

## BBC News

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# Ghana's unique African-Hindu temple

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*The temple is located in the capital Accra*

**The air is filled with the sweet smell of incense burning in a corner of the huge hall.**

Wrapped in shiny bright clothes, idols of Hindu gods and goddesses smile benevolently from the elevated platform.

Sitting on the white marble floor a group of more than 50 men, women and children sing devotional Hindi songs.

Nothing extraordinary about this scene, except that the temple is in Ghana and the devotees are all indigenous Africans.

The tall cone-shaped temple emerges out of the crowded neighbourhood of Orkordi on the outskirts of the capital Accra. It can be easily identified - the holy Sanskrit word 'Om' shines on its top.

### Indian feel

The devotees here have no links with India and have never visited the country. Still they strictly follow religious rules and observe rituals in traditional Hindu way.

They say they have all converted to Hinduism but many still use their Christian names and African surnames.

However, they give their young ones Hindu names like Rama or Krishna.

Once inside the temple, you forget that you are a continent away from India.

Diyas or little lamps are lit in obeisance to the gods. Surprisingly, there is even a

picture of Jesus Christ amid the idols of Hindu deities.

Come evening and the devotees gather in the temple hall for evening prayer rituals. Holy offerings to the gods are distributed after prayers.

Swami Ghanananda Saraswati, the man who established Ghana's first African Hindu Monastery in 1975, oversees the prayers sitting in a high chair.

Dressed in a flowing saffron kurta and a wrap-around, he addresses the people on the public address system and explains the finer points of the Hindu faith and philosophy.

*Swami Ghanananda Swaraswati established the temple in 1975*

"I was born in a village nearby into a native Ghanaian faith," he says.

But his parents converted to Christianity. "From a very early age I would think about the mysteries of the universe and try to find the answers in religious texts. But I failed," Swami Ghanananda says.

Then he read some books on Hindu faith and embarked upon a new journey which took him to Rishikesh in north India.

He spent some time there with a spiritual guru who suggested him to open the monastery in Accra.

Ask Swami Ghanananda his original name and the reply comes promptly: "My real name is Guide!"

## 'No conversion'

It's not been easy for him to keep the faith.

He says initially he faced some opposition from a section of the local people, but then the number of visitors started growing.

"We don't ask anyone to convert to Hinduism. Those who seek the truth enquire about the Hindu monastery. We write articles in newspapers before we observe big Hindu festivals like Navaratri or Dipawali," says DG Otchere, manager of the temple.

He says that when a devotee died recently, a local TV channel covered his cremation because burning a body on pyre was unusual in Ghana.

There is even one Muslim among the devotees.

Jamer Baroudy says he was born into the Islamic faith but his mother introduced him to Hinduism when he was eight years old.

Mr Baroudy says: "I am aware that Islam prohibits idol worshipping but then God doesn't make any distinction. I visit this temple because I find solace here."

Today there are more than 2,000 indigenous African Hindus in Ghana who come to the temple quite regularly.

The total number of Hindus, including those from India, is much larger.

Hindu religion was first introduced in Ghana by Sindhi settlers who migrated to Africa after India was divided in 1947. There is still a Sindhi temple in Accra.



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