

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 is the 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, which is 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 and historical Tin Hau Temple in Hong Kong is at Fat Tong Mun in Joss

House Bay. Other notable temples include the Wong Tai Sin Temple 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 1961, 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.

Confucianism: Confucianism is a set of religious, ethical and philosophical teachings derived from ancient Chinese philosopher Confucius (551 to 479 B.C) that emphasizes the importance of tradition and rites. These values are introduced in local primary, secondary and tertiary curriculum through the advocacy of the Confucian Academy. Founded in 1930, the Academy incorporates principles of Confucianism in the curricular of its own Confucian Tai Shing schools and offers various social services. Besides education, the Academy also organises various social services, such as Fun Day for Elderly and Children, to promote the thought of care for the elderly and children.

Other local Confucian organisations include the Hong Kong Confucianism Association and the Confucius Hall. . The government endorsed the third Sunday of September as Confucian Day in 2014 to mark Confucius' birthday on the 27th day of the eighth lunar month. Another main feast day is the birthday of ancient Chinese philosopher Mencius, taking place on the second day of the fourth lunar month.

Christianity

The Roman Catholic Community: The Roman Catholic Church in Hong Kong was established as a mission prefecture in 1841 and became a diocese in 1946. There are about 379 000 Catholics served by 297 priests, 64 brothers and 481 sisters in 52 parishes, comprising 40 churches, 31 chapels and 26 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 Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong has its own administrative structure while maintaining close links with the Pope and other Catholic communities around the world.

Through the assistance of the Catholic Education Office, 256 Catholic schools and kindergartens impart education to about 158 000 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, 43 social and family service centres, 23 hostels, 16 homes for the aged, 27 rehabilitation service centres and many self-help clubs and associations. T

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.

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 and 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 300 000 Muslims, of whom 50 000 are Chinese, 150 000 are Indonesians and 30 000 are Pakistanis, with the rest from other parts of the world including the Middle Eastern 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, Cape Collinson in Chai Wan and Nathan Road in Kowloon; there is also a masjid inside Stanley Prison. The oldest one 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 100 000-strong Hindu community from India, Nepal, Singapore, Thailand and other Asian countries 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 12 000 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.