

# A Beacon of Faith and Harmony in the Hills of Kandy

Posted on



Kandy's Katukelle Jumma Mosque rises beneath blue skies, its golden-tipped minarets in harmony with the surrounding hills.

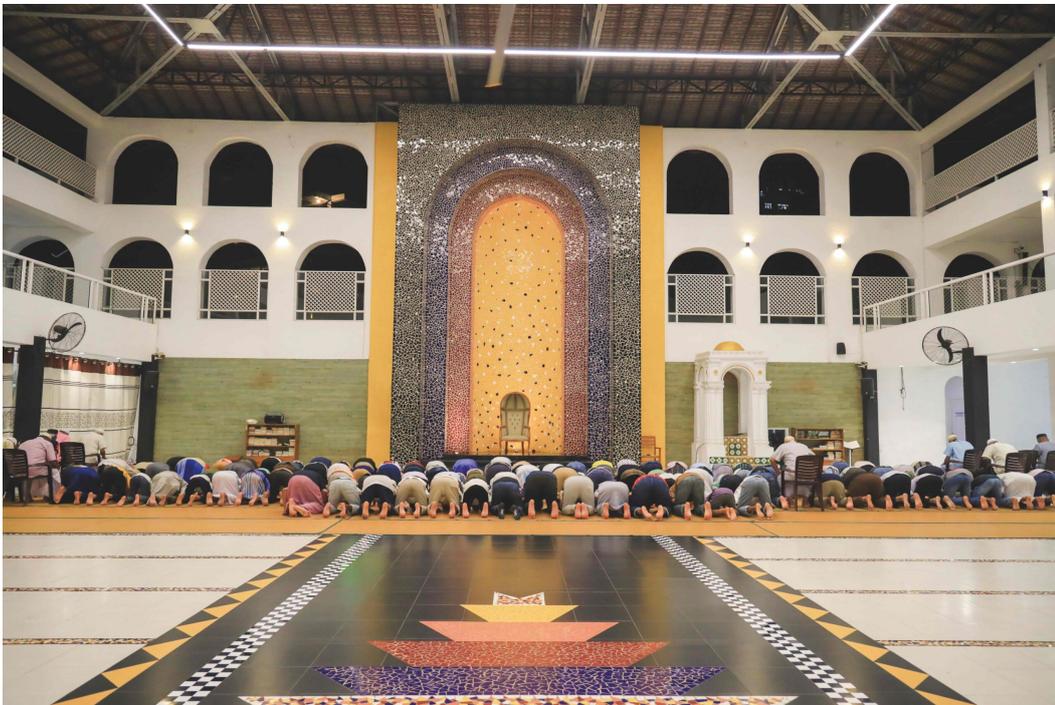
In the historic hill capital of Kandy, the Katukelle Jumma Mosque stands as a prominent symbol of faith, heritage, and community life, fostering peace, education, and interfaith understanding for all who visit.

Words: Jennifer Paldano Goonewardane.

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Photography: Amila Alahakoon.

Set against the hills of Kandy, the Katukelle Jumma Mosque departs from conventional Islamic architecture, rising with spire-like forms and presenting a silhouette that harmonizes with the local landscape. Spanning 4.5 acres, it stands on ground used for worship since 1874, when H.W. George, then Governor of the Central Province, donated the land for the first modest mosque.



Worshippers gather in quiet devotion beneath the softly illuminated, mosaic-adorned mihrab.

For travelers visiting Kandy in March, the Kandy Katukelle Jumma Mosque offers a rare opportunity to experience the serene spirituality of Ramadan alongside the joyous festivities that mark its conclusion.

While the property bears a legacy dating back over a century, the present structure – built in the early 2000s – embodies the mosque’s evolving role as a center for prayer, education, and community cohesion. Its architecture blends global Islamic influences with modern design.

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The Board of Trustees has nurtured the site as a place of harmony and learning, welcoming visitors to appreciate Islamic traditions in an atmosphere of openness. The activity outside is juxtaposed by the quietness in the inside. There's always a believer praying in the direction of Mecca.



The historic mimbar, framed in white columns and vibrant tiles, links the mosque's past and present.

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Sunlight filters through arched windows, illuminating the mosaic-lined mihrab and serene prayer hall of the Kandy Katukelle Jumma Mosque.

The mihrab features intricate mosaics that catch and reflect natural light, creating an interplay of color and texture across the prayer space. The flooring repeats this mosaic artistry, extending visual continuity. The prayer hall is expansive and uncluttered, framed by arched windows that bring in natural light and let the breeze flow through. Among the original mosque's cherished remnants is the historic mimbar, preserved alongside the modern mihrab. The overall design emphasizes minimalism, accommodating nearly 3,000 worshippers.

The mosque becomes a vibrant hub during Friday prayers, Ramadan, and Islamic festivals, reflecting its central role in the community. Inspired by Malaysian mosque architecture, the Kandy Katukelle Jumma Mosque rises across three floors, culminating in a rooftop space with contemporary influences.

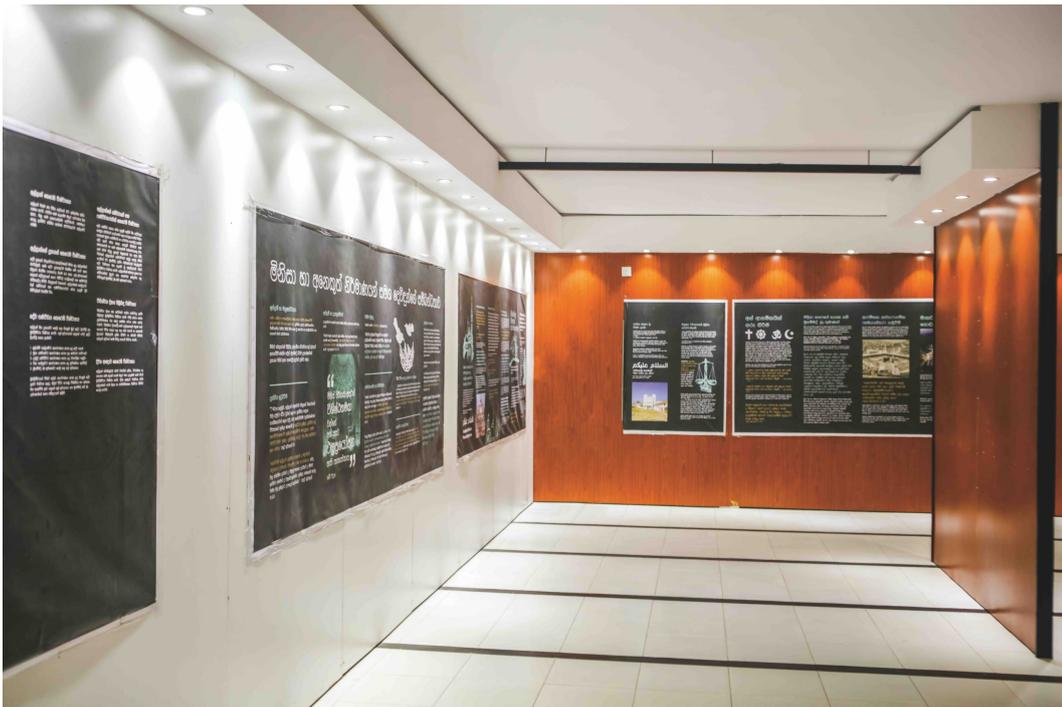
Its basement houses Sri Lanka's very first Harmony Center – a pioneering initiative fostering interfaith understanding. Since 2000, a dedicated Board of Trustees has guided the mosque's expansion and modernization.

K.R. Ahamed Siddeek, Mosque Secretary and President of the Kandy District Mosque

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Federation, says the mosque now serves over 1,500 families, combining prayer, social service, and community life. The Trustees aim to show that mosques welcome non-Muslims.

The Harmony Center was created to invite people of all faiths to learn about Islamic traditions and culture. The mosque also stands out for its inclusive linguistic approach to religious outreach – the only mosque in Sri Lanka to dedicate one Friday each month to delivering sermons in Sinhala. Typically, two Fridays are reserved for Tamil sermons, one for English, and one for Sinhala. In a milieu where public perceptions of Muslims in Sri Lanka are often shaped by media narratives that sometimes present a limited or distorted view of the community, Ash Sheik A. A. Mohamed Aslam said the Harmony Center seeks to counter such misconceptions through meaningful engagement.



Sri Lanka's very first Harmony Center.

Visitors to the center are introduced to the fundamentals of Islam, along with a historical overview of the arrival and evolution of Muslim communities on the island. He explains that certain aspects of Islam, including Sharia law and the role of madrasas, are frequently criticized without a full understanding of their purpose or context. The guided experience, therefore, offers visitors a comprehensive insight into Islamic teachings and the cultural traditions associated with Sri Lanka's Muslim

community, addressing even complex and sensitive topics such as extremist ideology.

The tour culminates in an interactive, seated discussion where visitors are encouraged to ask questions on a wide range of topics, from women's attire and Islamic finance to dietary practices and other areas of interest. The forum promotes open dialogue, where every question is welcomed and addressed thoughtfully and respectfully.



K.R. Ahamed Siddeek, Mosque Secretary and President of the Kandy District Mosque Federation.



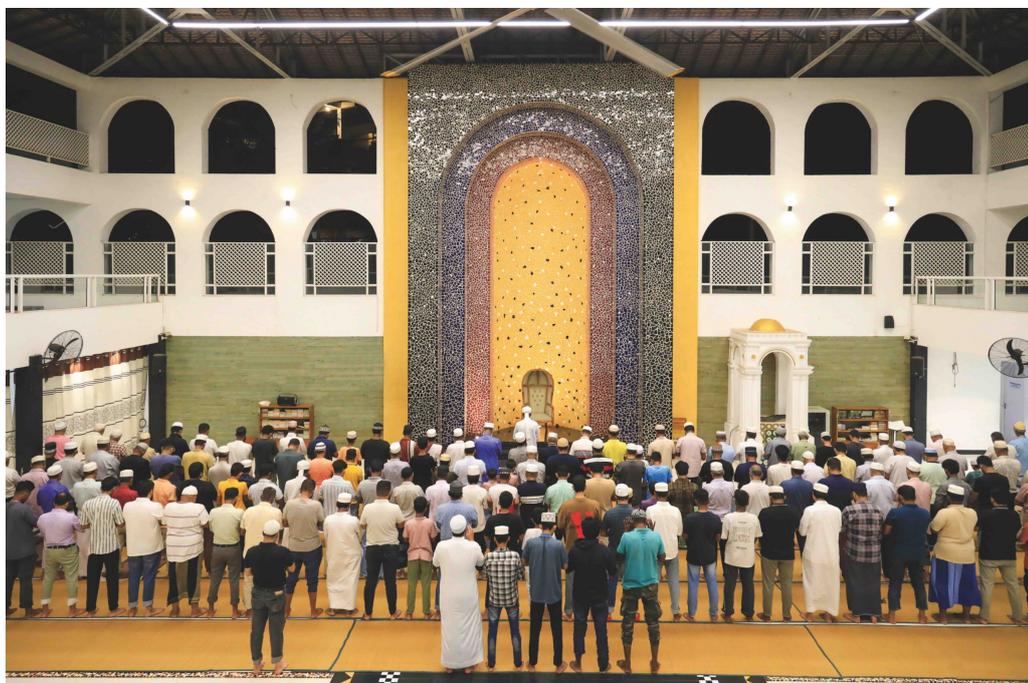
Ash Sheik A. A. Mohamed Aslam.

Ash Sheik A. A. Mohamed Aslam also spoke candidly about practices that are often misunderstood, particularly the perception that women are excluded from mosques. He clarified that women are indeed permitted to attend mosques, but prayer arrangements are typically structured to provide separate spaces for men and women. This separation, he noted, is intended to preserve focus and spiritual reflection during worship rather than to restrict participation. Within the mosque itself, distinctions of wealth, social standing, and status dissolve. In the presence of God, every worshipper stands equal, united in devotion. Congregants stand shoulder to shoulder in prayer, facing the sacred city of Mecca, symbolizing unity, humility, and the shared spiritual bond that transcends worldly differences.

Situated in the heart of the city — home to the revered Temple of the Tooth Relic — the mosque's Trustees warmly welcome pilgrims and tourists curious to explore another faith tradition.

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Outside the Kandy Katukelle Jumma Mosque, the sight of children at play often reflects its extended role as an educational hub. A modern computer learning center supports around 150 students, equipping them with vital digital skills, while an Arabic College offers religious and language education, nurturing knowledge and discipline among the younger generation. The mosque complex also includes dedicated facilities, such as a prayer and study space for women and girls, as well as a mortuary preparation room that assists families who may lack adequate space at home for final rites. Beyond the main complex, nearly two acres of elevated land serve as a Muslim burial ground.



Worshippers stand shoulder to shoulder in evening prayer beneath the illuminated mihrab.

Reflecting on the community's harmony, Ash Sheik A. A. Mohamed Aslam notes that Kandy has long fostered coexistence among diverse religious and ethnic groups, strengthened by linguistic and cultural understanding that helps minimize divisions and encourages mutual respect.

Situated in the heart of the city — home to the revered Temple of the Tooth Relic — the mosque's Trustees warmly welcome pilgrims and tourists curious to explore another faith tradition. With ample parking, the mosque invites non-Muslims to visit, often concluding their experience with a tour of the Harmony Center. For many visitors, it is a journey that replaces misconception with understanding, leaving

them with a deeper respect for Sri Lanka's Muslim community — a message that continues to spread, week by week, through word of mouth.



The dedicated ladies' prayer hall, set amid leafy surroundings with convenient parking access.

### **Eid-ul-Fitr**

For travelers visiting Kandy in March, the Kandy Katukelle Jumma Mosque offers a rare opportunity to experience the serene spirituality of Ramadan alongside the joyous festivities that mark its conclusion.

Ramadan commemorates one of Islam's five fundamental pillars — fasting. Exemptions from fasting are granted to the sick and elderly, pregnant and nursing mothers, and menstruating women. Fasting during Ramadan is more than abstaining from food and drink. It is deeply rooted in cultivating empathy and compassion.

As explained by Ash Sheik A. A. Mohamed Aslam, abstaining from meals helps individuals understand the hardships faced by those living in poverty, thereby encouraging generosity and social responsibility. The observance serves as a reminder of the struggles of the less fortunate, inspiring acts of charity and kindness within the community. The daily routine during Ramadan begins with early morning prayers between 5am and 5.30am, after which the fast commences and

continues until dusk, typically until 6.30 in the evening.

As Ramadan draws to a close, the Kandy Katukelle Jumma Mosque becomes a focal point of celebration, welcoming large congregations for special morning prayers.

In Sri Lanka, the time is roughly 13 hours. The duration of fasting varies globally, with some countries reaching nearly 19 hours. Beyond refraining from food and drink, it also emphasizes self-discipline, encouraging believers to avoid “sin” and consciously practice good deeds. Ultimately, the observance is intended to foster spiritual growth, grounded in self-restraint, reflection, and moral purity. Dates hold special significance during Ramadan, traditionally marking the end of the day-long fast. This practice has its roots in the time of Prophet Muhammad, who lived in the Middle East, where dates were a staple food.

A practice that began as a practical and nourishing way to break the fast gradually became a cherished tradition observed by Muslim communities worldwide, including in Sri Lanka. Nevertheless, Islam allows flexibility, and individuals may break their fast with locally available, culturally familiar foods. Among Sri Lankan Muslims, a popular Ramadan staple is kanji, a porridge-like preparation widely consumed at sunset.

According to Ash Sheik A. A. Mohamed Aslam, this dish traces its origins not to the Middle East but to India. He notes that many festive foods associated with the island’s Muslim community, particularly those prepared during Eid celebrations, reflect strong culinary influences from India. The evolution of these food traditions is closely linked to historical migration and trade, as many Muslim settlers arrived on the island from India for mercantile and maritime pursuits. Additionally, cultural influences from Malaysia contributed to the heritage of Sri Lanka’s Malay Muslim community, further enriching the island’s diverse Islamic culinary and cultural landscape. The conclusion of Ramadan is determined by the sighting of the new moon, with both the beginning and end of the fasting period guided by lunar observation. In Sri Lanka, this is confirmed by a committee of Islamic scholars, and the fasting month typically lasts 29 or 30 days, depending on the moon’s visibility. Festivities commence on the evening marking the end of the fast, with formal celebrations beginning the following morning with congregational prayers at mosques — underscoring the importance of placing devotion before all else. The

day usually concludes with families gathering to share festive meals. According to Ash Sheik A. A. Mohamed Aslam, while religious observances remain central, cultural traditions also enrich the celebrations. One such cherished practice is the sharing of trays of sweets and festive dishes with neighbors — a custom deeply rooted in Sri Lanka's broader cultural heritage of exchanging food during celebrations. This tradition reflects the adaptability of the island's Muslim community, which has embraced and integrated local customs into its own cultural expression.



The Kandy Katukelle Jumma Mosque glows under the moonlight, its twin minarets rising above the softly lit entrance.

Following the completion of Ramadan, some devotees voluntarily observe an additional six days of fasting as a form of reflection and spiritual renewal, a practice often embraced by the elderly. As Ramadan draws to a close, the Kandy Katukelle Jumma Mosque becomes a focal point of celebration, welcoming large congregations for special morning prayers. The atmosphere is marked by vibrant attire, shared joy, and a spirit of gratitude and renewal as the community gathers to mark the festive occasion.

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