



Religion and Custom

Religious freedom is one of the fundamental rights enjoyed by Hong Kong residents. It is protected by the Basic Law and other relevant legislation. There is a large variety of religious groups in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR), including Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism and Judaism. All of these groups have a considerable number of adherents. Apart from offering religious instructions, many major religious bodies have established schools and provided health and welfare facilities.

Buddhism: Buddhism is one of the dominant religions in China. The major Buddhist festival takes place on Buddha's Birthday, on the eighth day of the fourth month in the lunar calendar, which is one of the public holidays in Hong Kong. There are more than one million followers of the religion and hundreds of Buddhist organisations in Hong Kong. Followers pay respect to Sakyamuni Buddha, Kwun Yum (the Buddhist Goddess of Mercy) and other Buddhas and Bodhisattva.

The Po Lin Monastery on Lantau Island is famous for the Tian Tan Buddha, a majestic bronze statue of Buddha, in a seated position, believed to be the largest outdoor Buddha statue of its kind in the world. It is a popular attraction for visitors, especially during weekends and holidays.

Other notable Buddhist temples include the Chi Nin Nunnery in Diamond Hill, which is a cluster of temple structures built in Tang Dynasty's architectural style.

The Hong Kong Buddhist Association, founded in 1945, is the largest Buddhist organisation in Hong Kong. Apart from propagating dharma teaching and culture, it also provides charitable and social welfare services to the public, such as medical and general care to the young and the elderly.

Taoism: Taoism is an indigenous religion of China with a 2000-year history, advocating simple living and harmony with the nature. There are over one million Taoist followers and more than 300 Taoist abbeys and temples in Hong Kong, most of which are open to the public.

Its followers honour Taishang Laojun as the Supreme Patriarch, whose birthday is on the 15th day of the second month of the lunar year. The Taoist Day is on the second Sunday of March.

Since Hong Kong has always depended on the sea – originally for fishing and then for trade – the most popular deities are those connected with the sea and the weather; for instance, Tin Hau, the 'Queen of Heaven' and protector of seafarers. The most famous Tin Hau Temple in Hong Kong is at Fat Tong Mun in Joss House Bay.

Other notable temples include the Wong Tai Sin Temple, named after a Taoist deity, in the Wong Tai Sin

District of Kowloon, the Che Kung Temple in Sha Tin in the New Territories, and the Man Mo Temple in Hollywood Road on the Hong Kong Island.

The Hong Kong Taoist Association, formed by representatives of major Taoist temples and Taoists in 1967, organises a wide range of religious, cultural and charitable activities to promote the Taoist belief. Besides religious and cultural exchanges, the Taoist community in Hong Kong are committed to promoting the well-being of society, especially the educational, social and charitable services. For example, they run schools and kindergartens, subsidise courses offered by tertiary institutions, and operate clinics, homes for the elderly, child care centres, community service centres, etc.

Confucianism: Confucianism is the belief in the teachings of Confucius and the subsequent *ru* school of thoughts. Confucius lived in ancient China from 551 to 479 B.C. His teachings were based on moral code for human relations with emphasis on the importance of tradition and rites. He was one of the most eminent thinkers of the time, a great sage and educator whose philosophy has deeply influenced the political, economic and social systems of China. He has also been hailed as an exemplary mentor for all ages. The major festival of Confucianism is the birthday of Confucius that falls on the 27th day of the eighth month of the lunar calendar. The Confucian Day is on the third Sunday of September.

Confucian organisations in Hong Kong include the Confucian Academy, the Confucius Hall and the Confucian Association. Confucians in Hong Kong have been deeply involved in education. They run local schools with an objective of promoting the teachings of Confucius.

Christianity

The Roman Catholic Community: The Roman Catholic Church in Hong Kong was established as a mission prefecture in 1841 and as vicariate apostolic in 1874. It became a diocese in 1946. About 379 000 people are Catholics. They are served by 303 priests, 64 brothers and 481 sisters. There are 51 parishes, comprising 40 churches, 31 chapels and 27 halls for religious service. The majority of Services are conducted in Cantonese, with three-fifths of the parishes providing services in English and in Tagalog in some cases.

The diocese has established its own administrative structure while maintaining close links with the Pope and other Catholic communities around the world with which it shares the same creed, scripture, liturgy and organisation. One of the prime concerns of the diocese has been the well-being of the community as a whole. In terms of education, there are hundreds of

Catholic schools and kindergartens assisted by the Catholic Education Office. Medical and social services include hospitals, clinics, social and family centres, hostels, homes for the aged, rehabilitation service centres and many self-help clubs and associations. Caritas is the official social welfare arm of the Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong. These services are open to everyone.

The diocese publishes two weekly newspapers, *Kung Kao Po* and *The Sunday Examiner*. In addition, the Diocesan Audio-Visual Centre also produces cultural and educational programmes.

The Protestant Community: The presence of the Protestant community dates back to 1841. About 480 000 Protestant Christians live in Hong Kong. The Protestant community is made up of more than 70 denominations with at least 1 450 congregations. Apart from many indigenous denominations, most of the major international denominations and former mission agencies have ecclesial branches in Hong Kong, such as the Adventist, Anglican, Baptist, Christian and Missionary Alliance, Evangelical Free, Lutheran, Methodist, Pentecostal and Salvation Army. The Protestant community is deeply involved in education, health care and social welfare. Protestant organisations operate a large number of educational institutions, including post-secondary institutions, secondary schools, primary schools, kindergartens, nurseries and theological schools. Protestant organisations also run hospitals, clinics and multi-social centres that include community service centres, children's homes, elderly centres, rehabilitation centres for the mentally handicapped, disabled and drug addicts, hospital chaplaincies and campsites. Media, and art ministries in Hong Kong include Protestant publishing houses, bookstores, weekly newspapers such as *The Christian Weekly* and *The Christian Times*, TV and radio programmes.

Two ecumenical bodies facilitate co-operative work among the Protestant churches in Hong Kong. The Hong Kong Chinese Christian Churches Union, dating from 1915, has a current membership of more than 360 congregations. The Hong Kong Christian Council was formed in 1954 and its membership includes major denominations, ecumenical service agencies and the Orthodox Metropolitanate of Hong Kong and Southeast Asia. The Council is committed to building closer relationships among all churches in Hong Kong, the Mainland and overseas and also seeks to serve the wider community through its affiliated organisations.

The Muslim Community: Hong Kong has about 270 000 Muslims, of whom 30 000 are Chinese and 140 000 are Indonesians, with the rest mainly non-Chinese born in Hong Kong, and others from Pakistan, India, Malaysia, the Middle Eastern and African countries. Five principal masjids are used daily for prayers, and they are located at Shelley Street in Hong Kong Island, Oi Kwan Road in Wan Chai, Nathan Road in Kowloon and Cape Collinson in Chai Wan; there is also a masjid inside Stanley Prison. The oldest is the Jamia Masjid in Shelley Street, which was built in 1849 and rebuilt in 1915 to make room for 400 worshippers. The Kowloon Masjid and Islamic Centre in Nathan Road can accommodate 3 500 worshippers and the Masjid and Islamic Centre in Oi Kwan Road can accommodate 700 to 1 500 people.

The Chinese Muslim Cultural and Fraternal Association is the major organisation representing Chinese Muslims in Hong Kong. It organises religious activities for Chinese Muslims and manages education facilities. The Incorporated Trustees of the Islamic Community Fund of Hong Kong co-ordinates all of Hong

Kong's Islamic religious activities, manages the masjids, two Muslim cemeteries and a kindergarten. It also certifies the supply of acceptable religious 'halal' food in Hong Kong. Charitable work among the Muslim community, including financial aid to the needy, medical care and assisted education, is conducted through various Muslim organisations in Hong Kong.

The Hindu Community: The religious and social activities of Hong Kong's 40 000-strong Hindu community take place mainly in the Hindu Temple in Happy Valley. The Hindu Association of Hong Kong is responsible for the upkeep of the temple, which is also used for meditation, spiritual lectures, yoga classes and other community activities as well as the observance of major Hindu festivals such as Diwali, Dussehra, etc. Devotional music sessions and religious discourses are held every Sunday morning, followed by a free community meal, which is also served on Monday evenings.

Engagement and marriage ceremonies in accordance with the Marriage Ordinance are performed at the temple according to Hindu rites. Other important services rendered by the temple include administration of last rites, arrangements for cremation and related ceremonies and the maintenance of the Hindu crematorium at Cape Collinson.

The Sikh Community: There are about 10 000 Sikhs in Hong Kong. The Sikh Temple in Queen's Road East, Wan Chai is classified as a Grade II Historic Building and managed by the Khalsa Diwan, a registered charitable organisation. A unique feature of the Sikh Temple is that it provides free meals and short-term accommodation to overseas visitors of any faith.

Religious services are conducted in the temple every morning and evening. Followers of Guru Nanak Dev, founder of Sikhism, gather in the temple in large numbers on Sundays and on main holy days. The most important religious dates are the birthdays of Guru Nanak Dev, Guru Gobind Singh (the 10th Guru) and Baisakhi (birthday of all Sikhs).

The Jewish Community: With a history dating back to the 1840's, Hong Kong's Jewish community, comprising families from various parts of the world, worships at three main synagogues. Ohel Leah Synagogue (Orthodox) provides daily, Sabbath and festival services and the United Jewish Congregation of Hong Kong (Reform) provides Sabbath and festival services. Both synagogues share the same premises in Robinson Road, Hong Kong Island. The Chabad Lubavitch in MacDonnell Road also holds daily services.

The site adjoining the Ohel Leah Synagogue, now containing a residential complex, also houses the Jewish Community Centre which serves all three congregations. The centre offers its 400 member families supervised kosher dining and banqueting, cultural and recreational facilities and operates a fully kosher supermarket, a wide range of activities and classes, as well as a specialist library covering all aspects of Judaica. The centre functions as the focal point of social and cultural life for the Jewish community.

Traditional and Religious Festivals: There are five major festivals in the Chinese calendar, with the *Lunar New Year* being the most important. Gifts and visits are exchanged among friends and relatives and children receive *lai see*, or 'lucky money'. During the *Ching Ming Festival* in spring, ancestral graves are visited. In early summer (fifth day of the fifth lunar month), the *Dragon Boat Festival* is celebrated with dragon boat races and by eating cooked glutinous rice wrapped in bamboo

leaves. The *Mid-Autumn Festival* falls on the 15th day of the eighth lunar month. Gifts of mooncakes, wine and fruit are exchanged and adults and children gather under the full moon with colourful lanterns. *Chung Yeung* is on the ninth day of the ninth lunar month, when many visit their ancestors' graves or hike up mountains in remembrance of an ancient Chinese

family's escape from plague and death by fleeing to a mountain-top.

Apart from the above traditional festivals, quite a number of important religious festivals, including Good Friday, Easter, Buddha's Birthday and Christmas, have been listed as public holidays. Adherents hold special celebration or memorial ceremonies on these occasions.