

## Religion and Custom

*Hong Kong's Basic Law guarantees religious freedom, allowing a diversity of faiths to coexist harmoniously. Celebrations of religious holidays form an anticipated part of the social calendar alongside traditional Chinese festivals.*

### Traditional Festivals

The Lunar New Year is the most important festival in the Chinese calendar. It marks the first new moon of the year, considered an auspicious time for friends and relatives to visit one another and to exchange gifts while children and unmarried adults receive *lai see*, or 'lucky' money, in red packets. This is followed by the Dragon Boat Festival on the fifth day of the fifth lunar month to honour ancient Chinese poet Qu Yuan, who chose death over compromising his honour by jumping into a river. Dragon boat races and rice dumplings wrapped in bamboo leaves are highlights of this festival. Next comes the Mid-Autumn Festival on the 15th day of the eighth lunar month, when families and friends gather under the full moon with colourful lanterns and eat moon cakes, a traditional festival delicacy. Apart from these celebrations, the Chinese visit their ancestral graves during the Ching Ming Festival in spring and the Chung Yeung Festival in autumn. They climb hills at Chung Yeung to remember one family's flight up a mountain in ancient times to escape a plague.

### Buddhism

Buddhism was introduced into China from India more than 2,000 years ago. It is one of the main religions practised in Hong Kong, with around one million followers and more than 400 temples, some over 700 years old. Notable worship sites include the Po Lin Monastery on Lantau Island, famous for its giant bronze statue of a seated Tian Tan Buddha that is also known as the Big Buddha, and the Chi Lin Nunnery in Diamond Hill, Kowloon, which is a cluster of temple structures built in the architectural style of the Tang dynasty. Both are popular visitor attractions.

Local Buddhist groups have long aided social welfare and education, operating nearly 100 primary and secondary schools, homes for the elderly and centres for children and youth. The Hong Kong Buddhist Association, for instance, was founded in 1945 and seeks to propagate Buddhist teaching and culture while providing charitable services to the public, including

medical and general care for both young and old. The association runs 13 secondary schools, seven primary schools, eight kindergartens and six Chinese medicine service units.

The major Buddhist festival takes place on Buddha's birthday, which falls on the eighth day of the fourth month in the lunar calendar and is a public holiday. Followers visit temples across the city to pay homage. The association holds celebrations on that day and during the Ching Ming Festival to raise awareness of Buddhism.

### Taoism

Taoism is an indigenous religion of China with a 2,000-year history. Hong Kong has over one million followers and more than 300 Taoist abbeys and temples, according to a 2010 survey by the Hong Kong Taoist Association. About 100 of these abbeys and temples are members of the association.

The association, set up by representatives of major temples in 1961, is a non-profit-making charity. It organises religious, cultural and charitable activities to promote Taoist scriptures and moral values. These activities include the annual Taoist Day held on the second Sunday of March to celebrate the birthday of the deity Taishang Laojun, or Laozi, whom Taoists believe is the founder of Taoism and author of *Tao Te Ching*, the main Taoist text dated to the late 4th century BC. Worshipers also mark the triennial Taoist Blessing Ceremony on the 15th day of the 10th lunar month and attend religious lectures, music lessons and *tai chi* classes.

Educational, social and charitable services include running more than 40 schools and kindergartens and subsidising tertiary-level courses. Taoists operate clinics, homes for the elderly, care homes, child care centres and community service centres in Hong Kong while providing strong funding support for education, poverty alleviation and medical care in the Mainland, where they also help build and repair Taoist temples.

### Confucianism

Confucianism is a set of religious, ethical and philosophical teachings derived from ancient Chinese philosopher Confucius (551–479 BC) that emphasises the importance of tradition and rites.

These values are introduced in local primary, secondary and university teaching through the advocacy of the Confucian Academy. Founded in 1930, the academy incorporates principles of Confucianism in the curricula of its own Confucian Tai Shing schools. The academy also organises various social services, such as a Fun Day for the Elderly and Children, to promote the thought of caring for the elderly and children.

Other local Confucian organisations include the Hong Kong Confucianism Association and Confucius Hall. The major Confucianism festival takes place on Confucius' birthday, which falls on the 27th day of the eighth month in the lunar calendar. The academy celebrates Confucian Day on the day following the Mid-Autumn Festival, recognised and supported by the government. Another main feast day is the birthday of ancient Chinese philosopher Mencius on the second day of the fourth lunar month.

## Christianity

The Christian community numbers about 1.2 million, most of whom are Protestants and Roman Catholics. The Greek, Russian and Coptic Orthodox Churches also have a presence in Hong Kong.

### Protestant Community

The local Protestant movement began in 1841 and Hong Kong now has about 800,000 Christians, more than 300,000 of whom attend church services regularly, according to the Hong Kong Christian Council and surveys done by research institutes. They make up 70-odd denominations and no fewer than 400 independent churches in at least 1,500 congregations, about 1,300 of which are Chinese-speaking. These include indigenous denominations like the Church of Christ in China (representing Presbyterian and Congregational traditions); Hong Kong Sheng Kung Hui; the Methodist Church, Hong Kong; True Jesus Church and Local Church (the Little Flock). Cooperation among the churches is facilitated by the Christian Council and Hong Kong Chinese Christian Churches Union.

The Protestant community runs three tertiary institutions – the Chinese University of Hong Kong's Chung Chi College, Hong Kong Baptist University and Lingnan University – about 180 secondary schools, 200 primary schools, 260 kindergartens, 130 nurseries, over 20 theological schools, 80 publishing houses, 110 bookstores and 55 media, audio-visual production and art groups. Media materials produced include the weekly *Christian Times* and *Christian Weekly*, regular television programmes and weekly radio shows on RTHK.

Seven hospitals and 17 clinics are under Protestant management, as are about 110 social welfare organisations that provide services at over 100 centres for families and youths, 11 children's homes, 170 elderly centres and nursing homes, and about 60 rehabilitation centres for drug addicts and the disabled. There are some 50 hospital chaplaincies, three prison chaplaincies, one airport chaplaincy and around 25 campsites.

Some 730 para-church agencies attend to the Protestant community's needs and support emergency relief and development projects. More than 450 missionaries serve abroad.

### Roman Catholic Community

The Roman Catholic Church in Hong Kong was established as a mission prefecture in 1841 and became a diocese in 1946. The Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong calculates there are about 403,000 Catholics served by 285 priests, 68 brothers and 441 sisters in 52 parishes, comprising 40 churches, 33 chapels and 27 halls for religious services conducted in Cantonese; three-fifths of the parishes also provide services in English and, in some cases, Tagalog, the Filipino language. The diocese has its own administrative structure while maintaining close links with the Pope and other Catholic communities round the world.

Through the assistance of the Catholic Education Office, 250 Catholic schools and kindergartens impart education to 148,186 pupils. Caritas-Hong Kong is the diocese's official social welfare arm, offering services to Catholics and non-Catholics alike. It provides medical and social services to at least six hospitals, 13 clinics, 42 social and family service centres, 23 hostels, 19 homes for the aged, 35 rehabilitation service centres and many self-help clubs and

associations. The diocese publishes two weekly newspapers: *Kung Kao Po* and the *Sunday Examiner*. Its Diocesan Audio-Visual Centre produces cultural and educational programmes for television broadcasting and DVD production.

## Islam

Hong Kong has an estimated 300,000 Muslims, comprising 150,000 Indonesians, 50,000 Chinese, 30,000 Pakistanis and people from India, Malaysia, the Middle East, Africa and elsewhere, according to the Incorporated Trustees of the Islamic Community Fund of Hong Kong.

All local Islamic activities are coordinated by the trustees, which form a charity managing all five mosques, two cemeteries and a kindergarten. They make funeral arrangements, announce the dates of festivals including Ramadan, and conduct inspections and issue certificates for halal food in Hong Kong and parts of the Mainland.

Local Chinese Muslims are represented mainly by the Chinese Muslim Cultural and Fraternal Association, which operates a college, two primary schools and two kindergartens.

The oldest mosque is the Jamia Masjid in Mid-Levels, built in 1849 and rebuilt in 1915 to cater for more than 400 worshippers. The eight-storey Masjid Ammar and Osman Ramju Sadick Islamic Centre in Wan Chai, with a capacity of over 1,500, features a library, a clinic, an Islamic canteen and the Muslim Community Kindergarten among its many facilities. The Kowloon Masjid and Islamic Centre, with its distinctive white-marble finish, is a landmark in Tsim Sha Tsui and manifests the true identity of local Muslims. It has a capacity of 3,500 and sees nearly one million users yearly. Stanley Mosque is inside Stanley Prison, while Chai Wan Mosque is at Cape Collinson. The cemeteries are in Happy Valley and Cape Collinson.

## Hinduism

Religious and social activities of the 100,000-strong Hindu community from India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Thailand and other south-east Asian countries are centred on the Hindu Temple in Happy Valley, which the Hindu Association of Hong Kong manages and maintains. Worshippers use the temple for meditation, spiritual lectures, yoga classes and other community activities, and to observe major festivals including *Diwali*, *Dussehra*, *Holi*, *Ganesh Chaturthi*, *Cheti Chand* and *Hanuman Jayanti*. They also perform engagement and marriage ceremonies according to Hindu rites and the Marriage Ordinance. Other important services include administering last rites, making arrangements for cremation and related rituals and maintaining the Hindu crematorium at Cape Collinson.

The temple holds devotional music sessions and religious discourses every Sunday morning, followed by a free community meal that is also served on Monday evenings.

## Sikhism

Hong Kong's first Sikhs came from Punjab, India, as part of the British Armed Forces in the 19th century. In 1901, Sikh members of the British Army Regiment stationed in the city built the first Sikh temple, Sri Guru Singh Sabha, at Queen's Road East, Wan Chai. This temple was later

renamed Khalsa Diwan Hong Kong Sikh Temple, redeveloped in 1938 and further extended in the 1980s to serve the growing Sikh population. The old building was pulled down in 2018, while an extension block built in 2008 remains in use. A new four-storey temple is under construction with two prayer halls, a free kitchen and dining room, private function rooms, seminar halls, a digital library, a car park and other facilities. It is estimated to be completed by late 2020.

The Khalsa Diwan, a registered charitable organisation that manages the temple, offers voluntary services for Sikhs and non-Sikhs, including the provision of *langar* (a free meal) and short-term accommodation for overseas visitors.

The Khalsa Diwan estimates Hong Kong has about 12,000 Sikhs. Followers of Sikhism founder Guru Nanak Dev Ji attend religious services at the temple every morning and evening, and gather there on Sundays and the main Sikh holy days. Their most important religious dates are the birthdays of Guru Nanak Dev Ji and Guru Gobind Singh Ji (the 10th Guru), and *Vaisakhi* (the birthday and baptism day of all Sikhs).

## Judaism

The settlement of the Jewish community in Hong Kong dates from the 1840s and comprises families drawn from different parts of the world. There are three main synagogues – Ohel Leah Synagogue (Orthodox) providing daily, Sabbath and festival services; the United Jewish Congregation of Hong Kong (Reform) with Sabbath and festival services, both of which share the same premises in Robinson Road, Mid-Levels; and the Chabad Lubavitch, which has daily services in MacDonnell Road. All fulfil an important role in the religious, cultural and social life of the local Jewish people.

Ohel Leah Synagogue was built in 1901 on land given by Sir Jacob Sassoon and his family and includes a *mikvah* (ritual bath). Before this, a Jewish Cemetery was built in 1857 at Shan Kwong Road, Happy Valley.

The site next to Ohel Leah houses a residential complex and the Jewish Community Centre. The centre offers its 400 member families from all three congregations supervised kosher dining and banqueting, cultural and recreational facilities, a fully kosher supermarket, a specialist library covering all aspects of Judaica, as well as activities and classes. It is the focal point of social and cultural life for local Jews. The community also operates the Carmel School and supplementary religious classes. There are several charity and cultural organisations, including the Jewish Women's Association, United Israel Appeal, Israeli Chamber of Commerce and Jewish Historical Society, which all combine to create a vibrant Jewish community in Hong Kong.

## Other Faiths

The Baha'i Faith and Zoroastrianism are among other religions that have been established in Hong Kong for many years.