

Experience Many World Religions on one Little Red Dot – One Singaporean Advantage

By Bill Poorman

Even if you are coming to Singapore for the first time, you likely already know that it is a diverse country, with a population coming from Chinese, Indian, Malay and European backgrounds. Along with that national diversity comes a number of different religions, providing a rare opportunity to investigate and experience a wide variety of faiths in relatively small space.



The latest study of the religious make-up of Singapore's resident population (native Singaporeans and permanent residents) was the *General Household Survey* from 2015. Among people aged 15 or older, this was the breakdown of religious affiliation:

- The largest religious group in Singapore was Buddhism/Taosim at 43.2% of the resident population. 33.2% were Buddhist, while the remainder were Taoist.
- The second largest religious group was Christians at 18.8%.
- The next largest group was people who reported no religion at 18.5%.
- Muslims make up 14% of the resident population.
- Hinduism was the religion of 5% of the resident population.
- Other religions were reported by 0.6%.

The survey also called out a few other findings about religion in Singapore:

- Only people with no religion and Christianity saw an increase in percentage terms since the last survey in 2010. The non-religious increased by one-and-a-half points, while Christianity increased half a percent.
- Even so, the proportions among the various religions have remained relatively stable.
- Virtually all Malays are Muslim in Singapore. Only a half a percent report other religions, and 0.3% report no religion.
- Among Chinese Singaporeans, more than half are Buddhist and Taoist. Almost a quarter report no religion, while about a fifth are Christians.
- Among Indian Singaporeans, almost 60% are Hindu, while 21% are Muslim, and 12% are Christian. About 5% report other religions, and 1.4% report no religion.

So, with that as background, if you're looking to explore some of the religious diversity of Singapore, there are many, welcoming places of worship to visit throughout the country. Also, there are many religious festivals to take in throughout the year. In case you need reminders of the festivals, you'll find that many of the national holidays in Singapore celebrate religious holidays. To tap into the non-religious community, look for the Humanist Society (Singapore), a registered society started in 2010.

Should you choose to visit a place of worship, be sure to observe any customs regarding clothing or purification before you enter. If you don't, you can count on being gently reminded by attendants or worshippers. And while it's highly unlikely that you're here to cause religious trouble, be aware that Singapore law is designed to make sure you show respect to various faiths. Insulting a group's religion, deliberately disturbing religious services, and stoking religious divisiveness are all crimes, punishable by prison terms, fines, or both.

But enough about that. Have fun exploring your new home and the religious diversity it has to offer. If you're especially curious, do a bit of homework and compare how the Singaporean

communities celebrate various events compared to the country of origin. Sometimes you'll find small differences, like a name change, while other times you'll find entire practices that are different. Despite the cultures it's inherited, Singapore remains a place unto itself.

Bill Poorman has lived in Singapore for three years and enjoys exploring the religious landscape of the country. To answer the question you might have had in the back of your mind, it's no religion.

Photos by Bill Poorman

Singapore is often referred to as the Little Red Dot, a reference to its appearance on the map. As you find your way around Singapore, you will see this phrase in many forms, from national celebrations to magazine titles to the names of breweries.

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