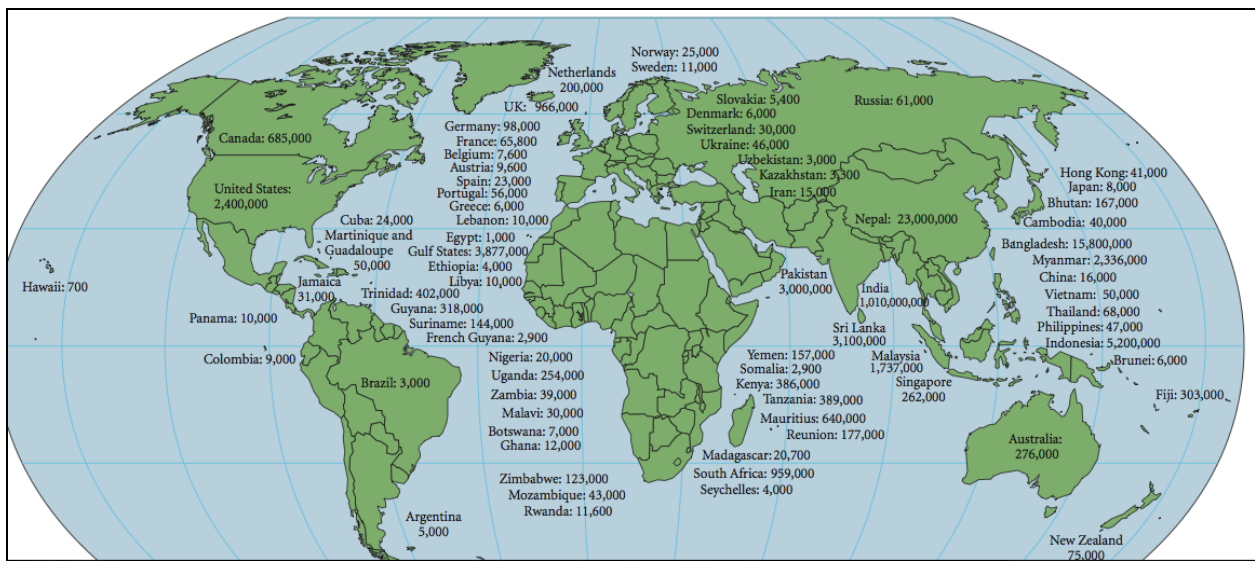


## Hinduism Around the World

Numbering approximately 1 billion in global followers, Hinduism is the third-largest religion in the world. Though more than 90 percent of Hindus live on the Indian subcontinent (India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, and Bhutan), the Hindu diaspora's impact can still be felt today. Hindus live on every continent, and there are three Hindu majority countries in the world: India, Nepal, and Mauritius.



### Hindu Diaspora Over Centuries

Hinduism began in the Indian subcontinent and gradually spread east to what is now contemporary Southeast Asia. Ancient Hindu cultures thrived as far as Cambodia, Thailand, the Philippines, Vietnam, and Indonesia. Some of the architectural works (including the famous Angkor Wat temple in Cambodia) still remain as vestiges of Hindu contact.

Hinduism in Southeast Asia co-worshipped with Buddhism for centuries. However, over time, Buddhism (and later Islam in countries such as Indonesia) gradually grew more prominent. By the 10th century, the practice of Hinduism in the region had waned, though its influence continued to be strong. To date, Southeast Asia has the two highest populations of native, non-Indic Hindus: the Balinese Hindus of Indonesia and the Cham people of Vietnam.

The next major migration took place during the Colonial Period, when Hindus were often taken as indentured laborers to British and Dutch colonies. As a result, Hinduism spread to the West Indies, Fiji,

Malaysia, Mauritius, and South Africa, where Hindus had to adjust to local ways of life. Though the Hindu populations in many of these places declined over time, countries such as Guyana, Mauritius, and Trinidad & Tobago, still have significant Hindu populations. All three also have had Hindu heads of state.

The last major migration of Hindus took place in the 20th century, when migration patterns in the post-colonial era took many to the United Kingdom, Canada, the United States, and later, countries such as Australia and New Zealand. Hindu migration to the United States grew after the repeal of the Asian Exclusion Act in 1965, but took another major leap in the 1990s with the growth of the U.S. technology industry. Today, there are approximately 3 million Hindus in North America.

## **Contemporary Hindu Populations**

### ***The Indian Subcontinent***

Hinduism's origins trace back to what are now modern day India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. The religion spread across the subcontinent over centuries, beginning in the Vedic era. India is home to most of the world's Hindus, with Bangladesh having the second highest population in numbers (though Hindus make up less than nine percent of Bangladesh). Pakistan has a small Hindu minority, since most fled to India during the partition era. Nepal was the last Hindu kingdom until 2008, when a Maoist-backed Constitution replaced the monarchy. Sri Lanka's Tamil population is majority Hindu, though many fled the country during the 30-year-old civil war between Tamil rebels and the Buddhist-majority Sinhalese government. There are smaller numbers of Hindus in Bhutan, with over 100,000 Nepali-speakers (mostly Hindu) driven out from the country in recent years. Afghanistan, which once boasted a strong Hindu culture, has only several thousand Hindus, with the majority of the native Afghani Hindu population living abroad.

### ***The West Indies (Guyana, Jamaica, Suriname, and Trinidad & Tobago)***

Following the end of the Transatlantic Slave Trade, hundreds of thousands of Hindus from India and Nepal were taken to British colonies such as Guyana, Jamaica, and Trinidad & Tobago. The British also brought Hindus to Suriname, which was under Dutch rule. The primary roles for the indentured servants was to work on the sugar fields. Many were also exploited, particularly women, as they were used as mistresses for British colonial administrators. Hindus were also taken to countries such as Barbados, the Virgin Islands, and Belize, though their numbers were far smaller. Due to aggressive proselytization

and limits on their ability to practice their traditions, most Hindus in Jamaica eventually converted to Christianity. A population once thought to be as high as 50,000 dwindled to just under 1,500 by 2000, but recent immigration to the countries has steadily increased the population there. Though many in Guyana, Suriname, and Trinidad & Tobago also converted, the countries managed to maintain significant populations, largely due to the willingness of Hindu leaders to adapt to their new



*A Hindu temple in Paramaribo, Suriname.*

environment. Many Hindus in the West Indies are followers of a Hindu reform movement known as Arya Samaj.

### ***Southeast Asia/Asia Pacific (Fiji, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and Vietnam)***

The spread of Hinduism to Southeast Asia established powerful Hindu kingdoms in the region, most notably the Khmer Empire that encompassed modern Cambodia and Thailand, and influential kingdoms in the Indonesia archipelago. Though Buddhism and Hinduism co-existed in the region for several centuries, Buddhism (and Islam in Indonesia) eventually replaced Hinduism as a primary religion. Today, there are approximately 5 million Hindus in Indonesia, primarily in Bali. There are also roughly 60,000 Cham Hindus in Vietnam, and smaller numbers in Thailand. Hinduism in Fiji, Malaysia, and Singapore is a much more recent phenomenon, with Hindus arriving in the 19th and early 20th centuries as indentured laborers. Today, Hindus are prominent in politics and business in all three countries, though they continue to experience discrimination as religious minorities.

### ***Africa (Ghana, Kenya, Mauritius, and South Africa)***



*Hindus in Ghana celebrating the Hindu holiday, Ganesh Chaturti.*

Hinduism came in waves to Africa, with Southern Africa getting Hindu workers during the early years of British colonization, while East and West Africa experienced Hindu migration during the 20th century. South African Hindus played a significant role in the struggle against Apartheid, with figures such as Monty Naicker becoming leaders in the national struggle against minority white rule. Today, the Hindu community remains a strong presence in major cities such as Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban. Hinduism is the majority religion in Mauritius. In Ghana, it is one of the fastest growing religions, due to the rapid increase of Hare Krishna devotees among native Ghanaians.

### ***Europe (the Netherlands and the United Kingdom) and the Americas (Canada and the United States)***

Hindus have been a multi-generational presence in the United Kingdom since the 19th century, though an increase in migrants in the 1950s and 1960s helped to rejuvenate the community. Today, there are between 1 and 1.5 million Hindus living in the United Kingdom, with half living in London. There are between 100-150,000 Hindus in the Netherlands, with most of the country's Hindus coming from Suriname. Other countries such as France also have significant Hindu populations, and the spread of Hindu religious centers has helped to preserve and expand the faith. In the United States, Hindus number approximately 2 million, with most coming to the country after 1965. Canada also has a significant Hindu population of nearly one million, centered primarily in the provinces of Ontario, Quebec, and British Columbia.

### **Key Takeaways**

- 90% of Hindus live on the Indian subcontinent, but the effect of the Hindu diaspora can be seen world wide.
- Vietnam and Bali host the largest populations of native, non-Indic Hindus.
- There are approximately 2 million Hindus in the United States.