**Thought for the Week: Ramadan**

**Fun, fashion and halal lipstick: retailers cash in on £200m Ramadan economy**

**Store chains plan special offers, products and events for month of fasting**

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Muslims observing [Ramadan](https://www.theguardian.com/world/ramadan) are increasingly being targeted by supermarkets and brands in the UK, which has led to a rise in spending on food and gifts during the month, according to new research.

The Ramadan economy in the UK is worth at least £200m, with supermarket chains such as Tesco, Sainsbury’s, Asda and Morrisons increasingly gearing products, displays and special offers on popular food items to Ramadan in areas with significant Muslim populations. This year, for example, Morrisons is selling a Ramadan countdown calendar, similar to an Advent calendar, aimed at children.

The month-long Muslim religious observance starts in mid-May and its ending is marked with the [Eid al-Fitr](https://www.theguardian.com/world/eid-al-fitr) holiday. MAC cosmetics, the Body Shop and Godiva chocolates are some of the brands specifically packaging goods as Eid gifts.

Despite the trend, more than three-quarters of British Muslims want retailers to pay even more attention to Ramadan, according to the [Great British Ramadan](https://www.campaignlive.co.uk/article/why-brands-embrace-ramadan/1462570), a study by an Islamic marketing consultancy Ogilvy Noor.

“Muslims feel that Ramadan and Eid are ignored, the report says. “They see the nation proudly gravitate towards cultural and religious holidays such as Chinese New Year and Diwali. They are saying it’s also time to embrace Ramadan and Eid.”

In an indication of growing awareness of the lucrative opportunities of the Muslim market, Westfield London, Europe’s largest shopping centre, is hosting its first Eid festival in June. It will include live catwalk shows, pop-up food stalls, special offers and performances.

“The Muslim pound is seen as a valuable and largely untapped opportunity in the UK economy,” says festival promotional material.

The global Islamic economy is forecast to be worth more than £3 trillion by 2021, according to the [State of the Global Islamic Economy](https://ceif.iba.edu.pk/pdf/ThomsonReuters-stateoftheGlobalIslamicEconomyReport201617.pdf) report, and is growing at nearly double the rate of the general worldwide economy. The sector includes halal food, Islamic finance, halal travel, modest fashion, halal media and recreation, and halal pharmaceuticals and cosmetics.

Many of the UK’s four million Muslims begin to prepare for Ramadan two weeks before its start date, which is determined by the lunar calendar. The month is characterised by sunrise-to-sunset fasting. Although in some countries the working day is adjusted to accommodate the season, for many British Muslims the fasting requirement is complicated by the need to continue working or studying.

For the second year running, Ramadan falls within the six-week summer exam season, which means hundreds of thousands of school and university students have to take exams when their concentration may be impaired by lack of sleep, food and water.

The absence of official recognition in the UK of the three-day Eid holiday immediately following the end of Ramadan means traditional visits to family and friends end up being spread over two weekends.

“In the UK, you don’t have three days of shutdown over Eid like you do in the Middle East,” says Janmohamed. “Only about half of people take time off work, so Eid visits and celebrations are spread out.”

She said brands and retailers should wake up to the opportunities of the Ramadan season. “If brands can play a useful role in Muslims’ experience of Ramadan, if they can help with planning or freeing up time for spiritual or social activities, that is very welcome.”

Almost two-thirds of Muslims plan financially for Ramadan and Eid, the study found. More than half are concerned about their concentration during the month-long daylight fast and two-thirds worry about dehydration. Young men in particular are concerned about maintaining fitness and some gyms in areas with big Muslim populations adjust opening times to allow exercise between *iftar*, the sunset meal that breaks the fast, and *suhoor*, the pre-dawn meal.

The majority of British Muslims eat a range of food over the two meals, with chicken and chips a favourite for 18-to-24-year-olds. Despite the long hours of fasting, four in 10 married women say putting on weight during Ramadan is a worry. Gift-giving, buying new clothes, eating out and family gatherings are key features of the Eid holiday.

Charitable donations also increase markedly during Ramadan, particularly among 25-to-34-year-olds. Donations to Muslim charities through the JustGiving website increased by almost 500% over Ramadan last year.

**Quick Questions**

1. How much is the Ramadan economy worth? (£200m)
2. Which big brands package goods as Eid gifts? (MAC, Body Shop, Godiva chocolates)
3. How many Muslims are there in the UK? (4 million)
4. What meal is a favourite of the 18 to 24 years olds when fasting? (chicken and chips)