



Reaching the Nations International Church Growth Almanac

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



Brunei

Population: 0.42 millions (#176 out of countries)

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Geography

Area: 5,765 square km. Located on the western side of the island of Borneo, Brunei consists of two small enclaves surrounded by East Malaysia on the South China Sea. The climate is hot, tropical, and rainy. The terrain includes coastal plains and hills in the interior. Seasonal smoke and haze from fires in Indonesia is the primary environmental issue. Typhoons, flooding, and earthquakes are natural hazards. Brunei is divided into four administrative districts.

Peoples

Malay: 66.3%

Chinese: 11.2%

Indigenous: 3.4%

Other: 19.1%

Malays are the largest ethnic group. Chinese arrived as early as the fourteenth century. Other ethnic groups are indigenous or primarily come from East Malaysia. Foreign workers constitute a sizeable minority.

Population: 450,565 (July 2018)

Annual Growth Rate: 1.55% (2018)

Fertility Rate: 1.77 children born per woman (2018)

Life Expectancy: 75.2 male, 80.0 female (2018)

Languages: Malay [Brunei dialect] (70.0%), Chinese languages (10.0%), Bisaya (8.9%), Iban (4.1%), Tutong (3.9%), English (2.4%), other (0.5%). Standard Malay is the official language. English and Chinese languages are widely spoken. No languages have over one million speakers.

Literacy: 96%

History

Islam arrived in the twelfth century, and was adopted in the fifteenth century when a Malay Muslim became Sultan. The Sultanate of Brunei reached its height in power and influence in the region between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries. Territory controlled included coastal areas of northeastern Borneo and the southern Philippines. The Sultanate of Brunei began to decline due to political instability, pirate attacks, and European powers exerting their influence in the region. The British made Brunei a British protectorate in 1888. With the exception of a brief period of Japanese occupation in the 1940s, Brunei was ruled by Great Britain until independence occurred in 1984. Oil and natural gas profits have made Brunei one of the wealthiest nations in Asia. The royal family has continued to rule for over 600 years.

Culture

Brunei proudly professes its adherence to Islam and shares many commonalities with Malaysia. Government bans the public sale and consumption of alcohol. Minority groups practice their own unique traditions and customs. Ancient influence from Hinduism is still apparent in some customs. Crime rates are very low. Government leaders have expressed some concern over the balance of integrating into the international community without losing local culture or disrupting social systems.

Economy

GDP per capita: \$78,900 (2017) [132% of U.S.]

Human Development Index: 0.853 (2017)

Corruption Index: 63 (2018)

Brunei's economic success is attributed to revenues from oil and natural gas, which account for more than 90% of exports and two-thirds of the total GDP. Foreign investment has also contributed to the nation's wealth. Industry employs 63% of the workforce and produces 56.6% of the GDP. Services account for most of the remainder of these two indicators. Revenues fund free education through the university level and provide free health care. Government aims to diversify the economy through increasing tourism, banking, and agriculture. Primary trade partners include Japan, China, Singapore, South Korea, and Malaysia.

Faiths

Muslim: 78.8%

Christian: 8.7%

Buddhist: 7.8%

Other: 4.7%

Christians

Denominations – Members – Congregations

Catholic 712

Latter-day Saints less than 100 2

Religion

Muslims are the predominant religious group and number approximately 200,000. Sharia law is enforced, and adherence to Muslim teachings is more conservative than in Malaysia. In the late 2000s, there were over 16,000 Buddhists and 7,500 Christians. At the time, Hindus, Baha'is, atheists, Taoists, and Sikhs all numbered less than 500, and almost 17,000 Bruneians

expressed no religious preference.^[1] In the mid-2010s, the Chinese population was 65% Buddhist and 20% Christian. Muslims comprise half of indigenous tribes and foreign-born workers.^[2] Religious groups do not typically experience conflict and interact peacefully. Converts to Islam receive financial incentives from the government.^[3]

Religious Freedom

Persecution Index: 36th (2019)

The constitution allows for religious freedom of non-Muslims, although government restricts these rights. The official religion is Islam. Proselytism by non-Muslim groups is forbidden. The government promotes Islam. Non-Muslim groups report challenges in bringing religious literature into Brunei. Christian denominations report challenges with maintaining, renovating, or building new facilities. Individuals who wish to convert to another religion report fear of social retribution that prohibits many from doing so. All ethnic Malays are assumed to be Muslim by the government.^[4]

Largest Cities

Urban: 77.6% (2018)

Bandar Seri Begawan, Kuala Belait, Sengkurong, Lumut, Seria, Tutong, Jerudong, Mentiri, Muara, Lumapas, Panaga.

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

None of the ten most populous cities has an official Church congregation. Eighty percent (80%) of the national population lives in the five largest cities.

Church History

Members have lived in Brunei from as early as the 1980s. Elder Russell M. Nelson visited with members from Brunei during the Miri East Malaysia District conference in early 2010.^[5] Brunei is assigned to the Singapore Mission.

Membership Growth

Church Membership: Less than 50 (2018)

There are likely fewer than fifty members in the country, consisting primarily of expatriate workers and few native members. Convert baptisms appear infrequent due to restrictions on formal proselytism, although members can share their beliefs with friends and relatives.

Congregational Growth

Wards: 0 Branches: 0 Groups: 2? (2018)

In 2010, two small groups in Brunei were administered by the Miri East Malaysia District and meet in Bandar Seri Begawan and Kuala Belait. However, by 2019 it was unclear whether either of the groups continued to operate.

Activity and Retention

Limited information is available, and most active members appear to be expatriate workers. There may be additional inactive members who are not known to the Church among expatriate workers.

Language Materials

Languages with Church Scripture: English, Chinese (Traditional and Simplified Characters).

All Latter-day Saint scriptures are available in Chinese (traditional and simplified Characters) and Standard Malay. Many Church materials are translated into these languages. The Articles of Faith and The Testimony of the Prophet Joseph Smith are

translated into Iban.

Meetinghouses

There are no Latter-day Saint chapels in Brunei. Meetings likely occur in the home of a member or in a rented space.

Humanitarian and Development Work

No Church-sponsored humanitarian or development work has occurred in Brunei.

Opportunities, Challenges, and Prospects

Religious Freedom

Government restrictions on proselyting and societal intolerance for conversion severely limit Church activities and operations. Church meetings in Brunei are not published due to the conservative nature of this Islamic state, as the Church does not have official status. Members have resided in Brunei who cannot find the Church due to these restrictions. In addition to laws rendering the population unreached by the Church's missionary efforts, local members also face challenges regarding their religious freedom and must be careful to respect and obey local laws.

Cultural Issues

Many cultural issues faced by the Church in Brunei mirror those in Malaysia but with less tolerance toward minority religious groups. Many Bruneians live lifestyles in harmony with some Church teachings, as indicated by low alcohol consumption and crime rates. Societal intolerance for conversion create difficulties for prospective missionary activity.

National Outreach

The entire population is unreached by the Church missionary program. Only non-Muslims with personal contacts with Church members may potentially learn about the Church. Information on the Church's meetinghouse locator website that directs members to contact Church Headquarters or mission headquarters for information on location and meeting times may be a suitable method to help reach isolated members or interested individuals within the confines of the law as this is the same procedure the Church has adopted in sensitive countries in the Middle East for foreigners and mainland China for People's Republic of China citizens. The small geographic size of Brunei and its urbanized population would potentially allow for few outreach centers to reach the population if proselytism were less restricted.

Member Activity and Convert Retention

The sensitive nature of the Church in Brunei poses barriers for church activity, as expatriate members experience difficulty making contact with the local church. Convert retention is likely high as few, if any, converts in Brunei likely join the Church after overcoming considerable opposition.

Ethnic Issues and Integration

Two-thirds of the population, virtually all Malay, are unreached by the Church due to their adherence to Islam. Indigenous groups and immigrants from East Malaysia and elsewhere may be challenging to integrate into congregations due to cultural differences among this diverse subset of the population.

Language Issues

Many speak English fluently, and the Church has translated all scriptures into Chinese (traditional and simplified characters) and Standard Malay. Worship services likely use English or Malay.

Leadership

Few active members results in limited leadership insufficient for the organization of a branch. The Church in Brunei appears to

be largely dependent on transient expatriate members. Training and mentoring local leaders will be difficult due to government restrictions on religious freedom.

Temple

Brunei is assigned to the Hong Kong China Temple district and may be reassigned to temples in mainland Southeast Asia once construction on these temples is complete. Temple trips likely occur through the Miri East Malaysia District, as the active Church membership in Brunei is likely too small to support its own temple trips. Such trips are likely infrequent due to long distances and travel costs, as well as the preponderance of transient expatriate members who may have easier temple access in their home regions. A temple in Singapore would reduce these burdens.

Comparative Growth

Due to restrictions, there has been little growth in Brunei, with small, unofficial member groups that primarily service foreign expatriate workers which may not continue to operate as of 2019. The Church's presence in Brunei is comparable in size to some Muslim nations, primarily in North Africa.

Christian groups report that little to no progress has been made in increasing their congregations over the past couple of decades.

Future Prospects

With a small population and heavy government restrictions on non-Muslim faiths, Brunei is unlikely to experience significant church growth in the medium-term future. No other Muslim nation in Southeast Asia is as intolerant towards Christians. Government restrictions and Malay cultural customs limit missionary efforts among religious minorities to personal contacts of Church members in Brunei.

Prospects exist for groups to mature into independent branches under the Miri East Malaysia District if foreign members with leadership experience remain active and stay in the country for extended periods of time. Greater progress will not occur until local members join the Church in greater numbers. Additional foreign members who relocate to Brunei may help strengthen congregations if they are able to locate them. Information on meetinghouse locations accessible upon request to Church Headquarters or mission headquarters may have a tremendous impact on better organization and accounting of members in the country, and help establish a more permanent Church presence in the long term.

[1] "Brunei," International Religious Freedom Report 2009, 26 October 2009. <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2009/127265.htm>

[2] "2018 Report on International Religious Freedom: Brunei." U.S. Department of State. 21 June 2019. <https://www.state.gov/reports/2018-report-on-international-religious-freedom/brunei/>

[3] "2018 Report on International Religious Freedom: Brunei." U.S. Department of State. 21 June 2019. <https://www.state.gov/reports/2018-report-on-international-religious-freedom/brunei/>

[4] "2018 Report on International Religious Freedom: Brunei." U.S. Department of State. 21 June 2019. <https://www.state.gov/reports/2018-report-on-international-religious-freedom/brunei/>

[5] "Asian saints taught by Elder Nelson," LDS Church News, 13 March 2010. <http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/59001/Asian-saints-taught-by-Elder-Nelson.html>