



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.



Singapore

Population: 5.57 millions (#116 out of countries)

By David Stewart and Matt Martinich

Geography

Area: 719.2 square km. One of the smallest countries in the world, Singapore comprises a city that rests on the equator on a main island and several smaller islands off the coast of the tip of the Malay Peninsula. The geography is flat and the climate is tropical. Nature preserves protect remaining areas of tropical rainforest left over after widespread urbanization following independence. Due to limited space for development, land reclamation projects in the surrounding ocean have increased the size of Singapore. Pollution is the primary environmental concern. Flashfloods are a natural hazard.

Peoples

Chinese: 74.3%

Malay: 13.4%

Indian: 9.0%

Other: 3.2%

The Chinese are the largest ethnic group in Singapore. Chinese primarily arrived before independence or after 1990. Malays were among the original inhabitants, and Indians were brought by the British.

Population: 5,995,991 (July 2018)

Annual Growth Rate: 1.79% (2018)

Fertility Rate: 0.84 children born per woman (2018)

Life Expectancy: 82.8 male, 88.3 female (2018)

Languages: Twenty-four languages are spoken in Singapore. English (36.9%), Mandarin (34.9%), Malay (10.7%), and Tamil

(3.3%) are all official languages. The rest of Singaporeans speak other Chinese languages (12.2%) or other languages (2.0%). English literacy has steadily increased over the past couple decades. Most are literate in English. In 2010, 52% of Chinese youth, 50% of Indian youth, and 26% of Malay youth spoke English as their home language.[\[1\]](#) Languages with over one million native speakers include English (2.07 million) and Mandarin (1.96 million).

Literacy: 97% (2016)

History

Malay sultans controlled Singapore when in 1819 the British received permission to build a trading post on the island. The entire island came under British control in 1824. During World War II, the island was invaded and held by Japanese forces. An independence movement began in the 1950s. Independence was declared in 1963, and the country joined the Federation of Malaysia. In 1965, Singapore seceded from Malaysia. Due to its geographic location, free-market economy, and small population compared to other nations, the country was transformed into one of the world's wealthiest.

Culture

Singapore is known for its strict laws, cleanliness, urban and family planning, and ethnic and religious diversity. Many crimes follow severe penalties, such as caning, imprisonment, and heavy fines. A chewing gum ban was in effect for over a decade in the 1990s and 2000s. Due to limited space and natural resources, government pressured families to have few children in order to reduce the high birth rate following independence. A large portion of the inhabitants are not permanent residents. In order to reduce religious and ethnic tensions, strict laws are enforced banning persecution or harassment based on religion. Military service is mandatory at age eighteen.

Economy

GDP per capita: \$94,100 (2017) [157% of U.S.]

Human Development Index: 0.932 (2017)

Corruption Index: 85 (2018)

Singapore ranked as the country with the seventh highest GDP per capita in 2017 and is among the least perceived corrupt countries in the world. Consumer electronics, pharmaceuticals, information technology products, and tourism are the major industries in the economy. Services comprise approximately three-quarters of the GDP and workforce, whereas industry constitutes the remaining one-quarter of the GDP and workforce. Singapore has an insignificant agriculture sector and a weakening industry sector. Singapore has one of the lowest unemployment rates, at 2.2% in 2017. Import and export partners are well distributed around Asia and developed nations. However, China is the main trade partner. Transparency International ranked Singapore as the fourth least corrupt country in the world in 2018 after Denmark, New Zealand, and Finland.

Faiths

Buddhist: 33.2%

Christian: 18.8%

Muslim: 14.0%

Taoist: 10.0%

Hindu: 5.0%

Unaffiliated: 18.0%

Other: 1.0%

Christians

Denominations – Members – Congregations

Evangelicals – 377,398

Catholic – 360,000

Latter-day Saints – 3,449 – 7

Seventh Day Adventists – 3,120 – 8

Jehovah's Witnesses – 2,000?

Religion

Singapore has a blend of diverse religious traditions that interact regularly. Buddhists form the majority due most Singaporeans claiming Chinese ancestry. Malays are homogeneously Muslim. Taoists are Chinese and Hindus are Indians. Chinese are 42.3% Buddhist, 20.9% Christian, and 12.9% Taoist. Ethnic Indians are 59.9% Hindu, 21.3% Muslim, and 12.1% Christian. Christians comprise the largest percentage among Chinese.[\[2\]](#)

Religious Freedom

The constitution allows religious freedom, which is limited by the government to promote racial and religious harmony. Jehovah's Witnesses and the Unification Church are banned and are fined for distributing literature, as they are seen to disrupt social order. Literature produced by Jehovah's Witnesses is banned. Foreign Christian missionaries are allowed to proselyte. However, open proselytism is discouraged by the government. Government closely monitors religious communities to maintain social order.[\[3\]](#)

Major Cities

Urban: 100%

Church History

The earliest presence of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Singapore was established in 1960 when four members resided in the country. In 1963, the first Church meetings were held with British military and members from Hong Kong. The first full-time missionaries were assigned in 1968. In 1969, Elder Ezra Taft Benson dedicated Singapore for missionary work[\[4\]](#) and the Southern Asia Mission was organized with headquarters in Singapore. In 1970, the government restricted missionary visas and proselytism resulting in local membership taking responsibility for missionary work. John Huntsman played an important role with the Church obtaining missionary visas.[\[5\]](#) The Singapore Mission was reestablished in 1980. In 2003, the Singapore Mission Branch was created and headquartered in Singapore for members of the Church living in remote areas of the mission. At the time, the Singapore Mission included Bangladesh, Brunei, Diego Garcia, Malaysia, Maldives, Nepal, Singapore, and Sri Lanka. In late 2007 the Singapore Mission was divided and to create the India New Delhi Mission. The Singapore Mission has consisted of Singapore, Malaysia, and Brunei since late 2007. The Church has sought to create positive relationships with other religious groups, such as with the Muslim community.[\[6\]](#)

Membership Growth

Church Membership: 3,449 (2018)

By 1970 there were around one hundred members and by 1976 membership reached 512. Growth accelerated, with membership reaching 960 in 1985 and 1,300 in 1990. In mid-1993 there were 1,750 members.[\[7\]](#) Church membership reached 2,000 in 1997, 2,162 in 2000, 2,265 in 2002, 2,385 in 2004, 2,612 in 2006, 2,890 in 2008, and 3,337 in 2010. Annual membership growth rates between 2000 and 2010 ranged from a high of 13.6% in 2010 to a low of 1.7% in 2002 and 2009 but generally varied from 2% to 6%. Rapid membership growth in 2010 may have been attributed to an influx in convert baptisms in groups operating in Brunei and Malaysia under the Singapore Mission Branch rather than in Singapore.

Membership totals were relatively unchanged or slightly declined for most years in the 2010s. Membership totaled 3,608 in 2013, 3,381 in 2016, and 3,449 in 2018.

In 2018, one in 1,738 was a Latter-day Saint.

Congregational Growth

Wards: 7 Branches: 0 (August 2019)

The first branch was created 1968 when the first missionaries arrived from the Southern Far East Mission. A second branch was also created in 1970.^[8] By 1990, there were five branches and one district. By the middle of 1993, there were seven branches in Singapore.^[9] The first stake was organized in 1995 and included the Bedok, Clementi, Singapore 1st, and Toa Payoh Wards, and the Singapore 2nd and 3rd Branches.^[10] By 2000, there were six wards and two branches in Singapore. The following year, both branches, which were not English speaking, were made into wards. The Singapore Stake also included the Johor Bahru Branch in neighboring Malaysia. Of the eight wards in the Singapore Stake in 2010, six were designated as English-speaking, one as Chinese-speaking, and one as Tagalog-speaking. In 2011, two new wards were organized: the Singapore 4th (English) and the Chao Chu Kang Wards. That same year, the two branches in neighboring Johor Bahru, Malaysia were reassigned from the Singapore Stake and made into their own district.

In 2017, wards in Singapore were redistricted to help better strengthen individual congregations and the stake. However, there was no net change in the number of congregations in the stake.^[11] A more dramatic reorganization of the wards in Singapore occurred in early 2019 with the discontinuation of eight wards and the creation of five wards, resulting in the net number of wards decreasing from ten to seven. One of the new wards was a young single adult ward.^[12] One Tagalog-speaking ward and one Chinese-speaking ward continue to operate in the stake.

Activity and Retention

High retention and activity existed in the late 1960s when church attendance was greater than reported membership.^[13] Focus has been placed on teaching and fellowshiping youth through conferences and musical performances with hundreds in attendance.^[14] Inactivity and retention issues have presented challenges that have been addressed through active members inviting less active members for an open house of the newly completed Singapore Stake center in 2007. Four hundred active and less active members attended the event. Six hundred attended the dedication of the building. Most wards in 2010 appeared to have between 75 and 150 active members. In the mid to late 2010s, most wards had between 70-120 active members prior to the reconfiguration of wards in 2019. Returned missionaries who served in Singapore during the 2010s noted that poor fellowshiping from members, weak testimony of the Church, and being offended by a fellow member or church leader are the main reasons why inactive members no longer attend church. Active membership for Singapore is estimated at 1,000, or 28% of total church membership.

Language Materials

Languages with Latter-day Saint Scripture: English, Chinese (traditional and simplified characters), Tamil, Malay

All Latter-day Saint scriptures and most church materials are available in simplified and traditional Chinese characters and Malay. The Book of Mormon is the only Church scripture translated into Tamil although plans to translate the Doctrine and Covenants and The Pearl of Great Price into Tamil were announced in 2017.^[15]

Meetinghouses

In 1990, a new meetinghouse was dedicated by Elder Dallin H. Oaks to serve three of the five branches in the Singapore District.^[16] The Singapore Stake center was dedicated in early 2007 and housed six wards. Two additional meetinghouses service wards in Singapore, one of which was completed in 2011.

Humanitarian and Development Work

The Church has conducted seventeen projects in Singapore since 1985 that have consisted of community projects and emergency response.^[17] Church members in Singapore have conducted humanitarian and charity work for their own country and other less prosperous nations. In 2004, LDS women donated quilts to an orphanage.^[18] Tsunami relief aid was assembled by members in early 2005.^[19] Eighty youth cleaned a beach in Singapore as part of a youth conference in 2006.^[20] In 2007, Latter-day Saint women knitted 1,700 hats for newborns, which were distributed to hospitals around Asia.^[21]

Opportunities, Challenges, and Prospects

Religious Freedom

The Church has maintained positive relations with the government, resulting in no obstructions to missionary work. Many Christian churches in Singapore condemn the Church as un-Christian, intimidate converts and investigators, and send hateful letters to missionaries. Opposition from other Christian groups poses challenges for the Church when conducting missionary work and public affairs.

Cultural Issues

The Church has the challenge of assimilating different ethnic groups into the same congregation due to differing religious and cultural backgrounds. As greater numbers of Singaporeans joined the Church, non-English speaking congregations have been established. The Church appears to have gained converts among many of the ethnic groups in Singapore and integrated them into English-speaking congregations due to the widespread use of English as a language of interethnic communication. Challenges exist in retaining converts into the Church when large diversity exists in religious and cultural background. Singapore's wealth has increased materialism, likely resulting in Singaporeans being less receptive to the Church than many other southeastern Asian countries. Returned missionaries who served in the 2010s complained that most Singaporeans are uninterested in the Latter-day Saint gospel message, and that busy work schedules and a focus on wealth have deterred receptivity. High cost of living and mediocre receptivity has limited the number of full-time missionaries assigned and have likely prevented the construction or renting of additional meetinghouses.

National Outreach

Singapore is one of the only countries where the Church is not restrained by geography, resulting in the opportunity of reaching the entire population with few outreach centers. Outreach is limited due to the diversity in the culture, language, and religious background of the population. Although approximately half of the population speaks a Chinese language, only one of the seven congregations in Singapore is Chinese speaking, as many Chinese Latter-day Saints speak English and attend English-speaking wards. Some areas of Singapore are less reached by Latter-day Saints due to distance to meetinghouses. Several planning areas have over 100,000 inhabitants and no congregations, such as Jurong West, Tampines, Hougang, Yishun, Sengkang, Bukit Merah, Bukit Batok, Pasir Ris, Bukit Panjang, and Serangoon. Establishing additional meetinghouses to reduce travel times may enhance national outreach if feasible.

Member Activity and Convert Retention

Member activity was strong enough to fill the needed callings to support a stake, even though membership was smaller than most stakes when the Church created the Singapore stake. Member activity rates are moderate for East Asia. Higher convert retention rates than other industrialized Asian nations appear possible due to the active role of members in referring and fellowshipping investigators and new converts. However, more recent reports indicate that member-missionary participation is low in many wards. A reduction in member participation in the finding, teaching, and fellowshipping of investigators and new converts may explain stagnant membership growth rates during much of the 2010s. However, these changes in membership growth trends may be also due to foreign members moving away from the country. Convert retention appears moderate due to counter-proselytism efforts from other Christian groups and the influence of materialism and secularism on society. Many converts in the Church come from nations that have a small presence in Singapore and an even smaller or no Church presence in their home country. This provides a great opportunity for converts from nations or areas in which the Church is not established to return home and conduct missionary work among family and friends in preparation of the Church's arrival.

Ethnic Issues and Integration

The cosmopolitan atmosphere of Singapore and government policies aimed at maintaining ethnic harmony reduces ethnic integration challenges for the Church. Most countries in Asia have some permanent or temporary residents in Singapore. Even the largest ethnic group, the Chinese, is an agglomeration of peoples throughout China who have arrived at different times. The sole Chinese-speaking ward did not become a ward until 2001 and likely serves members who are not proficient in English. Some new converts consist of temporary residents from lesser-reached nations including India, Indonesia, and Myanmar.

Language Issues

Widespread fluency in English among Singaporean residents simplifies mission outreach. Notwithstanding this advantage, few immigrants and migrant workers speak English with enough competence to learn the gospel and have meaningful church attendance. Misunderstandings and lack of communication between migrant workers and permanent residents has likely contributed to modest member activity and retention rates among these converts.

Leadership

Singapore has built strong local leadership over the past several decades, resulting in the creation of a stake in the mid-1990s despite few congregations and a small church membership. Oftentimes, the first stake created in a country has leaders who also

work for the Church, yet the first Singapore Stake presidency revealed the strength of active male membership, with neither the president nor his counselors working for the Church.^[22] The stake presidency was reorganization in 2003^[23] and 2008. The latter reorganization resulted with the new president also working for the Church as the CES country director. The new counselors did not work for the Church.^[24] None of the stake presidency members were Church employees when the stake presidency was reorganized in 2017.^[25]

Singaporean members have served in international leadership positions. In 2013, Hoi Seng Leonard Woo was called as an area seventy.^[26] In 2019, Stephen Chee Kong Lai was called as an area seventy^[27] and Leonard Woo was called as the new mission president for the Singapore Mission.^[28] Foreigners living in Singapore have also been called to international leadership positions, such as Carlos Garcia Revillo Junior^[29] and Joseph Payne Benson in 2013^[30] and Alvin Frazier Meredith III and his wife in 2019.^[31] Leadership is challenged to serve the needs of the ethnic diversity in membership and developing leadership among ethnic minorities.

Temple

Singapore is assigned to the Hong Kong China Temple district. Singapore may be reassigned to the Bangkok Thailand Temple upon its completion. Temple trips occur regularly but require planning due to travel costs and times. President Hinckley stated in 2000 that members should continue growing the Church in Singapore so that a temple could be built.^[32] In 2009, the Singapore Stake President reported to members in stake conference that they had the numbers needed to support a temple, but members needed to learn to be more charitable and forgiving before a temple would be announced. Singapore appears able to support a small temple given sustainability in leadership and isolation from the nearest temples in Hong Kong and Bangkok. Moreover, a potential small temple in Singapore could serve Latter-day Saints in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Timor-Leste.

Comparative Growth

Slow to modest membership growth has occurred in Singapore in the past sixty years compared to other East Asian nations. Greater membership and congregation growth in the Church occurred in Hong Kong during the first fifty years, after which there were 20,700 members, thirty-nine congregations and a temple. Singapore experiences higher member activity rates compared to Hong Kong despite many cultural similarities, and today Singapore is one of the countries with the fewest Latter-day Saints with a stake. Differences in member activity and convert retention rates appear due to differing mission policies and convert baptismal standards. Nevertheless, the percentage of members in the population in Singapore was six times less than that of the Church in Hong Kong as of 2018. The Church in Singapore experienced one of the highest membership growth rates among industrialized nations in the 2000s and early 2010s, but since this time membership growth rates have been less than the Church in Hong Kong and other developed Asian nations.

Other Christian groups have had difficulty establishing themselves in Singapore. Jehovah's Witnesses were banned by the government, yet meet privately in homes and manage to have an estimated 2,000 members at most recent report. Seventh-Day Adventists have also seen growth comparable to Latter-day Saints, indicating that Singaporeans are cautious about joining Christian religions seen as untraditional. Slow growth in Singapore is likely related to the rise of secularism and the complex religious and ethnic demography. Other Christian denominations may have hurt The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints' image.

Future Prospects

Slow, steady growth will likely occur for the Church in Singapore with fluctuations in growth rates depending most strongly on the ebb and flow of foreign members who temporarily work in the country. Secularism and materialism pose major obstacles for greater growth through Singaporean converts who join the Church and remain active. A second stake may be organized in Singapore if additional congregations are created, albeit recent ward consolidations suggest that a second stake may be many years or decades away from fruition. Additional language-specific congregations may be created, such as for Tamil and Indonesian speakers. Differentiated Chinese-speaking congregations (Mandarin, Cantonese, Hokkein, etc.) seem a likely possibility. However additional congregations will likely only be created as membership is strong enough to provide leadership and if functioning congregations are operating at capacity given high real estate prices. As hinted by President Hinckley and a former Singapore Stake President, Singapore is a likely location for a future small temple.

[1] "Singapore Department of Statistics—Press Release," Singapore Department of Statistics, 12 January 2011. <http://www.singstat.gov.sg/news/news/press12012011.pdf>

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

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

[4] Tice, Richard. "Singapore Saints," Liahona, December 1990. <http://lds.org/liahona/1990/12/singapore-saints?lang=eng>

[5] Weaver, Sarah Jane. "Jon Huntsman Sr. worked 'harder, longer, stronger' for the Church, family, business, philanthropy." LDS Church News. 8 February 2019. <https://www.thechurchnews.com/archives/2018-02-08/jon-huntsman-sr-worked-harder-longer-stronger-for-the-church-family-business>

[6] Williams, Spencer. "Muslims, Latter-day Saints break fast at Church meetinghouse during interfaith event." The Church News. 30 May 2019. <https://www.thechurchnews.com/global/2019-05-30/muslims-ramadan-latter-day-saint-fast-singapore-1465>

[7] "Singapore," Country Profile, 2 April 2011. <http://newsroom.lds.org/country/singapore>

[8] Tice, Richard. "Singapore Saints," Liahona, December 1990. <http://lds.org/liahona/1990/12/singapore-saints?lang=eng>

[9] "Singapore," Country Profile, 2 April 2011. <http://newsroom.lds.org/country/singapore>

[10] "New stake presidencies," LDS Church News, 22 April 1995. <http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/26764/New-stake-presidencies.html>

[11] "Singapore Stake re-organized to "strengthen and build up Zion." Lds.org.sg. Accessed 10 September 2019. <https://www.lds.org.sg/singapore-stake-re-organized>

[12] "Singapore Stake re-organization." Lds.org.sg. Accessed 10 September 2019. <https://www.lds.org.sg/singapore-stake-re-organization>

[13] "Friends in Singapore," Friend, September 1975, 14.

[14] "Musical youth are singing in Singapore," LDS Church News, 22 May 2004. <http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/45604/Musical-youth-are-singing-in-Singapore.html>

[15] "First Presidency Letter." 9 October 2017. https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/bc/content/ldsorg/church/news/2017/11/2-15159_000_letter.pdf?lang=eng

[16] "Asia area: Elder Oaks visits Singapore," LDS Church News, 11 March 1989. <http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/18481/Asia-area—Elder-Oaks-visits-Singapore.html>

[17] "Where We Work." Latter-day Saint Charities. Accessed 10 September 2019. <https://www.latterdaysaintcharities.org/where-we-work>

[18] "Making quilts for orphanage," LDS Church News, 18 September 2004. <http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/46163/Making-quilts-for-orphanage.html>

[19] Weaver, Sarah Jane. "Emergency response is appropriate, immediate," LDS Church News, 15 January 2005. <http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/46735/Emergency-response-is-appropriate-immediate.html>

[20] "Singapore youth serve," LDS Church News, 29 July 2006. <http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/49250/Singapore-youth-serve.html>

[21] "Singapore sisters knit beany hats for babies," LDS Church News, 30 December 2006. <http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/49965/Singapore-sisters-knit-beany-hats-for-babies.html>

[22] "New stake presidencies," LDS Church News, 22 April 1995. <http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/26764/New-stake-presidencies.html>

[23] "New stake presidents," LDS Church News, 17 May 2003. <http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/43772/New-stake-presidents.html>

[24] "New stake presidents," LDS Church News, 5 April 2008. <http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/51796/New-stake-presidents.html>

[25] "New Stake Presidents." LDS Church News. 30 November 2017. <https://www.thechurchnews.com/archives/2017-11-30/new-stake-presidents-19-15050>

[26] "Newly called to Quorums of the Seventy." LDS Church News 4 May 2013. <https://www.thechurchnews.com/archives/2013-05-04/newly-called-to-quorums-of-the-seventy-46139>

[27] "Meet the new Area Seventies sustained during April 2019 general conference." The Church News. 23 April 2019.
<https://www.thechurchnews.com/leaders-and-ministry/2019-04-23/general-conference-april-2019-mormon-lds-area-seventies-2874>

[28] "New mission leaders called to serve in Argentina, Nigeria, Korea and other areas around the world." The Church News. 3 February 2019.
<https://www.thechurchnews.com/callings/2019-02-03/new-mission-presidents-called-to-serve-in-argentina-nigeria-korea-and-other-a>

[29] "New mission presidents." LDS Church News. 2 March 2013.
<https://www.thechurchnews.com/archives/2013-03-02/new-mission-presidents-68-47106>

[30] "New mission presidents." LDS Church News. 23 February 2013.
<https://www.thechurchnews.com/archives/2013-02-23/new-mission-presidents-69-47269>

[31] "Learn more about these new mission leaders who have been called to serve around the world." The Church News. 3 March 2019.
<https://www.thechurchnews.com/callings/2019-03-03/learn-more-about-these-new-mission-leaders-who-have-been-called-to-serve->

[32] "Pres. Hinckley completes tour in Pacific Rim," LDS Church News, 12 February 2000.
<http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/37174/Pres-Hinckley-completes-tour-in-Pacific-Rim.html>