


# 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.**



## French Guiana

**Population: 0.25 millions (#188 out of countries)**

*By David Stewart and Matt Martinich*

**Geography**

**Area:** 83,534 square km. French Guiana is located in northern South America and borders the Atlantic Ocean, Brazil, and Suriname. Hot, tropical weather occurs year round with little variation in seasonal temperature. Wet winters and dry summers characterize the climate. Most the terrain consists of coastal plains with some hills and small mountains in the interior. Sparsely populated dense rainforest covers the interior, making it nearly inaccessible. Thunderstorms and flooding are natural hazards. French Guiana is administratively divided into two arrondissements that are divided further into twenty-two communes.

**Peoples**

Black/mulatto: 66%

White: 12%

East Indian/Chinese/Amerindian: 12%

Other: 10%

Blacks are descendants of slaves brought to French Guiana or the Caribbean, some of which mixed with Amerindians giving rise to the mulatto ethnic group. Many blacks are Haitians. Whites are primarily French or other European. Other ethnic groups include Hmong, Laotians, Indians, Lebanese, Latin Americans, and individuals from other Caribbean nations. Approximately half the population was born in French Guiana.

**Population:** 269,352 (January 2016)

**Annual Growth Rate:** 2.1% (2016)

**Fertility Rate:** 3.61 children born per woman (2017)

**Life Expectancy:** 76.2 male, 82.8 female (2011)

**Languages:** French and/or Guianese Creole French (85.9%), Aukan (6.7%), other (7.4%). French is the official language,

widely spoken and used for business. Other languages include Amerindian dialects and immigrant languages such as Spanish, Arabic, Hmong, Haitian Creole, English Creole, and Chinese dialects.

**Literacy:** 83% (2017)

**History**

Prior to French settlement, French Guiana was inhabited by Amerindian groups. The French arrived in the sixteenth century but failed to establish any large colonies, as many of the settlers died. Some plantations were established, but many closed due to the abolition of slavery in 1848. Devil's Island served as a penal settlement for nearly one hundred years starting in the mid-nineteenth century. In the twentieth century, France relocated refugees from French Indochina to French Guiana. French Guiana has been an overseas department of France since 1946. There has been little support for an independence movement in recent years.

**Culture**

French customs and culture heavily influence French Guiana. However, the small population is accommodating to the many minority groups including Vietnamese, Hmong, Chinese, and Amerindians. There is a major divide in education, living conditions, and everyday life between coastal urban areas and the rural interior.

**Economy**

**GDP per capita:** $16,200 (2016) [27.5% of U.S.]

**Human Development Index:** 0.901 (2017) (for France)

**Corruption Index:** 72 (2018) (for France)

The French Guiana economy relies heavily on France for sustenance and support. The French Space Center is located in French Guiana and provides additional economic support to the overseas department. Primary economic activities include logging and fishing. Services employed 61% of the workforce in 1980. Primary trade partners include France (with which over 60% of goods are exchanged), the United States, and other European nations.

**Faiths**

Christian: 84.4%

Other: 15.6%

**Christians**

**Denominations Members Congregations**

Catholic – 180,000

Evangelicals – 10,361

Seventh Day Adventists – 2,869 – 17

Jehovah's Witnesses – 2,694 – 47

Latter-day Saints – 428 – 1

**Religion**

Most French Guiana natives and immigrants are Catholic. Many Christian groups have a presence in the urban areas. Most

Christian groups report moderate growth. European connections with the space industry have increased secularism. Most non-Christians are irreligious. There are small groups of Muslims, Baha'is, and other non-Christian religious groups.

**Religious Freedom**

The constitution protects religious freedom, which is generally upheld by the government. Discrimination towards some small, socially unaccepted religious groups regarded as cults occurs.[1]

**Largest Cities**

**Urban: 76%**

Cayenne, **Saint-Laurent-du-Maroni, Matoury, Kourou, Remire-Montjoly, Macouria, Maripasoula, Mana, Apatou, Papaïchton.**

Cities in **bold** do not have a congregation of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

One of the ten largest cities has a Church congregation. Ninety percent (90%) of the population lives in the ten largest cities. About 120,000 or 44% of the total population live in Cayenne and surrounding communities.

**Church History**

A native of French Guiana named Charles Fortin joined the Church in France and returned to French Guiana in 1980. Fortin held Sunday meetings in his home and invited others to Church meetings. Fortin died in 1986, but by this time several members were attending meetings. In March 1988, Elder Charles Didier visited and organized a group, and the first convert baptism took place in November. In 1989, two branches were organized in Kourou and Cayenne. Senior missionary couples were first assigned in 1989 to both congregations. The West Indies Mission administered French Guiana prior to the creation of the Trinidad and Tobago Mission in 1991. French Guiana returned to the West Indies Mission following the consolidation of both missions in 1994. French Guiana was assigned to the North America Southeast Area until it was transferred to the Caribbean Area in 2006.[2] In 2015, French Guiana was transferred to the newly organized Barbados Bridgetown Mission.

**Membership Growth**

**LDS Membership: 428 (2017)**

In 1990, there were fewer than one hundred members.[3] By 2000, membership increased to 250. Between 2000 and 2006 the number of members remained static and numbered 248 in 2006. In 2007 and 2008, greater membership growth occurred, increasing to 287 and 306. The Church reported slow, steady membership growth in the mid-2010s as membership totaled 357 in 2013 and 403 in 2016. Although many members are natives, there are many Spanish-speaking members in Cayenne from Colombia, Venezuela, and Peru.

**Congregational Growth**

**Branches: 1 (2012)**

The Cayenne and Kourou Branches began operating in the late 1980s. A third branch was organized in Matoury when the first district in French Guiana was created in March 2009, but the Matoury Branch closed in 2011. In early 2011, the Cayenne French Guiana District and the Kourou Branch were discontinued. It is unclear whether members in the Kourou area continue to meet as a group or dependent branch. In early 2019, the Cayenne Branch was assigned to the Guadeloupe District.

**Activity and Retention**

In 1990, 45 members attended a fireside held prior to the dedication of French Guiana for missionary work.[4] In early 2010, the Matoury Branch had twenty to thirty attending meetings and the Kourou Branch had comparable sacrament attendance. The Cayenne Branch had fifty to seventy attending Church meetings. Twenty-six were enrolled in seminary or institute in the 2009–2010 school year. In the mid-2010s, there were approximately eighty active members in the Cayenne Branch. Active membership is likely no greater than 100, or 23% of total membership.

**Language Materials**

**Languages with Latter-day Saint Scripture:** French, English, Spanish, Haitian Creole, Arabic, Chinese, Hmong, and Vietnamese.

All Latter-day Saint scriptures are translated in French, Spanish, Haitian Creole, Arabic, Chinese, and Vietnamese. A Latter-day Saint version of the Bible is available in Spanish. Only the Book of Mormon is translated in Hmong. Most Church materials are available in French whereas some priesthood, Relief Society, Sunday School, young women, missionary, audio/visual, and family history materials are available in Chinese, Hmong, and Vietnamese. Most of these materials are available in Arabic and Haitian Creole.

### Meetinghouses

The Cayenne Branch meets in a Church-built meetinghouse. The Matoury Branch met in the Cayenne chapel until early 2010 when meetings began to be held in the home of a newly called branch president in the community of Matoury. The Kourou Branch met in a renovated or rented building.

### Health and Safety

Malaria is endemic to French Guiana outside of Cayenne. Dengue, filariasis, and other tropical diseases also occur. An HIV/AIDS epidemic spread in the 2000s and is the highest among overseas departments of France.

### Humanitarian and Development Work

The Church has performed little humanitarian and development work. Service projects appear limited to full-time missionaries' weekly service hours and branch service projects.

## Opportunities, Challenges, and Prospects

### Religious Freedom

No laws limit the the Church missionary program. The Church has sent missionaries to French Guiana with few or no challenges.

### Cultural Issues

Urban areas contain the majority of the population yet have increased secularism and greater wealth that have posed challenges to proselytism. French Guiana's status as an overseas department allows many to immigrate to France in search of better employment and living conditions.

### National Outreach

French Guiana's remote location and small population has reduced mission leadership visits and likely prevents the assignment of additional missionaries. Prior to 2015, the West Indies Mission served a population of approximately four million in the southern Caribbean and the Guianas, of which French Guiana's population accounted for only 5.5%. In early 2019, the Barbados Bridgetown Mission administered to approximately one dozen nations and dependencies/territories with a combined population of 1.8 million. Future outreach in terms of the frequency of missionary visits, the number of missionaries assigned, and the assignment of a senior missionary couple must be allocated with the demands throughout the Barbados Bridgetown Mission, as the mission administers to many small, island nations with burgeoning congregations. It is unclear whether the closure of branches in Kourou and Matoury in 2011 have resulted in a total cessation of missionary activity in these locations.

The highly urbanized population along coastal areas provides opportunity for national outreach among most inhabitants with few outreach centers. Remire-Montjoly, a commune on the outskirts of Cayenne, has 19,000 inhabitants (8.6% of the national population) and is only five miles from the Cayenne Branch, which likely allows for some limited outreach. Remire-Montjoly and other large communes on the outskirts of Cayenne appear likely locations for expanding mission outreach.

Saint-Laurent-du-Maroni appears the most promising location for future national outreach that is distant from established Church centers. The commune has the second largest population with 44,000 inhabitants (15% of the national population). Eleven of the twenty-two communes are in remote areas in the interior or are distant from larger cities. These eleven communes account

for approximately one-tenth of the population but 77.5% of the geographic area. These locations will be very challenging to reach due to their small populations distributed over a large amount of terrain that is difficult to access.

Small groups or cottage meetings held in remote communities may facilitate greater national outreach as they require few resources and can result in strengthened local members, investigator finding, and teaching potential converts for baptism. It does not appear that there is an emphasis on cottage meetings in French Guiana, but some worship services have been or are currently held in members' homes when there is no nearby chapel for a small group of members.

**Member Activity and Convert Retention**

Member inactivity is a serious problem that limits the Church's future growth in French Guiana. Congregations in Matoury and Kourou had few active members resulting in fewer fellowshipping resources for potential converts and their closure in 2011. Member activity and convert retention is partially influenced by geographical distance as some members cannot attend meetings regularly. The number of active members is insufficient to operate a district as evidenced by the creation of the first district in 2009 and its closure two years later. In the past, immigration to France has slowed membership growth and has likely reduced active membership.[5]

Convert retention appears to have been poorest in the 1990s and the late 2000s, as membership grew from fewer than one hundred members to 250 members in the 1990s, yet there was no increase in congregations. Furthermore, increases in Church membership in the late 2000s did not result in sustainable increases in active membership as indicated by the closure of multiple branches.

**Ethnic Issues and Integration**

French Guiana has ethnic integration issues primarily caused by language barriers. There does not appear to be much friction between ethnic groups based on other issues. Haitians, Latinos, and French Guiana natives have shown desires to work together to resolve issues stemming from cultural differences. There appears to be little outreach among the Asians and Amerindians likely due to their limited numbers, differences in language, and distance of these communities from current outreach centers.

**Language Issues**

Misunderstandings and challenges with members speaking different languages create barriers between language groups. In Cayenne, French- and Spanish-speaking members have experienced difficulties integrating into the same congregation, and sometimes do not attend meetings or leave worship services early when talks are primarily in a language they cannot understand. In early 2010, the Cayenne Branch received a new branch president who only spoke Spanish. This decision was likely partially influenced by the greater receptivity of Spanish speakers in Cayenne and the willingness of Spanish speakers in participating in member-missionary work. There appears to be a significant need to establish separate branches for French and Spanish speakers in Cayenne. Many members have shown a willingness to make accommodations for other language groups but face many frustrations due to language barriers. Many of the Asian languages spoken have a large number of Church materials that can be utilized for future outreach. Unreached Amerindian groups do not have Church materials in their native languages.

**Missionary Service**

In June 2009, six missionaries served in French Guiana and were assigned to the Suriname zone of the West Indies Mission. In the late 2010s, there appeared to be two full-time missionary companionships. Very few members from French Guiana have served missions.

**Leadership**

In 2010, local members led branches in Cayenne and Matoury. In April 2010, the Kourou Branch had an acting branch leader, indicating that the branch presidency was in transition. The closure of the branch was likely due to a lack of local leadership in addition to few active members. The creation of the first district and its closure less than two years later indicates that there are some capable and qualified leaders, but they remain too limited in numbers or are too inconsistent to sufficiently staff a district. In 2019, the branch president appeared to be French-speaking. Emigration has likely contributed to local leadership challenges.

**Temple**

French Guiana pertains to the Caracas Venezuela Temple district. Many members likely travel to the Santo Domingo Dominican Republic temple instead due to challenges in entering Venezuela. Temple trips likely occur once or twice a year with very few members due to constraints on distance, time, and money. A closer temple is unlikely to be built in the near future as

membership is small and young throughout the Guianas and southern Caribbean.

**Comparative Growth**

The Church in French Guiana has experienced slower membership growth than the Church in Guyana and Suriname. In the 2000s, only a few other Caribbean nations such as Antigua and Barbuda and Grenada experienced such small increases in membership. French Guiana ranks among nations in the region with the smallest percentages of Latter-day Saints in the population. The number of full-time missionaries assigned to French Guiana is comparable to many small Caribbean nations.

Christians have struggled to address the unique challenges of French Guiana's emigration of natives, ethnic diversity, secularism, small population, and unreached Amerindian groups. However, proselytism-focused groups have reported accelerated growth in recent years. Seventh-Day Adventists and Jehovah's Witnesses have both reported an increase in membership of approximately 27% since 2010. Both denominations have reported increases in congregations in French Guiana commensurate with membership growth. These denominations have more developed local leadership and have extended language-specific outreach to individual ethnolinguistic groups. For example, Witnesses operated congregations in Cayenne that held services in as many as twelve different languages as of early 2019.

**Future Prospects**

The outlook for future growth is mixed, as mission leadership has been dynamic toward meeting the needs of receptive language groups in French Guiana, but local leadership sustainability and member activity issues frustrate growth. The creation of language-specific congregations in Cayenne providing church services in French, Haitian Creole, and Spanish may help address these issues. Immigration of French Guiana natives to France threatens growth among the largest ethnic group. However, the growing diversity of the population allows for unique opportunities and challenges for proselytism. Long-term sustained church growth will largely depend on outreach efforts among various ethnic groups, the retention of converts, local leadership development, and local member involvement in missionary work.

[1] "France," International Religious Freedom Report for 2017. 16 March 2019. http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2009/127310.htm

[2] "Southeast area divided; Caribbean Area created," LDS Church News, 10 June 2006. http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/49062/Southeast-area-divided-Caribbean-Area-created.html

[3] "Six new missions to be created missions are added in Europe, Africa, Caribbean, and U.S.," LDS Church News, 23 March 1991. http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/20711/Six-new-missions-to-be-created-missions-are-added-in-Europe-Africa-Caribbean-and

[4] "Services in 3 South American nations and island republic," LDS Church News, 10 March 1990. http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/20438/Services-in-3-South-American-nations-and-island-republic.html

[5] "French Guiana," Country Profiles, retrieved 10 April 2010. http://newsroom.lds.org/ldsnewsroom/eng/contact-us/french-guiana