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# MAURITIAN HERITAGE

## Places of Worship

## Port Louis

IN COLLABORATION WITH





## OLDER THAN 100 YEARS (IN ORDER OF AGE)

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3	St. James Cathedral	(1819)
4	Kwan Tee Pagoda	(1832)
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## LESS THAN 100 YEARS OLD

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# ST. LOUIS CATHEDRAL

Jules Koenig Street, Port-Louis

GPS Location

S 20° 09.9"

E 057° 30.3"



When the plans for Port Louis were drawn up, François Mahé de La Bourdonnais, the governor of the country in 1735, had already reserved a location for this place of worship.

The current building took its form in 1933, under the office of Bishop Leen, after having undergone three previous renovations.

The Blessed Father Laval was in office during the time of the third renovation (1816 - 1928).

With help from the Mauritian Historical Society, the remains of Mahé de La Bourdonnais's widow and his son, Gilles, who died in Mauritius, were moved to the cathedral. A descriptive plaque can be found to the right of the pulpit.

To the left of the statue of Notre Dame du Grand Pouvoir, is another plaque inscribed with the office of Bishop Leen, who was very active in the diocese.

It was originally the Marie Reine de la Paix Monument. In a tomb, in the heart of the cathedral, lie the remains of the bishops and (in 2009) of the first Mauritian cardinal, Jean Margéot.

More reminders of the Blessed Father Laval are:

The statue of St. Pierre Claver, the apostle to the slaves in southern America (Father Laval was the apostle to the freed Mauritian slaves).

The Altar Facing the People (a requirement after the Second Vatican Council) was found in the Saint Croix church, Father Laval's parish. It was given by a friend who had ordered it from Italy. The altar was Carrara marble and had been put aside during the construction of the modern church, which had incorporated its own altar. While the new tomb to hold Father Laval's remains was being built, they were kept under the altar from 1968 - 1970.

# AL AQSA MOSQUE

Dr Hassen Sakir Street, Port-Louis

GPS Location

S 20° 09.6"

E 057° 30.9"



In 1722, when the French colonists settled in Mauritius, then known as Isle de France, Islam had already set foot in the country many years earlier than the Arabs of East Africa, more particularly the Omanis, who had established a trading post to support Zanzibar, on the African coast.

On the 23rd of December 1798, the small Muslim community on the island sent a petition to Governor Malartic expressing their desire to build a place of worship; a mosque. Due to the fierce opposition from the settlers, the elderly governor gave in to their pressure, and to the dismay of the Muslim community, he refused their request.

A few years later Malartic passed away and his replacement, Governor Morlière, received a similar petition, which had the same outcome; a refusal.

Determined, the Muslims sent another petition in 1805, when the first Emperor Napoleon ruled France and much of Europe. Their third attempt was successful. The Captain-General and then governor of Decaën, agreed to sell them

a plot of land with an area of 120 toises (455 square metres).

The first mosque, Al Aqsa, was built during the same year. The mosque was known as "Masjid Camp des Lascars" (Lascar was the name given to Indian marine-warriors, most of whom were of Muslim origin. By implication, it gave the entire Muslim community a derogatory name).

The first official Imam was Mr Gassy Sobedar who died in 1861 at the age of 70. He was succeeded by his brother, Hajee Bacosse Sobdar. (Note the distortion of the name over the years - Sobedar, Soobadur, and Sobdar, which was common in those days because the registration of birth at the Civil Registry was often at the mercy of the officer who wrote what he thought he had heard)

Al Aqsa was the only mosque on the island until 1852 when the Jumma Mosque was built.

# ST. JAMES CATHEDRAL

La Poudrière Street, Port-Louis

GPS Location

S 20° 10.0"

E 057° 30.3"



In 1812, Governor Farquhar had given the former French Powder Magazine site to the Anglican community. However, given the scale of the task (the Powder Magazine walls were 3m thick), they could not find anyone to demolish it in order to build the church on the site.

Eventually, as an economic measure, the decision was taken to use the Powder Magazine as it stood. In 1821 a patio, a bell tower and two vestries were added. In 1846, with the proliferation of British soldiers into the colony and the growing number of new believers, two wings were added in harmony with the rest of the building. The fence and iron gates were added in 1850.

To the right of the entrance is a glazed box containing a cross made from nails that were recovered from Coventry Cathedral in England, after it had been destroyed by bombs during World War II.

Among the celebrities who have visited the cathedral, the latest was Archbishop Desmond Tutu who delivered a memorable sermon.

# KWAN TEE PAGODA

Kwan Tee Street, Port-Louis

GPS Location

S 20° 09.7"

E 057° 29.5"



The oldest Chinese pagoda belongs to the Cohan Thai Bui Society, and is commonly known as KWAN TEE Pagoda. Constructed in 1832 during the British occupation, it is situated at Les Salines, at the southern entrance of Port Louis.

The first wave of immigrants from Fu Kien province, on the coast of China, initially settled in Mahebourg until Port Louis became the port and the capital in 1734.

The site was purchased by Mr Cho Tse and on it the pagoda was built, behind the mountain and facing the sea, at the end of a beautiful alley of coconut palms.

The second wave of immigrants consisted of Cantonese and the third of Hakkas (1880).

Over the years they joined with the descendants of the first wave and eventually a steering committee, composed of representatives from each wave, was set up. Thus the president was Fu Kien, the secretary Cantonese and the treasurer Hakka.

Two lion statues guard the entrance to the temple. The lioness on the left has her paw resting on her cub while on the right the lion's paw rests on a ball.

An abundance of incense sticks are planted into sand-filled pots.

To announce the arrival of the worshipers, a bell is struck three times and an old drum three more times.

# ST-JEAN PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

GPS Location  
S 20° 09.9"  
E 057° 30.2"

La Poudrière Street, Port-Louis



The first observance of a religious service was probably by the Dutch Protestants when they discovered the island in 1598, but it was Reverend Jean Le Brun, a missionary of the London Missionary Society, who had the honour of establishing the Presbyterian Church in Mauritius.

Born in Jersey, Jean Le Brun arrived on the island in 1814 and remained here until his death in 1865. His mission to help slaves and the Métis (slavery was abolished 21 years later after his arrival), who were neglected economically, socially and politically, was so successful that Governor Farquhar fully supported him in establishing and managing schools for disadvantaged members of society.

This free education was open to all and produced an impressive number of renowned doctors, lawyers and artists.

The St. Jean Chapel on Poudrière Street opened its doors for the first meeting in June 1840. The building, located behind the old prison, is a key link in our architectural and religious heritage.

# JUMMAH MOSQUE

GPS Location  
S 20° 09.6"  
E 057° 30.3"

Royal Street, Port-Louis



The mosque is an elegant colonial building dating back more than 150 years. It was built by craftsmen in the south of India and reflects their particular style.

In October 1832, eight wealthy Muslim merchants purchased two plots of land which were connected to La Reine Street. The existing building was transformed into a place of prayer. This was the beginning of Jumah Mosque (the Grand Mosque).

In 1853 a small but beautiful mosque, accommodating 200 worshipers, was built.

The benefactors continued to acquire neighbouring properties and eventually found themselves with seven lots, making up a rectangular plot measuring a third of a hectare.

To finance the construction of Jumah Mosque (the Grand Mosque) a call was made for donations, following which importers and wholesalers charged a levy on every bag of grain sold to retailers... a tax for the mosque.

In 1878 an appeal was made to craftsmen from India to harmonise the new with the existing structure. The work ended in 1895.

The remains of a Holy Man, Peer Jamal Shab, lie in the mosque's courtyard. He died on the 12th of August 1858, at the age of 45, after having worked tirelessly for the moral and spiritual development of his fellow Muslims.

As an aside, the English governor had refused permission to bury the Holy Man in the grounds of the mosque. He changed his mind the next morning, saying he had been visited by the Holy Man in his dreams.

Today, Jumah Mosque continues to be the pride of all Mauritians, whether they belong to the Muslim faith or not.

# SOCKALINGUM MEENATCHEE AMMEN TIRUKOVIL KAYLASSON

GPS Location  
S 20° 09.0"  
E 057° 31.2"

Noor - E - Islam Mosque Street, Port-Louis



The Sockalingum Meenatchee Ammen Tirukovil Shrine, more commonly known by the name KAYLASSON TEMPLE is the most important temple for the Tamil Hindu religion in Mauritius.

It was in 1854, after the island had been hard-hit by a cholera epidemic, that the Tamil traders and merchants of Port Louis decided to build a large temple to the north of the city, which was dedicated to the god Siva.

The temple is an example of Dravidian sculpture, unparalleled in this part of the world, and was built in three stages. The first stage was marked by the arrival of masons and artists from India in November 1854, who came with a block of stone, which was placed at the rear of the building.

The temple and its archways were dedicated in 1860.

During the second phase, the entrance (arthamandapam) was constructed outside of the hall and was finally completed in 1868 after which the masons and artists returned to India.

The temple represents a reclining human body, with the thousand-petalled lotus flower representing the top of the head and the entrance archway representing the feet.

# FATHER LAVAL'S TOMB

GPS Location  
S 20° 08.9"  
E 057° 31.7"

Allée Père Laval, Ste Croix, Port-Louis



Father Laval's tomb is always open. It is a place of pilgrimage for all Mauritians, not just those of the Catholic faith.

Born on the 12th of September 1803 in Normandy, France, Jacques Désiré Laval was ordained a priest in November 1831. He became the first missionary of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit and the Immaculate Heart of Mary. He landed at Port Louis on the 15th of September 1841. He lived there for 23 years and died on the 15th of September 1864.

Father Laval focused his ministry on the black population (most of whom were recently freed slaves), the Creoles and the Métis, who represented a total of 80,000 people. He had to learn to speak Mauritian Creole very quickly. He successfully used additional black laymen, who were among the first to be baptised, to teach catechism. There were also numerous testimonies of conversions among white families under the influence of these black laymen who evangelised by word and example.

Father Laval built many chapels in the country, including 10 in Port Louis and 7 in Grand Port in the southeast.

On the 22nd of June 1972, Pope Paul VI called him "the Apostle of Mauritius".

"Faced with a potential volcanic eruption after the abolition of slavery, Père Laval brought a population of newly enfranchised black and Creole people to Christ through his evangelism. He thereby brought about a revolution of hearts, minds and customs" (Amedee Nagapen, Historian, Maurice Passion Magazine 2004).

Father Laval was beatified on the 29th of April 1979 by Pope John Paul II, who prayed at his tomb during his stay in Mauritius.

# VISHNU KCHETRE MANDIR

Vishnu Kchetre Mandir Street, Port-Louis

GPS Location

S 20° 10.2"

E 057° 30.4"



St. Denis Street was buzzing at the beginning of 20th century when Gandhi was received with great pomp at Taher Bagh in 1901. His emissary, Manilall Doctor, would eventually donate his press, located at 19 St. Denis Street, to the Arya Samaj movement.

The Sanatans, orthodox Hindus, founded an association and built a small temple on St. Denis Street. A second association replaced the first in 1921. Following an appeal to wealthy members of the Hindu community, the site was enlarged, a wall built around it and three domes placed on top of the building, which was then inaugurated in 1932.

The shrines (moortees) of Lord Vishnu, Radha-Krishna, Luxmi-Narayan, and Nandi & Hanuman were inaugurated on the 24th of July 1933.

The Port Louis Municipality contributed funds and the portion of St. Denis Street serving the temple took its name.

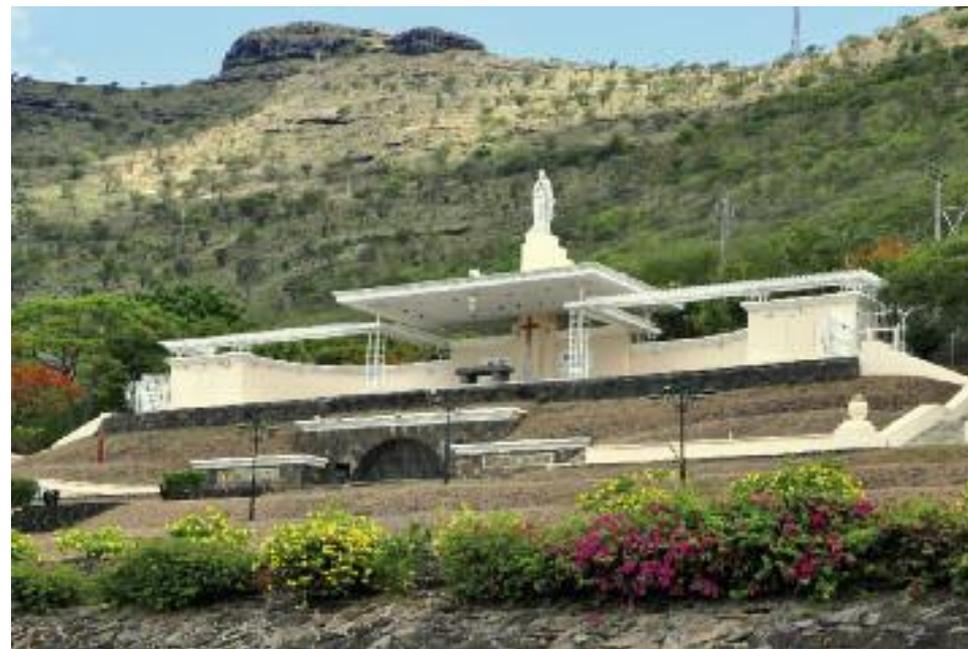
# MARIE REINE DE LA PAIX

Monseigneur Leen Street, Port-Louis

GPS Location

S 20° 10.2"

E 057° 29.8



A sanctuary carved into the side of Signal Mountain is dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary and to Peace. Seven grass terraces are connected by basalt stone steps and overhung by a 44m high statue of the Blessed Virgin. The statue was carved from a block of pure white Carrara marble (Italy). It portrays the Virgin holding the world globe in her hands.

On the initiative of Mgr. Leen, the Bishop of Port Louis at the time, the monument was built in 1940 following the destruction of the sanctuary of the Virgin Mary during the Russian invasion of Poland. He hoped that by praying to the Virgin Mary, Mauritius would be protected from the dangers of war.

The blessing and laying of the monument's foundation stone took place on the 8th of May 1940.

On the 15th of August 1943, Bishop Leen inaugurated the stone altar carved by the Mauritian sculptor Clément Esther.

In 1979, the site witnessed the ceremonial events following the beatification of Father Jacques Désiré Laval, the apostle of Mauritius.

On the 14th of October 1989 Mass was held by Pope S.S. John Paul II (of Polish origin!).

On the 19th of July 2009 the funeral of the first Mauritian Cardinal Jean Margéot was held.

Ordinations are held here regularly.

## TIEN TAN PAGODA

Justice Street, Port-Louis

GPS Location

S 20° 10.6"

E 057° 30.4"



Situated at the foot of Signal Mountain, the pagoda was constructed in 1950 and is a replica of the Temple of Heaven (Thien Thane) in Beijing. Dedicated to the Jade Emperor, the interior of the pagoda does not have any statue.

There are three doors on the ground floor and eight openings on each level; eight windows and eight portholes.

The eighth day of the first month in the Chinese calendar is the eve of the festival of the Jade Emperor. A celebration takes place in the temple, followed by a meal on the following day.

## POO TEE SHEE PAGODA

Volcy Pougnet Street Port-Louis

GPS Location

S 20° 10.4"

E 057° 30.4"



This pagoda was built in 1949 and was the first pagoda in Mauritius to be dedicated to the god Buddha.

A remarkable statue of Buddha is found on the roof of the building. It was a gift from the government of Thailand.

Buddhists are vegetarians and their offerings consist of fruit.

The dragons guarding the entrance to the temple have strong symbolic significance.

Buddhists worship at this pagoda.

## ARYA SABHA / ARYA SAMAJ

Frère Felix de Valois Street, Port-Louis

GPS Location

S 20° 10.2"

E 057° 30.6



The Vedic religion is based on the divine and religious values found in the Holy Scriptures of Veda, the oldest document known and used by UNESCO since the beginning of civilisation. Veda means knowledge. The Veda's knowledge is not only a spiritual guide, but also a code of conduct for the individual and society as a whole.

It was at the end of the 19th century that Swami Dayananda Sarasvati was established, not as a new religion but as the Arya Samaj movement, designed to reject the bad in society and follow the teachings and philosophies of the Vedas... a fundamental knowledge of the Truth.

The Arya Samaj movement was introduced to Mauritius by three friends in 1903. The movement

was made official in 1911. Manilal Doctor, an emissary of Mahatma Gandhi of India, was a key in the promotion of the movement in Mauritius. Arya Sabha Mauritius groups together the movement's diverse activities around the island.

Their religious gatherings are known as 'Satsangs'.

The National Centre at Champ de Mars has undergone many structural alterations over the years.

# BAHA'I

Volcy Pougnet Street, Port-Louis

GPS Location

S 20° 10.2"

E 057° 30.1"



The Baha'i religion began in the mid-19th century in Persia.

The Baha'i faith was introduced to Mauritius in 1953 by Miss Othilie Rhein, an American Baha'i.

The first Local Spiritual Assembly was established in April 1956.

It was through a "Bill of Incorporation" at the Legislative Council in 1966, that the Baha'i faith was recognised as an independent religion in Mauritius.

It was felt there was a need to have a centre in Port Louis for the growing community. So in 1968, the Mauritian Baha'i community acquired a wooden house with a shingled roof, belonging to the Jeewa family, located at 40 Volcy Pougnet Street, Port Louis. In 1987, work began to reconstruct the building that is still standing strong today.

This building serves as the national administrative centre.

# PENTECOSTAL CHURCH

Saint Jean Road (A2), Port-Louis

GPS Location

S 20° 10.4"

E 057° 28.4"



The church was launched in October 1968 by an evangelical meeting in Champ de Mars, in the region of Tombeau Malartic, by the late missionary Aimé Cizeron of the French Assemblies of God.

The first meetings were held at the St. Jean Presbyterian Church in Port Louis.

A small building constructed in Bell Village housed the first church, which was eventually permanently established in northwest Grande Rivière, a suburb of Port Louis. The new building, constructed in 1975, could hold more than a thousand worshippers.

It was there, in 1996, that South Korean Pastor David Yonggi Cho, responsible for the largest Pentecostal church in the world, came to speak at a meeting for Mauritian pastors.

Opening hours: By appointment.

Please note: Smoking, eating and use of cellular phones is prohibited.

## A BRIEF HISTORY FROM THE TIME OF FIRST COLONISATION

*"...during the last three centuries, the island has maintained the distinction of uniting civil and religious society. In fact, civil society and the different religions always act in harmony on our island, and this historical situation is a characteristic trait of the evolution of the country."*

(A. Nagapen, Historian, "Old Grand Port... A Treasure of Mauritian Heritage")

It's interesting to look at what took place during the early days of Dutch and French colonisation, even before the various present cultures from India, Africa and China officially introduced their places of worship.

On the 18th of September 1598, the Dutch approached the island from the southeast - the area known today as Old Grand Port. They named the island T'Eylandt Mauritius Van Nassau in honour of their Prince T'Eylandt Maurits Van Nassau. The 20th of September 1598 was a Sunday, the Lord's Day, and the first religious service was celebrated under a palm grove. The 27th of September 1598 was the first baptismal service on the island. A native from Madagascar was taken on board as an interpreter and given the name Laurent (Madagascar was then known as Saint Laurent Island).

The very first Catholic mass was celebrated on the 22nd of March 1616 on the beach under

a large tree, at Port Sud-Est, during a Portuguese expedition. France took possession of the island (Dufresne d'Arsele, 20th of September 1715) after the Dutch departure in 1710. When the first French colonists arrived on the island in 1722 they renamed it Isle de France. Denyon, the first French governor, decided to make Port Sud-Est the capital (known today as Old Grand Port).

The first church saw the day in 1737 when Governor Mahé de La Bourdonnais restored an old building made of coral, left by the Dutch.

This little history lesson from the dawn of our civilisation is based on the book by Amédée Nagapen. It is important because it allows us to trace the basis of these secular and religious relationships over time; religions that still exist today and are the foundation of our multicultural society. Since then many other religious groups have come to play an important role.

DESIGN: MARLIN PRODUCTIONS FOR THE M.T.P.A.



Municipalité  
de Port Louis

