave in the slave lodge (now a cultural history museum in Adderley Street). His fellow slaves hailed him as their priest, their doctor, their oracle, but most of all, their Wali (saint, friend). In 1786, he gifted a group of slaves who were planning to escape with an azeemat (talisman), but the group was caught, and the azeemat implicated Nuruman, so he was imprisoned on Robben Island. Upon his release, he involved himself in all things religious, eventually becoming Imam. When he died in 1810, he was buried in the plot of land now known as the Tana Baru.



Tuan Nuruman

Signal Hill

4 – Sheikh Mohamed Hassen Ghaibie Shah al Qadri

The grave of Sheikh Mohamed Hassen Ghaibie Shah is inside the recently erected tomb on Signal Hill Ridge. It is the most visible and striking of the shrines on Signal Hill. Oral tradition has it that he was a follower of Sheikh Yusuf of Macassar. When Sheikh Yusuf died, two of his followers and his daughter chose to remain in the Cape, rather than return home to Indonesia. One of these two was Sheikh Mohamed Hassen Ghaibie Shah who became a learned teacher of Islam. The other was Tuan Kaape-ti-low.

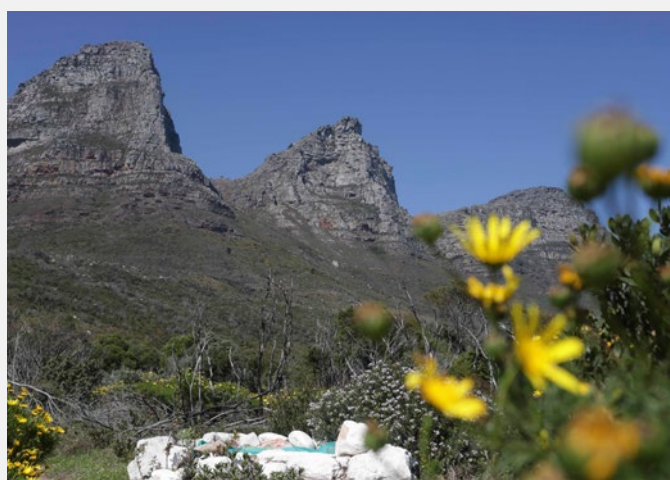
5 – Tuan Kaape-ti-low

The shrine of Tuan Kaape-ti-low is a humble rectangular structure with a moon and star built onto one of its walls. It is situated a short distance from the shrine of Sheikh Mohamed, and is clearly visible from the entrance to the Boy Scout Camp on Signal Hill. It is believed that Tuan Kaape-ti-low was a Javanese general in Sheikh Yusuf's army, who was banished to the Cape with Sheikh Yusuf. Not much more is known about Tuan Kaape-ti-low, but there is evidence that he became an ardent teacher of Islam, and was known in the community as Jawhi Tuan.

Bakoven

6 – Sayed Jaffer

Sayed Jaffer was a Sheikh who was banished to the Cape by the Dutch East India Company. His grave was only discovered toward the end of the 19th century. It can be reached from Victoria Road, Bakoven. Stone steps hewn into the mountainside lead to a pathway which directs pilgrims to the shrine. There are actually four graves in this area, but signposts have been erected to direct pilgrims to the relevant shrine. It is a fairly simple grave, raised on a concrete platform, which is actually the floor of the original tomb that was washed away by floods and storm waters in the early 1970s.



Sayed Jaffer


Oudekraal

7 – Sheikh Noorul Mubeen


The Kramat of Sheikh Noorul Mubeen lies in a rather isolated area known as Oudekraal. It can be reached from Victoria Road, but only after climbing 99 steps that lead up the mountain slope to the grave itself, which is inside a recently renovated tomb beside a stream. Popular legend has it that after the Sheikh's banishment to the Cape, he was imprisoned on Robben Island, but escaped from there. Some say he swam across to the coast where he now lies buried, others believe he walked across the water. What is clear is that he made contact with slaves and fishermen in the area, and set about teaching them Islam, becoming their Imam.




Tana Baru Cemetery




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Constantia

8 – Sheikh Abdurahman Matebe Shah

The Saint who lies buried here was the last of the Malaccan Sultans. He was banished to the Cape by the Dutch after they defeated his army at the Castle of Soeroesang. He arrived in the Cape in 1668. He was sent to the Company's forest at Constantia, where he encountered many slaves working mostly for the Company, and set about teaching them the message of Islam. When he died, they chose to bury him on the exact spot where he meditated and said his prayers. Today, his shrine can be found near the gateway to Klein Constantia.

9 – Sayed Mahmud

This shrine is located a fair distance from the road, on Islam Hill in Groot Constantia. Sayed Mahmud was a Malaccan spiritual leader who was captured with his Sultan, Sheikh Abdurahman Matebe Shah (see above). There is an inscription on his shrine which tells the story of how these 'Orang Cayen' (great men of wealth and influence) were brought to the Cape in chains.

Macassar

10 – Sheikh Yusuf

Sheikh Yusuf was born in 1626 at Macassar, a province of the island known today as Sulawesi. He was a nephew of the King of Goa. After completing his Islamic studies in Arabia, he could not return to his home because the Dutch had seized Macassar, so he went to Java where he married the daughter of the Sultan of Banten. For many years, the Sultan and Sheikh Yusuf led the resistance against the Dutch, but were ultimately defeated. Sheikh Yusuf was detained in Ceylon for years, but was transferred to the Cape of Good Hope in 1693.

Sheikh Yusuf was held in such high regard, that Governor Simon van der Stel gave him a royal welcome. He and his 49 followers were housed on a farm named Zandvliet. This small settlement blossomed into the first real Muslim Community in South Africa; it also became a sanctuary for slaves fleeing from colonial masters; and it was from here that the Sheikh reached out to others across Cape Town, spreading the holy message of Islam. When he died on 23 May 1699, he was buried on a hill on the farm, and later a shrine was erected over his grave. Centuries later, the area known as Zandvliet was renamed Macassar, in honour and remembrance of the holy man's birthplace.

Sea Point Promenade

The Sea Point Promenade stretches from Mouille Point to Sea Point, offering a scenic path for walking, jogging, cycling, and skating. Dogs on leashes are welcome, and owners must clean up after them.



Cape Town Stadium

Cape Town Stadium

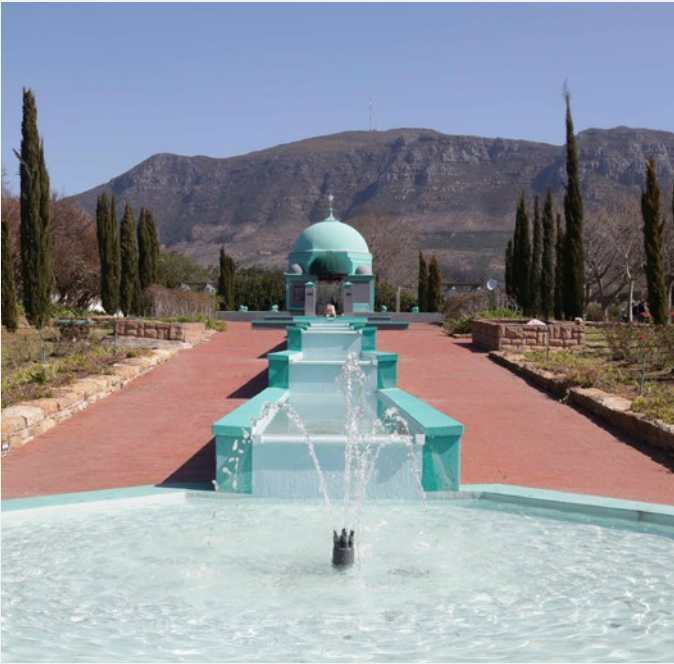
Cape Town Stadium in Green Point, built for the 2010 FIFA World Cup, now hosts soccer, rugby, tennis, and concerts.

Kirstenbosch National Botanical Garden

Kirstenbosch, on the eastern slopes of Table Mountain, is renowned for its stunning setting and diverse plant life. It covers 528 hectares, with 36 cultivated. Highlights include the Tree Canopy Walkway and various trails. Light meals and gifts are available at the café and shop.



Kirstenbosch Botanical Garden



Islam Hill

Robben Island

11 – Sayed Abduragham Motura

There are very few official records about the holy man who lies buried on Robben Island, save that his name was Sayed Abduragham Motura, also known as Tuan Matarah, and that he was a prisoner on the island. There are, however, legends aplenty. He was a very learned man, a Sultan, who spread the message of Islam and offered great solace to fellow prisoners, especially those in ill health. It is said that the island was too small to chain him, for he seemed to come and go without detection, often walking across the water to visit friends in Cape Town. Upon his death, he was buried on the island and his grave soon became a respected shrine. Ironically, in 1969, the Apartheid prison authorities built an actual shrine, a tomb, over his grave, in an attempt to appease Muslims for the imprisonment and murder of the highly respected Imam Abdullah Haron, in Cape Town. Today, the shrine has become a symbol of the struggle that Islam and its followers had to suffer in order to gain true freedom of religion which, in the Cape, was only granted in 1804.

Take a Trip to Seal Island

From Mariner's Wharf in Hout Bay, ferries to Seal Island (Duiker Island) offer wildlife sightings, including Cape fur seals and seabirds. Bring a light jacket as it can get breezy.



Chapman's Peak Drive

Simon's Town

Simon's Town, home to the SA Navy, is where nature meets adventure. From whale watching to visiting the African Penguin colony, the town offers rich marine life. Don't miss the story of Just Nuisance, the legendary Great Dane, at the Simon's Town Museum.

Boulders Penguin Colony

Boulders Penguin Colony, near Simon's Town, is a protected haven for African Penguins. The colony features three beaches reserved for penguins, with strict rules to ensure their safety. Enjoy viewing them from the boardwalks.

The V&A Waterfront

The V&A Waterfront, Cape Town's second most visited destination, features the oldest working harbor in the southern hemisphere, along with hotels, restaurants, shops, and historical landmarks like the Clock Tower and Chavonnes Battery. It's a vibrant place to shop, eat, and explore.

Boulders Beach

Nine Historic Mosques of the Cape

12 – Auwal Mosque

This stately Gothic-sThe Auwal Masjid, at 43 Dorp Street in the Bo-Kaap, was the first mosque in South Africa. It was founded by Tuan Guru, whose Kramat is in Tana Baru Cemetery. In 1795, after the Cape became a British territory, the authorities were more favourably disposed towards Islam, so they granted permission to build a masjid. Tuan Guru immediately converted an existing warehouse, first into a madrasah, then into a masjid, now known as Auwal Masjid.

13 – Mosque Shafee

Mosque Shafee, at 166 Chiappini Street in the Bo-Kaap, was built in 1847. It was first named the Mosque of Imam Hadjie, then later renamed Mosque Shafee. It is a Sunni Mosque which welcomes families, and even provides facilities for children, with separate prayer spaces for women to ensure privacy and comfort. They also accommodate different language backgrounds.

14 – Masjid Boorhaanol Islam

This mosque can be found at 196 Longmarket Street, Bo-Kaap. It is a beautiful green and white, with an eye-catching minaret that can be seen and admired from afar. This section of Longmarket street is fairly steep, cobbled, and very narrow, so parking is limited.

15 – Nurul Islam Mosque

Masjid Nurul Islam is also in the Bo-Kaap, at 134 Buitengracht Street. It is the third oldest masjid in the country, but it was the first that was initiated and founded by a congregation. It was established in 1844 as the culmination of a group effort, and among the founders, were two sons of Tuan Guru, who founded the first mosque in South Africa. Website: masjidnurulislam.co.za

16 – Palm Tree Mosque

The Palm Tree Mosque, at 85 Long Street, is sometimes called the Dadelboom Mosque, because dadelboom is Afrikaans for date palm tree. And, yes, there is a large palm tree in front of the mosque. For the benefit of our non-Muslim readers, we should mention here that palm trees have great spiritual significance in Islam, so this beautiful palm tree represents far more than may meet the eye.

Halaal Guide to Cape Town

We've discovered a variety of eateries, in and around the Peninsula, all strictly Halaal.

Tasca Mozambique

Located at Makers Landing, V&A Waterfront, Tasca Mozambique is a Muslim-owned spot known for Portuguese cuisine, peri-peri chicken, seafood, and vegetarian dishes. Enjoy al fresco dining in summer or order via UberEats.

Saray Restaurant

For authentic Turkish food, visit Saray Restaurant in the Clock Tower Building, V&A Waterfront. Enjoy meze starters, kebabs, and baklava. Explore their menu at saray.co.za. Reservations: 066 430 3391 or 082 868 4210.

Conscious Carnivores

Located at Makers Landing, V&A Waterfront, Conscious Carnivores specializes in Halaal, non-processed steaks. Contact: 061 499 1217.

Biesmiellah Restaurant

Found at 2 Wale Street, Biesmiellah is known for its Cape Malay and seafood curries, along with vegetarian and vegan options.

Bo-Kaap Deli

At 114 Church Street, Bo-Kaap, Bo-Kaap Deli offers a blend of coffee shop and restaurant vibes with authentic Cape Malay cuisine. Try their salmon sensation breakfast.

Bo-Kaap Kombuis

This family-run restaurant at 7 August Street, Bo-Kaap, serves traditional Cape Malay dishes like lamb breyani and masala chicken. They offer vegan options and have a fireplace for winter. Opening hours: 021 422 5446.

The Happy Uncles

South Africa's first halal fine dining restaurant, blending Cape Malay flavors with innovative culinary techniques. Experience a unique gastronomic journey in a chic, inviting space where every dish tells a story. Reservations: thehappyuncles.com

Eastern Food Bazaar

Located at 96 Longmarket Street, Eastern Food Bazaar features regional Indian, Turkish, and Chinese street food in a bustling setting. Take-aways available.

EatStanbul

Located at 64 Kloof Street, EatStanbul serves authentic Turkish cuisine, including vegan and vegetarian dishes. View their menu on Facebook and book a table at 021 422 1989.

17 – Jumu'a Mosque

They describe their Jama'at as "young, mixed, dynamic and fast-growing." They extend a warm welcome to all Muslims, visitors as well, and to those wishing to learn more about Islam. For women, they have dedicated ladies' ablution facilities. The Jumu'a Mosque is situated at Grey's Pass in Orange Street. You can visit their website: jumuaamosquect.co.za

18 – Habibia Soofie Masjid

This beautiful mosque, at 63 Flat Road in Rylands, offers religious education, as well as a truly peaceful place for worship. The dome and multiple minarets are breath-taking in their beauty, an architectural gem. The religious education is extensive, with regular lectures on offer. Full details are available on the website: habibia.org

19 – Zeenatul Islam Mosque

Zeenatul Islam Masjid is in the heart of District Six, in Chapel Street. Visit their website at: zeenatulislam.com There, on the home page, you will find a link which becomes live when they post official live-streams on YouTube.

20 – Noorul Islam Mosque

The Noorul Islam Masjid in Simon's Town stands majestically at the top end of Alfred Lane, in Thomas Street. From the entrance, one looks down onto Jubilee Square and, from there, to the ocean beyond. Architecturally, it is composed of harmoniously curved lines, and arched windows and doors with intricate detail. Today, it is a National Monument.



Noorul Islam Mosque

Damascus Restaurant

Situated at 305 Main Road, Sea Point, Damascus Restaurant offers Middle Eastern cuisine and a Shisha Lounge. Menu at damascus-cpt.co.za. Contact: 081 757 3148.

Andalusse Moroccan Restaurant

At 174 Main Road, Sea Point, Andalusse offers Moroccan cuisine with a blend of Berber, Arab, and Mediterranean influences. Menu on Facebook. Contact: 082 734 8615.

Prashad Café

Located below Checkers on Kloof Street, Gardens, Prashad Café offers vegan and lacto-vegetarian Indian cuisine. View their menu at prashadcafe.com. Limited indoor seating; outdoor tables available.

Prashad Café & Spices

In Old Constantia Village, Prashad Café & Spices offers the same vegan and lacto-vegetarian Indian cuisine as its Kloof Street counterpart but with a more relaxed dining atmosphere and ample parking. Visit prashadcafe.com for the menu. Contact: 021 795 0049.

District Café

A cozy, family-run spot at 115 Roodebloem Road, Woodstock, District Café offers a variety of breakfasts, burgers, seafood, and more. For the full menu, visit districtcafe.co.za. Contact: 021 447 3444 or 021 447 4321.

Sabria's Restaurant

Sabria's, at 117 Ottery Road, Wynberg, is known for its diverse Halaal fine-dining menus, including breakfast, buffet, and à la carte options. Discover their dishes, like the Mississippi Mud Pie, at sabrias.co.za. Contact: 021 761 5247.

Taj Mahal Restaurant

For a cozy, elegant Indian meal in Hout Bay, visit Taj Mahal at 44 Victoria Ave. They offer spicy curries and many vegetarian options. Check their Facebook page for more details. Contact: 083 690 8786.

Col'Cacchio

Located in Canal Walk Mall, Col'Cacchio offers Halaal pizza and pasta with a "trip to Italy" feel. Enjoy wood-fired, thin-based pizzas with various toppings on the lower level of the mall near Entrance #3.

Vida e Caffé

At 3-Arts Village, Plumstead, Vida e Caffé combines its Portuguese street culture with Halaal accreditation, offering healthy light meals such as egg pots and sandwiches. Many vegetarian and vegan options are available.

Other Must-Visit Venues

Table Mountain

Table Mountain, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is a geological marvel, estimated at 240 million years old, with some rocks dating back 600 million years. It's older than the Alps. For close-up views of its diverse flora and fauna, explore the many hiking trails suited for all levels.

Table Mountain Aerial Cableway

The Table Mountain Cableway offers stunning 360° views from its revolving floor. South African citizens enjoy a free ride on their birthday with ID. Tickets are available at the lower station or online at tablemountaintickets.co.za



Signal Hill

Signal Hill is adjacent to Lion's Head and offers panoramic views from its flat top. It was once used for signaling ships and now features the famous noonday gun, fired daily at noon.

Bo-Kaap

Bo-Kaap, a vibrant Muslim neighborhood on Signal Hill's lower slopes, is known for its colorful houses. Visit the Bo-Kaap Museum to learn about the area's history and its Muslim heritage.

Greenmarket Square

Greenmarket Square is one of Cape Town's oldest craft markets, bustling with informal traders selling traditional arts and crafts. Located at the intersection of Longmarket Street and Burg Street, it's known for its vibrant atmosphere and bargain-hunting opportunities.



Prashad Café



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Glossary:

Some of the words in this guide are of Malaysian, Indonesian and Indian origin, and may be unfamiliar to visitors, even Muslim visitors, so this brief glossary has been included to clarify certain terms.

- Auliya'h: Friends of Allah
- Azeemat: Talisman
- Jama'at: Congregation of a Mosque
- Kramat: Mazaar, name used in the Cape for tomb of a Saint
- Madrasah: Muslim School
- Mazaar: Kramat, tomb or grave of a Saint
- (S.A.W.): Peace and Blessings of Allah upon him
- Sayed or Sayyid: Descendant of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.)
- Sheikh: Teacher, learned man, elderly man
- Tuan, Sir, Mister, a title of respect
- Urs Sharif: Observance of death anniversary of a Saint
- Wali: Saint, friend
- Wali-Aallah: Friends of Allah
- Willayet: Bestowal of Sainthood

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