

Reaching the Nations International Church Growth Almanac

Country reports on the LDS Church around the world from a landmark almanac. Includes detailedanalysis of history, context, culture, needs, challenges and opportunities for church growth.



Mauritius

Population: 1.33 millions (#156 out of countries)

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Geography

Area: 2,040 square km. Mauritius is a small island in the Indian Ocean east of Madagascar. The tropical climate has wet summers and dry, warm winters. Mountains dominate the interior, and plains occupy coastal areas. Cyclones and reefs are natural hazards. Environmental issues include water pollution and coral reef degradation. Mauritius is administratively divided into nine districts and three dependencies.

Peoples

Indo-Mauritian: 68%

Creole: 27%

Sino-Mauritian: 3%

Franco-Mauritian: 2%

Mauritius had no indigenous inhabitants. Current inhabitants arrived from the British and French relocating peoples in other colonies to work in plantations, particularly from India and China. Few Europeans, mainly French, remain on the islands.

Population: 1,364,283 (July 2018)

Annual Growth Rate: 0.57% (2018)

Fertility Rate: 1.74 children born per woman (2018)

Life Expectancy: 72.6 male, 79.7 female (2018)

Languages: Mauritian Creole (86.5%), Bhojpuri (5.3%), French (4.1%), English (less than 1%), other and unspecified (3.1%). English is the official language. Mauritian Creole (Morisyen) is the only language with more than one million native speakers (1.18 million).

Literacy: 93.2% (2016)

History

Arab and Malay sailors first discovered Mauritius in the tenth century. The Portuguese discovered the island in the sixteenth century. Mauritius was settled by the Dutch in the seventeenth century. The French took control in 1715, developing the island's resources and establishing a naval base. The British conquered the island in 1810, developed the country's naval base and eventually established an air base. Mauritius remained part of the United Kingdom until independence in 1968. Stability and democracy attracted investment. The nation has one of the most developed economies in Africa, but the stability of the country depends on sugar prices, textile production, and favorable weather.

Culture

A blend of ethnicities has resulted in a very heterogeneous culture influenced by Indian, Chinese, and European influences. Cuisine draws upon a combination of these influences. Rum production from sugar has occurred for hundreds of years. Extinct for hundreds of years, the Dodo bird only lived on Mauritius and still has cultural significance. Ethnic groups tend to live separately from one another due to differences in language, culture, and religion. Recreation continues to gain popularity. Indians dominate government and politics. Cigarette consumption rates compare to the worldwide, average whereas alcohol consumption rates are low.

Economy

GDP per capita: $22,300 (2017) [37.3% of U.S.]

Human Development Index: 0.790 (2017)

Corruption Index: 51 (2018)

Originally dependent on agriculture, the economy of Mauritius has diversified to include industrial, financial, and tourist sectors. Stability since independence attracted foreign investment for sugar, tourism and banking. The location of the island provides a cheaper alternative compared to more industrialized nations around the Indian Ocean like Singapore or the United Arab of Emirates. Services generate 74.1% of the GDP, whereas industry comprises 21.8% of the GDP. Most of the labor force is employed in the services (62.2%) and the industry (29.8%) sectors. Food processing, textile manufacturing and clothing are major industries. Sugar is the most important cash crop. Emerging industries include fishing and technology. Primary trade partners include the United Kingdom, France, China, and the United States.

Corruption levels rank among the lowest in Africa. Bribe taking among politicians and government favoritism toward specific private companies are issues of concern.[1] Human trafficking is a major concern.

Faiths

Hindu: 48%

Christian: 32%

Muslim: 17%

Other: 3%

Christians

Denominations – Members – Congregations

Catholic – 354,714

Evangelicals – 130,801

Seventh Day Adventists – 5,199 – 38

Jehovah's Witnesses – 1,917 – 26

Latter-day Saints – 529 – 3

Religion

Many of the Indians taken to Mauritius by the British retained their Hindu or Muslim beliefs. The Catholic Church is the largest Christian denomination as a result of French rule and claims 90% of the population of the small island of Rodrigues. Northern areas of the main island are more Hindi, and central areas are more Catholic. Tensions exist between Hindus, the largest religious group, and the smaller Christian and Muslim populations. Ethnic and religious groups tend to live separate from one another in close knit communities.[2]

Religious Freedom

Religious freedom is protected by the constitution and generally upheld by the government. There are six religious groups (Hindus, Catholics, Muslims, Anglicans, Presbyterians, and Seventh-Day Adventists) recognized by parliamentary degree, and these groups receive annual lump-sum payments from the government. To register, religious groups must have at least seven members with leadership responsibilities for the group. Tax-exempt status is granted by the Ministry of Finance. No religious groups appear to have been denied registration. Tensions exist between Hindus, Muslims, and Christians, but all groups were allowed to worship freely. Foreign missionaries may proselyte but must obtain both a visa and work permit. The government imposes unofficial limits on the number of missionary visas and work permits.[3]

Major Cities

Urban: 40.9% (2019)

Port Louis, Vascoas-Phoenix, Beau Bassin-Rose Hill**, Curepipe, Quatre Bornes, Triolet, Goodlands, Bel Air, Bambous, St. Pierre.**

Cities listed in **bold** have no congregations of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Two of the ten largest cities have a published Church presence. Forty-eight percent (48%) of the national population lives in the ten largest cities.

Church History

The first member, Elder George Kershaw, arrived in 1856 as a missionary. During the two months of his stay, around ten people joined the Church. Few to no members lived in Mauritius, and no Church presence existed between the late 1850s and 1979. The Church was reestablished in 1979 through the International Mission, and in 1986, the South Africa Johannesburg Mission began administering Mauritius. Two years later, the Mascarene Islands Mission was created in Reunion that also included Mauritius and Madagascar.[4] Official government recognition was obtained in 1985.[5] Elder Marvin J. Ashton dedicated Mauritius and Reunion for missionary work in November 1988.[6] In 1991, the mission's headquarters were transferred to Durban, South Africa. Mauritius has pertained to the Madagascar Antananarivo Mission since the creation of the mission in 1998.[7] Seminary and institute began in 1993. In 2019, the Church announced that Mauritius would remain assigned to the Africa Southeast Area (renamed Africa South in 2020).

Membership Growth

Church Membership: 529 (2018)

By 1988, there were 400 members living in Mauritius and Reunion.[8] By 2000, there were 295 members on Mauritius. Membership increased to 361 in 2004 and 363 in 2008. The most rapid annual membership growth rates occurred in 2001 at 12.9% and 2010 at 10.0%. Annual membership growth rates declined in 2005 and 2008 by around 1% but in most years ranged from 0% to 3% in the 2000s. Membership growth rates slightly accelerated in the 2010s and generally ranged from 2-4% for most years. Church membership totaled 406 in 2010, 458 in 2014, and 529 in 2018.

In 2018, one in 2,579 was a member on Church records.

Congregational Growth

Branches: 3 (2019)

The first branch was created by missionaries in 1982 and likely pertained to the St. Denis Reunion District, which was created the same year. By 1988, two branches functioned. However, both of the branches were combined into one branch in the 1990s, the Rose Hill Branch.

A second branch was recreated in 2004 called the Phoenix Branch. Both branches report directly to the Madagascar Antananarivo Mission. The branches were transferred to the Reunion District sometime in the 2010s. A group began to operate in Flacq in 2011 due to the efforts of a single convert from Flacq who originally joined the Church in Rose Hill in 2003.[9] In 2017, the Church organized a third branch on Mauritius in Flacq. Later that year, the three Mauritian branches were organized into the Mauritius District.

Activity and Retention

Twenty-three were enrolled in seminary and institute during the 2008–2009 school year. The 2011 census reported forty residents who identified as “Mormon” (twenty-three men, seventeen women), and there were no reported Mormons on Rodrigues.[10] Previous government censuses did not report the total number of Mormons or Latter-day Saints.

Approximately twenty attended church meetings in Flacq in 2014. The Flacq Branch had approximately two dozen convert baptisms in 2017. In 2018, the Phoenix Branch had forty active members, of whom 40% spoke English as their first language. Active membership is estimated at no greater than 150, or 28% of total Church membership.

Language Materials

Languages with Latter-day Saint Scripture: English, French, Tamil, Urdu.

All Church scriptures and most Church materials are translated in French. Translations of Church materials into Mauritian Creole are limited to Gospel Principles. The Church has translated the Book of Mormon and some Church materials in Tamil. The Book of Mormon, The Testimony of the Prophet Joseph Smith, and a small number of Church materials are available in Urdu. In 2017, the Church announced plans to translate the Doctrine and Covenants and the Pearl of Great Price into Tamil and Urdu.[11]

Meetinghouses

The Rose Hill and Phoenix Branch met in separate Church-built meetinghouses. The Flacq Branch meets in a rented space.

Health and Safety

HIV/AIDS infects 1.3% of the population. Cyclones are a risk from November through May. Good private health care is available in Mauritius.

Humanitarian and Development Work

The Church has conducted eight community projects in Mauritius since 1985.[12] Missionaries supervised local members making 250 bags for school children in Rose Hill, le Morne, and Flaq.[13]

Opportunities, Challenges, and Prospects

Religious Freedom

No legal obstacles prohibit proselytism. However, the Church has struggled with a limited number of visas granted to full-time missionaries. The Church has yet to take greater advantage of religious freedom in missionary work, especially with the

significant Hindu and Muslim populations. There are no legal barriers to organize congregations in previously unreached areas. Full-time missionaries report that they sometimes do not wear name tags in public due to negative public opinion regarding Christian missionaries, specifically among Hindus.

Cultural Issues

The racial diversity found in Mauritian society challenges the Church in integrating multiple ethnic groups into the same congregations. Most ethnic groups have little interaction with one another. Tensions between religious groups challenge Church outreach by the diverse religious background of the population. Lack of interest in religion as greater economic prosperity continues may be partly responsible for slow membership growth.

National Outreach

Despite most of the population living on the main island that is only thirty miles across, most of the inhabitants do not live near established Church centers. The inhabitants of Rose Hill, Phoenix, and Central Flacq account for only 18% of the national population, and many of these individuals likely have little awareness of the Church and its beliefs. Only two of the nine districts and none of the island dependencies has a congregation. The Church has had the opportunity to conduct missionary work for more than thirty years, yet only a fraction of the population has a congregation nearby in two of the three largest cities. Usually only two sets of missionaries serve in the country. Isolated members who live in cities without a branch present good opportunities to organize member groups in more locations.

Reasons why little outreach has occurred despite a long, continual Church presence are plentiful. Current Church congregations function in the more Catholic areas of Mauritius, indicating that the greatest success in proselytism initially occurred among Catholics or that the Church's first missionary efforts began in this region and did not expand elsewhere. Lack of receptivity in Mauritius and Reunion may be one of the reasons that led to the relocation of the Mascarene Islands Mission to Durban, South Africa. Distance between Durban, South Africa and Mauritius likely limited mission presidency visits that may have lessened local membership training and support during the 1990s. Few missionaries were likely assigned during this period due to distance and greater receptivity in South Africa, Madagascar, and Reunion. Besides the late 1980s and early 1990s, the greatest outreach may have occurred in the late 1990s and early 2000s before more rapid growth occurred in Madagascar. The more recent rapid increase in convert baptisms and congregations in Madagascar has required greater mission resources, which have likely put prospects for greater outreach in Reunion and Mauritius on hold.

Member Activity and Convert Retention

The Church in Mauritius experiences one of the lowest member activity rates in Africa. 2011 census data reported only one-tenth of Church-reported membership for the year, albeit the number active members appeared much higher given reports from returned missionaries. This discrepancy in the number of active members on the census may be due to the census not counting youth converts or foreign members who live in the country temporarily.

Ethnic Issues and Integration

Ethnic issues in congregations likely do not pose significant challenges for the Church at present. Rather, the segregated living conditions of most due to differences in religion and language appear difficult for finding those interested in the Church and integrating them into congregations.

Language Issues

In 2018, full-time missionaries reported that the Phoenix Branch held separate sacrament meeting services, one in English and

one in French, to meet the language needs of members in the branch. However, the members held classes with speakers of both languages together. Due to the small Mauritian membership and few missionary resources allocated to the country, only one Church resource is translated into Mauritian Creole. The lack of any scriptures and other materials in the most widely spoken language challenge greater outreach among the population. Bhojpuri is the second most widely spoken language yet does not have any Church materials translated due to a lack of a Church presence in areas of India where Bhojpuri is spoken.

Missionary Service

Mauritius has had few members serve full-time missions and relies on foreign full-time missionaries to staff its missionary force. Missionaries who serve in Mauritius first serve in Reunion to develop greater fluency in French. Only a couple of missionary companionships were serving in the country in 2009. Inadequate numbers of full-time missionaries assigned to the Madagascar Antananarivo Mission have contributed to few full-time missionaries working on the island.

Leadership

Both branches were led by local Mauritian members in late 2009, and all three branches were led by local members in 2019. The Church has benefited from local leadership mature enough to lead three branches and staff essential district callings in a country with a membership of less than 600. Detachment from mission headquarters may have contributed to the resilience of local leadership that has learned better self-reliance in managing Church affairs compared to other African countries with small Latter-day Saint populations. Developed local leadership provides the opportunity for greater accommodation of new converts.

Temple

Mauritius pertains to the Johannesburg South Africa Temple District, nearly 2,000 miles away. The small membership likely has few temple visits due to distance and expenses. A closer, potential temple in Madagascar in the future would significantly lessen demands on time and finances to visit the temple.

Comparative Growth

Mauritius has experienced the slowest membership growth in Sub-Saharan Africa among countries that have had a continuous Church presence since the 1980s. With the exception of the Central African Republic, only other countries in Africa with smaller membership either have not had a continuous Church presence or had the Church first established after 2000. The small Church membership appears more resilient than other comparable African nations with small memberships, as manifested by two three branches functioning.

Most Christian denominations experience more limited growth in Mauritius compared to other African nations. Outreach for other churches is also limited due to the islands' remote location and greater receptivity in other African nations. Pentecostals have seen the greatest growth. Seventh-Day Adventists report steady membership growth and slight congregational growth, whereas Jehovah's Witnesses generally report slow growth in the number of active members and stagnant congregational growth. Despite similar challenges with The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, other Christian groups have memberships in the thousands or tens of thousands. This likely demonstrates that most Christian groups have more active membership in sharing their beliefs with those around them and that these groups have been more efficient with limited missionary resources.

Future Prospects

The creation of the Mauritius District may signal a new era for the Church in regards to local member involvement in missionary work and the expansion of the Church into previously unreached areas. The success of the Flacq Branch may encourage additional efforts to reach additional cities. However, limited missionary resources and a historical lack of member involvement

in missionary work continue to present serious challenges that will likely continue to stifle growth. The lack of Church materials and scriptures translated into Mauritian Creole presents a major barrier to outreach. Additional cities in predominantly Hindu and Muslim areas are challenging to open with full-time missionaries but are key to greater country outreach. Port Louis appears one of the most likely locations to have its own member group or branch organized within the foreseeable future given its large population. In order to accommodate the unique challenges in Mauritius and Reunion, a mission for the two islands may one day be reorganized and based in Reunion.

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[13] “School bags for children,” LDS Church News, 3 February 2007. http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/50090/School-bags-for-children.html