



UNITED KINGDOM VISIT

VISIT RESOURCES

WHO ARE THE ISMAILIS?

- Ismailis are a Muslim community within Shia Islam, one of the two main branches of Islam, alongside Sunni Islam.
- Ismailis are led by a living Imam, in a hereditary line of succession tracing back to the Prophet Muhammad through his cousin and son-in-law, Imam Ali. The present Imam is His Highness Prince Rahim al Hussaini Aga Khan V, commonly known as the Aga Khan.
- The Ismaili community has a continuous history spanning more than 1,400 years and many regions of the world.
- Ismailis are united by a shared religious ethic that emphasises faith, intellectual inquiry, compassion, and service to humanity.
- Today, Ismailis live in more than 25 countries worldwide, including South Asia, Central Asia, Europe, and North America.

WHO ARE THE ISMAILIS IN THE UNITED KINGDOM?

- Ismailis have been living in and contributing to British society since the 1950s and 1960s, with larger numbers arriving from the 1970s onwards.
- The UK Ismaili community reflects a rich and diverse heritage, with roots in Africa, Central, South and East Asia, and the Middle East.

WHO ARE THE ISMAILIS WORLDWIDE?

- The global Ismaili community comprises approximately 12 to 15 million people living in more than 35 countries across Central, South and East Asia, the Middle East, Africa, Europe, North America, and Australia.
- Ismailis are culturally diverse but share a strong sense of civic responsibility and a commitment to contributing positively to the societies in which they live.
- The community actively promotes pluralism, peace, and mutual understanding, and contributes through volunteer service, professional expertise, and charitable giving. Under the guidance of the Imam, Ismaili institutions support education, healthcare, housing, and social and economic development initiatives that benefit people of all faiths and backgrounds.



WHO IS THE IMAM / AGA KHAN?

- For more than 1,400 years, Ismailis have been guided by a living, hereditary Imam, providing continuous spiritual leadership from the time of Imam Ali to the present day. The Imam offers spiritual guidance while encouraging ethical responsibility, pluralism, and engagement with the modern world.
- On 5 February 2025, in Lisbon, Portugal, His Highness Prince Rahim al Hussaini Aga Khan V was named the 50th hereditary Imam of the Shia Ismaili Muslims, following the passing of his father, His Highness Prince Karim Aga Khan IV.
- Born on 12 October 1971, the Aga Khan is a direct descendant of the Prophet Muhammad.
- In keeping with long-standing tradition, the King granted the new Imam the title “His Highness” on 10 February 2025. This tradition, whereby the British Monarch accords the title to the Ismaili Imam, dates back to the first Aga Khan.

WHAT EVENTS ARE HAPPENING?

- Following his accession as Imam of the Time, His Highness began a series of official visits in 2025, marking the early phase of his Imamate (leadership).
- These visits focus on strengthening partnerships with governments and institutions, advancing development initiatives, and engaging with Ismaili communities around the world.
- Recent visits have included France, Kenya, Uganda, and the United States.
- For Ismailis, these visits are also significant spiritual occasions, reflecting the Imam’s dual role as spiritual leader and global partner in development and cooperation.
- They are moments of joy and celebration, often representing the first opportunity for many Ismailis to meet the Imam of the Time.

WHAT IS THE ISMAILI CENTRE?

- The Ismaili Centre, London, is a social, cultural, and religious gathering place for the Ismaili community, as well as a contemporary venue that hosts talks, events, and welcomes members of the wider public.
- The Centre supports daily prayers, weddings, and other important cultural and religious occasions, and is designed to bring together Ismailis, their families, and friends of all faiths.
- It was opened in April 1985 by the then Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher.
- Located in the heart of London’s cultural quarter, the Centre works closely with Exhibition Road partners, including the V&A, the Science Museum, and the Natural History Museum.
- In 2025, the Centre has hosted a range of events, including art exhibitions and concerts in collaboration with the Aga Khan Music Awards and the London Jazz Festival.



RESOURCES

<https://the.ismaili/gb/en/about/his-highness-the-aga-khan>

<https://www.royal.uk/news-and-activity/2025-02-10/the-king-is-pleased-to-grant-the-new-aga-khan-the-title-his-highness>

<https://media.ismaili.imamat/press-release/prince-rahim-aga-khan-v-named-50th-hereditary-imam-of-the-shia-ismaili-muslims>