



SPECIAL FEATURE

HINDUISM AND HINDU TEMPLES IN MALAYSIA

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INTRODUCTION

Hinduism was prevalent in Malaysia before the arrival of Islam in the 15th century. Traces of Hindu influence remain in the Malay language, literature and art. Indian settlers came to Malaysia from Tamil Nadu in the late 9th and early 20th centuries. Many of them came to work as labourers on rubber plantations, while those who were English educated occupied more professional positions. A minority of Indian immigrants to Malaysia during this time period came from Northern India and Sri Lanka. Malaysian Hinduism is diverse, with large urban temples dedicated to specific deities, and smaller temples located on estates. The estate temples generally follow the tradition of the Indian region from which the temple's worshippers came from. Many people follow the Saivite tradition (Worship of Lord Siva) of southern India.

However, there are also some Vaishnava Hindus in Malaysia as well, and many of them of North Indian extraction and these Hindus worship in temples such as the Geeta Ashram in Seksyen, Petaling Jaya or the Lakshmi Narayan Temple in Kampung Kasipillay, Kaula Lumpur. Services in these temples are usually conducted in Hindi or English. The International Society for Krishna Consciousness also has a number of followers in Malaysia, and maintain temples in Kaula Lumpur, Penang, Taiping and Seremban. The Ratha Yatra festival is held once a year, when the Deities, **Jagannatha**, **Baladeva** and **Subhadra** are placed on a chariot which is pulled through the streets by devotees, accompanied by a party chanting the Hare Krishna Mahamantra. There are also few devotees of Sri Vaishnava of Ramanuja Sampradaya and Madhva Sampradaya. There are also few followers of Sri Sai Baba.

Malaysia is globally known for its secular credentials. The majority of Malaysian population is of Muslims at 61.3%, followed by Buddhists and Christians being 2nd and 3rd positions with 19.8% and 9.2% respectively. According to official figures, Hindus in Malaysia comprise of just 6.3% of the total population. So, they are the 4th religious group in the country.

Predominantly a Muslim nation, Malaysia is considered a tourist magnet and a peaceful nation where believers of all religious faith are respected and tolerated. One can witness several Hindu temples here at all nooks and corners of the country. There are about nine Hindu Temples that are popular with everyone.

Malaysia has been welcoming the establishment of countless temples, including the 9 beautiful Hindu temples listed below, which remain worth visiting places during a Malaysian tour. They are not exclusively for Hindu tourists or devotees only. Good number of tourists with their beliefs in other faiths too visit these popular Hindu temples. They are ultimate destinations to evaluate great architecture as well as nature's bounty in Malaysia.

1. Batu Caves Temple

Batu Caves (Tamil: பத்துமலை : *Patthumalai*) is a limestone hill that has a series of caves and cave temples in Gombak, Selangor, Malaysia. It takes its name from

the Malay word *batu*, meaning 'rock'. The hill was originally known as *Kapal Tanggang* from the legend of *SiTanggang*. The town nearby is named after the Batu Caves limestone formation. The cave is one of the most popular Hindu shrines outside India, and is dedicated to **Lord Murugan**. It is the focal point of the Tamil festival of Thaipusam in Malaysia.

Batu Caves in short also referred to as 10th Caves or Hill for Lord Murugan as there are six important holy shrines in India and four more in Malaysia. The three others in Malaysia are *Kallumalai Temple* in Ipoh, *Tanneermalai Temple* in Penang and *Sannasimalai Temple* in Malacca. The limestone forming Batu Caves is said to be around 400 million years old. Some of the cave entrances were used as shelters by the indigenous *Temuan* people (a tribe of Orang Asli). Batu Caves was promoted as a place of worship by **K. Thamboo-**



Batu Caves Temple



samy Pillai, an Indian Tamil trader. He was inspired by the *vel*-shaped entrance of the main cave and was inspired to dedicate a temple to Lord Murugan within the caves. In 1890, Pillai, who also founded the Sri Mahamariamman Temple, Kuala Lumpur, installed the *murti* (consecrated statue) of Sri Murugan Swami in what is today known as the Temple Cave. Since 1892, the Thaipusam festival in the Tamil month of Thai (which falls in late January/early February) has been celebrated there. Wooden steps up to the Temple Cave were built in 1920. In the 1930s, the stairs began to show signs of wear and tear, and the then temple chairman Ramachandran Naidu proposed to build two flights of concrete stairs to the upper caves. The proposal was forwarded to Sorobgom in 1939. The work was completed in 1940, just in time for the Thaipusam celebration that year according to current temple Chairman R. Nadarajah. Currently there are 272 concrete steps. Of the various cave temples that comprise the

site, the largest and best known is the Temple Cave, so named because it houses several Hindu shrines beneath its high vaulted ceiling. In August 2018 the 272 steps were painted in an extraordinary colour scheme, with each set of steps painted in a different range of colours.

2. Sri Maha Mariamman Temple



Kaula Lumpur Malaysia is famous for housing the richest South Indian Hindu Temple, Sri Maha Mariamman Temple. It appeals to both the visiting devotees and to the tourists in the Chinatown vicinity, where a glimpse of this beautifully designed temple invites the visitors to plan at least one visit. This stands as one of the famous Hindu Temples in Kaula Lumpur, Malaysia. Late Thambusamy Pillay had constructed this temple in 1873 and developed that into a private shrine. Since it had been opened for the general public in 1920, it gained immense popularity as the worshippers of Mother Goddess Mariamman, keep flocking in here. The convoluted statuettes and grandiose façade of this temple add to its beauty. Its main entrance seeks the attention of visitors with an imposing Gopuram. It remains a popular temple in Malaysia with pedantically sculpted 228 Hindu deity idols that are worshipped by the devotees throughout the year. The number of visitors multiplies during *Deepavali* and *Thaipoo-sam* festivals.

3. Sri Poyyatha Moorthi Temple



Sri Poyyatha Moorthi Temple is the oldest existing/intact Hindu temple in Malaysia and one of the oldest functioning Hindu temples in Maritime Southeast Asia. It is Located in the state of Malacca, the temple is one of the few existing Chitty temples in Malaysia. Also called as Poyyatha Vinayaga Moorthi temple. Although its architecture is

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simple, it seeks the attention of all devotees besides large number of tourists. According to the historic recounts, Chitty preacher, Tha Vinayagar Chitty had constructed this temple way back in 1781. Devotees of Hindu God, Lord Ganesa keep flocking here. This temple is in the lime light for one more reason. Its location along side Cheng Hoon Teng Temple and Kampunbg Kling Mosque vicinity projects great communal harmony in this country. That is perhaps the main reason that this location is also denoted with the metaphor, *Harmony Street*.



4. Tebrau Glass Temple

Malaysia's famous landmark, Tebrau Glass Temple is a must visit in country's Johor Bahru area. Also denoted with its name, *Arulmigu Sri Rajakaliamman Glass Temple*, it is popular amongst the Indian community, especially Hindu visitors from around the world. Current temple is a renovated one with the use of glass and thus it earned the new name since 1996 while it had been inaugurated for the general public. It maintained the rare distinction of getting listed in the Malaysian Book of Records in 2010, as the only Glass built temple in the country.

5. Maran Murugan Temple



One of the famous Hindu Temples in Malaysia, Maran Murugan Temple is visited by the devotees worshipping Hindu God Lord Murugan. As per Hindu belief, Lord Ganesa's elder brother, Lord Murugan seeks equal respect. This temple is also popular by its other name, *Sri Marthandavar Bala Dhandayuthapani Aalayam*. As the stories go, the area nearby this temple witnessed happenings of several miracles. Presence of sacred tree in the temple premises is considered to be one such miracle. Devotees arriving here for worship, to reimpose their Hindu faith.

6. Klang Perumal Temple

Named after the place where it is located, Klang Perumal Temple in the Klang area of Malaysia's Selangor regions is the Vaishnavite Malaysian temple popular as the old-



est amongst all. This temple is denoted with many metaphors including, being called the *Tirupathi of Southeast Asia*, besides other popular name, *Sri Sundarararaja Perumal Temple* for the Hindus to worship in Malaysian region. As large chunk of South Indian Hindus worship Lord Vishnu, this temple is thus dedicated to Lord Vishnu.

7. Waterfall Temple



Located in the George Town area of Penang region in Malaysia. Waterfall Temple or famously called *Arulmigu Baladhandayuthapani Temple* is the one in this country where Lord Muruga is being worshipped. The temple is dedicated to that Hindu God and witnesses the gathering of sufficient crowd when the majority of Malaysian Hindus celebrate the popular Thaipusam festival. One important factor about this temple is that any devotee willing to worship here is supposed to climb the 513 steps of stair with the aim to worship Lord Murugan and to pay homage to the Hindu God. Considered the largest of Murugan shrines outside India, its tallest Gopuram stands at 21.6 m height is a popular attraction here.

8. Sri Ayyanar Temple



Hindu temple in Malaysia with its connection with a local Tamil village in India, Sri Ayyanar Temple is a globally recognized one today. A belief goes on that one Tamil migrant worker in Malaysia named Periamma had made a tiny statue of Sri Ayyanar, a Hindu God with sand and clay materials that had been brought from India then. With fast increase in worshipper's numbers over a period of time, that makeshift temple attained manifold popularity. That tiny temple had already become a popular and splendid temple today, where approximately 72 ft tall Sri Ayyanar statue seeks attention of all worshippers. The original idol which Periamma had crafted centuries ago is still kept there.

9. Sri Shakti Devasthanam



One of the recent yet vibrant Hindu temples in Malaysia namely Sri Shakti Devasthanam had its consecration ceremony in the year 2013 in a relatively calm and quiet environment of Bukit Rotan Village in Malaysia. Since then, this temple became popular landmark in the Selangor region, where its magnificent appearance appeals to Hindu devotees for worship. Also famous as Sri Shakti temple, it is known for its huge Gopuram that was meticulously sculptured to fit in the 5-storey temple. This tiny temple has already become a popular and splendid temple today where an approximately 72 feet tall Sri Ayyanar statue seeks attention of all worshippers. All 51 Shakti statues inside the temple corridor seek the attention of all devotees. According to Hindu belief these deities represent the *51 Shakti Peetas* in Indian subcontinents located in various places.

