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**ENCYCLOPEDIA OF RELIGIOUS GROUPS IN  
LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN:  
RELIGION IN FRENCH GUIANA**

SECOND EDITION

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# Religion in French Guiana

## Country Overview

French Guiana is an overseas department of France located on the Atlantic coast of South America, bordered by Brazil to the east and south, and by Suriname to the west. It is a tropical land, whose capital, Cayenne, is only five degrees north of the Equator. Its 83,534 km<sup>2</sup> (32,253 sq mi) of land is home to an estimated 259,865 people (2015), most of whom are of African descent. The territory has a very low population density of less than three inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup>, with almost half of its population living in the urban area of Cayenne: 61,268 inhabitants in the commune and 118,346 inhabitants in the metro area (2017 estimate), which includes the communes of Cayenne, Matoury, and Remire-Montjoly. The capital is located on the banks of the estuary of the Cayenne River.

Though sharing cultural affinities with the French-speaking territories of the Caribbean, French Guiana is not considered to be part of that geographic region, because the Caribbean Sea is actually located several hundred kilometers to the west, beyond the arc of the Lesser Antilles. However, the boundaries of what people have defined as the Caribbean today has changed. Historically, the boundaries of the Caribbean were at their greatest extent during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries and as such French Guiana was situated on the edge and during some periods maybe thought to be part of the Caribbean proper.

**Geography.** French Guiana consists of three main regions: the coastal plain in the north, a hilly plateau in the middle, and the Tumac-Humac Mountains in the south along the Brazilian border. Most of the interior (83 percent of it) is dense tropical rain forest.

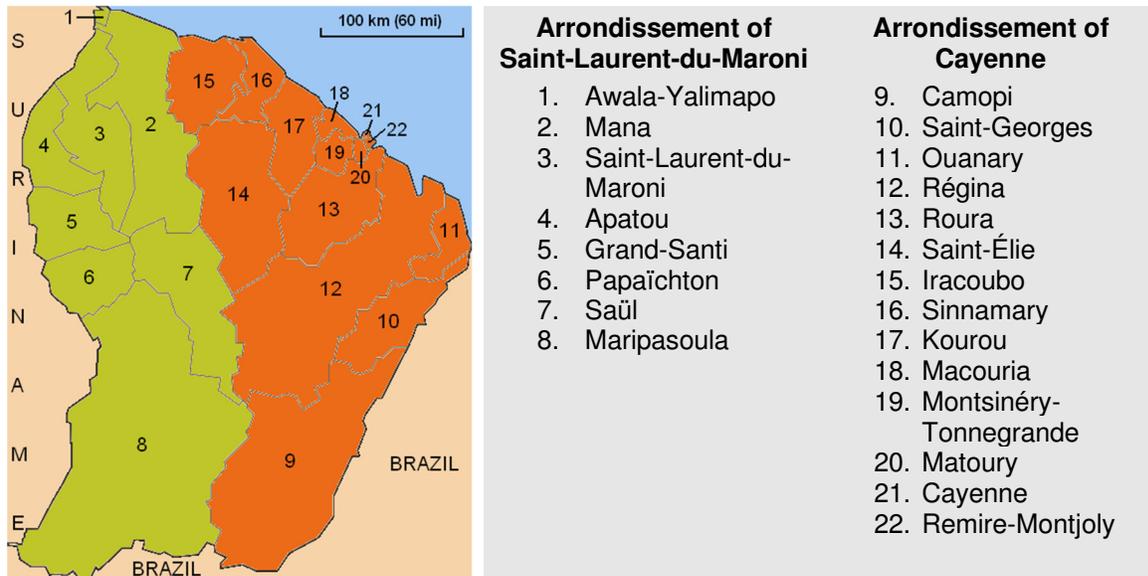
As of 2007, the Amazonian forest located in the most remote part of the department is now protected through one of the nine national parks of France, the *Guiana Amazonian Park*. The territory of the park covers some 33,900 square kilometers (13,090 sq mi) in the communes of Camopi, Maripasoula, Papaïchton, Saint-Élie and Saül.

French Guiana's highest peak is *Bellevue de l'Inini* (851 meters). Other highland peaks include *Mont Machalou* (782 meters), *Pic Coudreau* (711 meters) and *Mont St. Marcel* (635 meters), *Mont Favard* (200 meters) and *Montagne du Mahury* (156 meters). Several small islands are found off the coast: the three Salvation Islands (*Îles du Salut*), which include Devil's Island (*Île du Diable*), Royal Island (*Île Royale*) and St. Joseph Island (*Île Saint Joseph*), and the isolated *Iles du Connétable* bird sanctuary further along the coast towards Brazil.



French Guiana is a land of rivers, many flowing north from the southern mountains. The major rivers are the Maroni and Lawa that form its (disputed) border with Suriname; the Oyapok that forms a long natural border with Brazil, and the Approuaque, Camopi, Mana and Tompok rivers. The *Barrage de Petit-Saut* hydroelectric dam in the north of French Guiana forms an artificial lake and provides hydroelectricity for the country.

French Guiana is divided into 2 *arrondissements* (Saint-Laurent-du-Maroni and Cayenne), 19 *cantons* (counties) and 22 *communes* (municipalities, towns and villages).



## Arrondissements

The area and population of the arrondissements of French Guiana according to census results and latest official estimates: <https://www.citypopulation.de/en/france/cities/guyane/>

Name	Capital	Area A (km <sup>2</sup> )	Population	Population	Population	Population	Population
			Census (C) 1982-03-09	Census (C) 1990-03-15	Census (C) 1999-03-08	Estimate (E) 2007-01-01	Estimate (E) 2015-01-01
<b>French Guiana</b>	<b>Cayenne</b>	<b>83,534</b>	<b>73,022</b>	<b>114,678</b>	<b>157,213</b>	<b>213,031</b>	<b>259,865</b>
<u>Cayenne</u>	<u>Cayenne</u>	42,589	61,587	88,689	119,660	151,592	169,973
Saint-Laurent-du-Maroni	Saint-Laurent-du-Maroni	40,945	11,435	25,989	37,553	61,439	89,892

**Ethnic Diversity.** French Guiana's population of 259,865 (January 2015), most of whom live along a flat 15-40 km strip of land along the coast, is very ethnically diverse. In January 2010, 64.5 percent of the population had *French nationality*, while 35.5 percent had a *foreign nationality*. Of the latter, the largest groups were *Surinamese* (13.8 percent of the total population), *Haitians* (8.8 percent) and *Brazilians* (8.7 percent), while smaller groups included people from British Guyana

(1.7 percent), Colombia (1.0 percent), China (0.5 percent), the Dominican Republic (0.4 percent) and Peru (0.2 percent), as well as those from Arab-speaking countries (0.6 percent).

**The ethnic composition of the population is comprised**, roughly, of French Guyanese Creoles (36 percent), Haitian Creoles (26 percent), Europeans (10 percent, mostly French), Brazilians (8 percent), Surinamese (4 percent), Amerindians (5 percent), Hong Kong Chinese (3 percent), British Guyanese (2.5 percent), Hmong refugees (1.5 percent), and Maroons (1.0 percent). The majority of Europeans, known as “Metropolitans,” live in Cayenne and Kourou, and most are fairly recent migrants, with few descended from the European settlers of the XVII through XIX centuries (Redfield, 2000: 43).

The mulatto French Guyanese (creoles) live on the coast, mostly in Cayenne, Kourou, Saint-Laurant-du-Maroni and Mana, although small groups live in the equatorial forest; Maripasoula, Saül and Regina. The rest of the community that speaks some Creole, lives mainly in Cayenne. This group works mainly in the service industry and in administration.

The main ethnic groups living in the interior are the *Maroons* (formerly called "Bush Negroes"), who are racially black African, and the native American Indians, *Amerindians*. The Maroons, descendants of escaped African slaves mixed with indigenous people, live primarily along the Maroni River. The main Maroon groups are the Saramaca (about 5,000) and the Aucan (about 2,000), both of whom also live in Suriname, and the Boni (Aluku).

According to official sources, six indigenous ethnolinguistic groups (Amerindians) live in French Guiana: *the Kali'na Tileuyu, the Pahikweneh, the Wayãpi, the Wayana, the Teko, and the Lokono*:

*Kali'na Tileuyu (carib)*: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kalina\\_people](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kalina_people)

*Pahikweneh*: [https://www.blada.com/chroniques/2006/991-Or\\_transationales\\_et\\_droits\\_de\\_l\\_homme.htm](https://www.blada.com/chroniques/2006/991-Or_transationales_et_droits_de_l_homme.htm)

*Wayãpi*: <https://www.encyclopedia.com/humanities/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/wayapi>

*Wayana (carib)*: <https://pib.socioambiental.org/en/Povo:Wayana>

*Teko (emerillon)*: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Teko\\_people](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Teko_people)

*Lokono (arawak)*: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lokono>

Indigenous organizations – including the Federation of Indigenous Organizations of French Guiana / *Fédération des Organisations Autochtones de Guyane* (FOAG) – estimated the total number of indigenous people at approximately 19,000, which constituted around 10 percent of French Guiana's entire population (191,614 in 2004).

Source: <http://www.indigene.de/30.html>

Estimates of the percentages of French Guiana's ethnic composition vary, which is compounded by the large proportion of immigrants (about 20,000, nearly 10 percent). *Creoles* (people of mixed African and French ancestry) are the largest ethnic group (about 62 percent), with includes both Guyanese and Haitian Creoles. There are also smaller immigrant groups from various Caribbean islands, mainly Saint Lucia and Dominica, who speak English and/or English Creole. About 10 percent of the population is of *European* ancestry: the vast majority of these are of French heritage, though there are also people of Dutch, British, Spanish and Portuguese ancestry. In addition, there are *Javanese-speakers* (about 2,870) from neighboring Suriname. The main Asian communities are the *Hakka-speaking Chinese* (about 14,000, primarily from Hong Kong and Zhejiang province)

and *Hmong-speakers* from Laos (about 4,300). Other Asian groups include *East Indians (Tamil and Hindustani-speakers, about 11,000)*, *Syrian-Lebanese (Arab-speakers, about 1,440)* and *Vietnamese*. Source: <https://www.ethnologue.com/country/GF/languages>

The Asians mainly come from China, Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Vietnam and Laos. Those who come from Laos live in Cacao on the coast. The Syrian-Lebanese live near them. These groups like the other foreigners also live in Cayenne, Sanit-Laurent-du-Maroni and in Kourou. The Chinese have retail stores; the Hmong, natives of Laos, produce the smaller fruits and vegetables; the Surinamese and Brazilians work in construction and mining; and the Haitians in agriculture, gardening, driving taxis and garbage collection. The Vietnamese are refugees from their homeland in the former French-Indo China (1887-1954), especially during and after the U.S.-Vietnamese war (1955-1975), who migrated to the Caribbean region and established many restaurants with French-Vietnamese cuisine. Source: <http://humanidades.uprrp.edu/francofonia/guyana.html>

**Languages.** The official language of French Guiana is French (175,000), but a number of other languages are also spoken. Regional languages include Guianese Creole French (131,000), Guianese Creole English (4,200), six Amerindian languages – Arawak-Lokona (380), Carib-Kali'na (2,400), Emerillon-Teko (400), Palikúr (1,500), Wayana (1,000), Wayampi (750) – and four Maroon dialects (Saramaka, Paramaccan, Boni and Djuka), as well as Hmong Njua (4,300). Other languages spoken include Portuguese (13,900), Chinese Hakka (14,400), Haitian Creole (23,200), Hindustani (11,000), Suriname-Javanese (2,870), Arabic (1,440), Spanish, Dutch and English. Source: <https://www.ethnologue.com/country/GF/languages>

**Economy.** French Guiana is heavily dependent on mainland France for subsidies, trade, and goods. The major industries are shrimp and fish processing (accounting for three-quarters of foreign exports) and aerospace. Lumber, construction and mining are secondary industries. The Guiana Space Centre in Kourou (commune 17) accounts for 25 percent of the department's GDP and employs about 1,700 people. Most of the metropolitans, or continental French, work in the Guianese Space Centre for Scientific Research.

Agriculture is largely undeveloped and is mainly confined to the area near the coast: sugar and bananas are two of the main cash crops. The agricultural products are sugar, rice, manioc, cocoa, vegetables and bananas. Cattle, pigs and poultry are the main livestock animals.

There is very little manufacturing in the department. Natural resources include: bauxite, timber, gold (widely scattered), cinnabar, kaolin, fish, and shrimp. Tourism, especially eco-tourism, is a growing industry. However, unemployment is a major problem: between 20 to 30 percent of those in the labor market.

The major exports are shrimp, lumber, gold, rice, rum, rosewood essence and clothing. France bought the bulk of the products, more than 60 percent, with the USA, the European Union and Japan buying the rest.

The territory is also experiencing rapid growth, as it has the highest number of children per woman (3.6), which contributed very significantly to its demographic growth of 2.6% between 2010 and 2015. The population of French Guiana (estimate of 281,612 inhabitants in 2018) is young and cosmopolitan, with one in every two people being under the age of 25 and a third having an immigrant background.

The population growth represents an opportunity for the territory, but also a constraint. It must adapt its infrastructure by building new schools and hospitals every year and upgrading its road network. Public procurement to cover these needs is in fact one of the driving forces behind the Guianese economy. It is estimated that 3,000 new homes must be built every year for 30 years.

The level of education and training is relatively low, with one in two people having nothing more than a school leaving certificate (compared to 30 percent in France), which exacerbates difficulties in labor market integration.

For several years, French Guiana has thus had an economic growth rate between 3 and 5 percent, which has resulted in significant net job creation. However, this much stronger growth than on the French mainland has not been enough to absorb the mass entry of young people onto the labor market each year. As a result, the unemployment rate remains high, at 22 percent (December 2019).

Source:

<https://ec.europa.eu/eures/main.jsp?catId=11367&acro=lmi&lang=en&countryId=FR&regionId=FRY&nuts2Code=FRY3&nuts3Code=null&regionName=Guyane>

**Public security** is handled by the National *Gendarmerie* (militarized Police Force) and the French Foreign Legion, a unique military unit in the French Army, established in 1831. A chronic issue affecting French Guiana is the influx of illegal immigrants and clandestine gold prospectors from Brazil and Suriname. The border between the department and Suriname is formed by the Maroni River, which flows through rainforest, and it has proven difficult for the public security forces to patrol.

**The Environment.** Since the global economic crash of 2007-2008 caused the price of gold to skyrocket, a gold rush began all over the Amazon jungle. Since then, the price of gold has continued to soar and rampant illegal gold mining has destroyed large areas of the jungle. In French Guiana, there are an estimated 8,000 to 10,000 illegal miners. As Dominick Plouvier, conservation expert and director of Amazon Conservation Team explains, the problem lies in the use of one high volatile chemical. "Mercury, used in the extraction process is the big problem. It pollutes the rivers, which then poisons the fish, which then in turn poisons the people who eat the fish."

Source: <https://www.business-humanrights.org/en/french-guiana-gold-mining-threatens-one-of-the-most-forested-nations-on-the-planet>

**Transportation.** French Guiana's main international airport is Cayenne-Rochambeau Airport, located in the commune of Matoury, a southern suburb of Cayenne. The department's main seaport is Dégrad des Cannes, located on the estuary of the Mahury River, in the commune of Remire-Montjoly, a southeastern suburb of Cayenne. Almost all of French Guiana's imports and exports pass through the port of Dégrad des Cannes, which was built in 1969 to replace the old harbor of Cayenne that was congested and could not handle modern shipping.

An asphalted road from Régina to Saint-Georges de l'Oyapock (a town by the Brazilian border) was opened in 2004, thereby completing the road from Cayenne to the Brazilian border. It is now possible to drive on a fully-paved road along the Atlantic Coast from Saint-Laurent-du-Maroni on the Surinamese border to Saint-Georges de l'Oyapock on the Brazilian border (about 430 km).

## Current Status of Religious Affiliation

The vast majority of French Guianese are Roman Catholic. According to 1999 estimates by *Almanaque Mundial 2000* (1999: 178), religious affiliation was as follows: Roman Catholic 85.8 percent, Protestant 4.2 percent, other religions 5.0 percent, and none 5.0 percent. Other religions include indigenous Amerindian animistic beliefs and practices, Chinese Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam among Asian Indians, and African-derived religions among the Creoles and Maroons.

According to the Pew-Templeton Global Religious Futures Project, religious affiliation in 2010 was 84.4 percent Christian (76.9 percent Roman Catholic, 5.9 percent Protestant, and 1.6 percent “other Christians”); 9.1 percent “folk religions” (animistic beliefs and practices among the Amerindians, Creoles, Maroons and Hmong), 3.1 percent other religions (including 1.6 percent Hindu and 0.9 percent Muslim); and 3.4 percent were not affiliated with any religious group.

Source: [http://www.globalreligiousfutures.org/countries/french-guiana#/?affiliations\\_religion\\_id=0&affiliations\\_year=2010](http://www.globalreligiousfutures.org/countries/french-guiana#/?affiliations_religion_id=0&affiliations_year=2010)

## Overview of Social, Political and Religious Development

The primary American Indian (Amerindian) people who inhabited the land when Spanish explorers first visited the area in 1500 AD were the Caribs, who had displaced the earlier residents, the Arawaks. The Spanish settled the area in 1503 around where the town of Cayenne was later established. Further inland dwelt other peoples, including the Oyampi, Cussaris and Emerillon, who practiced a variety of related Amerindian animistic religions, some of which have survived to the present.

On 9 April 1604, a French expedition led by Daniel de La Touche de La Ravardière landed at Oyapock Bay. The Oyapock River is a 370-km (230-mi)–long river that forms most of the border between present-day French Guiana and the Brazilian state of Amapá. La Ravardière sailed on to the future site of Cayenne before returning to France with a favorable report about the prospects of French colonization in the area.

Between 1624 and 1643, the French occupied the Guiana coast, established the first settlements and brought Catholicism with them. In 1635, a company of French-Norman merchants was granted all privileges within the whole of Guiana and established a settlement at the site of present-day Cayenne. In 1643, *La Compagnie du Cap Nord* is founded by the people of Rouen, France, and Charles Poncet de Brétigny led a new group of 400 colonists from Rouen to Guiana where he built Fort Saint Michel on Mont Cépérou, overlooking the future site of Cayenne, and proclaimed himself the sovereign of Guiana.

In 1645, *La Compagnie de la France Equinoxiale* was established but its colonization effort in Guiana fails. In 1648, Indian attacks reduced the population of La Compagnie du Cap Nord’s colony to 25. In 1652, The second *Compagnie de la France Equinoxiale* or *Compagnie des Douze Seigneurs* was established to promote the colonization of Guiana. A new expedition was sent to Guiana with 650 colonists. Fort Diamant was built at the mouth of the Mahury River to protect the settlers from the Indians who inhabited the surrounding highlands. However, maritime invasions by the Dutch, English and Portuguese and attacks by the Indians and fevers decimated the inhabitants of the first settlements. The survivors fled west towards Suriname.

In 1654, the Dutch take control of French Guiana for twelve years. African slaves are first brought to Guiana by a Matoury plantation owner, a Dutchman named Spranger, during this period. In September 1659, a group of Portuguese Jews arrived in French Guiana from Brazil and established a settlement at Remire, on the eastside of the town of Cayenne. On 20 July 1660, more than 150 *Sephardic Jews* left Leghorn, Italy, and settled in Cayenne. The Jewish settlers negotiated with the Dutch authorities a grant of liberties and exemptions from laws placed on other colonizers. The Jews established sugarcane plantations, a sugarcane mill, and indigo dye workshops.

In 1667, The Netherlands and Great Britain recognized French claims in Guiana under terms of the *Treaty of Breda*. In 1674, Guiana came under direct control of the French crown and government minister Jean Baptiste Colbert undertook a policy of agricultural development in the French colonies. In 1666, the proprietary company brought the Jesuits to Cayenne, where they ministered among the Negro slaves and the Amerindians. The Jesuits establish plantations of sugarcane, cotton, cacao, coffee, vanilla and other spices. Papermills, brickworks and mines were developed by African slave labor.

Source: <http://www.schudak.de/timelines/frenchguiana1604-1946.html>

The land of Guiana was disputed territory through the rest of the century and at different times was controlled by the Dutch, the British and the Portuguese. French control was finally reestablished in 1676. Various efforts to build the colony with French citizens met with mixed results due to the climate, and even now most of the population resides along the coast and on the nearby islands.

**European settlement in this region during colonial times resulted in the creation of three colonies: British Guiana (now Guyana), Dutch Guiana (now Suriname) and French Guiana.** The three are still often collectively referred to as the Guianas. After the Treaty of Paris in 1763, King Louis XVI of France sent 12,000 settlers to French Guiana to colonize the region. However, only a few hundred survived the ordeal.

In 1848, France abolished slavery and many of the former slaves fled into the rainforest, where they established communities similar to the ones from which they had been taken captive in Africa. Now called *Maroons*, from the French word for "fugitive," they formed a sort of buffer zone between the Europeans who settled along the coast and main rivers, and the unconquered, and often hostile, Native American tribes of Arawak living in the inland regions. Without the availability of slave labor, many of the plantations were soon taken over by the jungle and the planters ruined. In 1850, several shiploads of Asian-Indians, Malays and Chinese were brought in as contract-laborers to work the plantations but, instead, many of them set up shops in Cayenne and other settlements.

In 1853, gold was discovered in the interior, which precipitated border disputes with Brazil and Dutch Guiana (these were later settled in 1891, 1899, and 1915, though a small region of the border with Suriname is still disputed).

Between 1852 and 1939, a total of 70,277 French convicts were deported to French Guiana where they were interned in various penal settlements, collectively known as the *Cayenne Penal Colony*, including the infamous *Île du Diable* (Devil's Island). In 1938, the French government stopped sending prisoners to the Cayenne Penal Colony, and in 1952 the prison was closed. Most of the former prisoners returned to metropolitan France, although some chose to remain in French Guiana.

The penal colonization of French Guyana with convicts began in 1852. Officially, it began with the law of 30 May 1854 on the execution of the sentence of hard labor (called the law on transportation). Napoleon III (during the Second Empire), decided to establish the execution of the sentence of hard labor not within France, but in the colonies, specifically, in French Guyana. Previously, prisons where those convicted to the penalty of hard labor – either for a specific period or for life – served their time in port prisons of Brest, Toulon and Rochefort. *The objective of this law, inspired by the penal settlement model implemented by Britain in Australia, was threefold: 1) it allowed the métropolis (France) to get rid of convicts (that is to say close the port prisons in France and avoid the risks of reoffending associated with released convicts); 2) it provided the colony with an abundant and cheap workforce while also allowing the most deserving convicts to settle when released; 3) it assisted in founding a settlement society and participating in the development of a part of the French colonial empire.* To further this third objective, Article 6 of the Law on transportation created a “doublage”: *transportés* sentenced to less than eight years of hard labor were required at their release to remain in the colony a time equivalent to the duration of their sentence. Those sentenced to more than eight years had to remain in the colony for life. This allowed the prevention of the return of convicts to France and forced them to settle, temporarily or permanently, in the colony of French Guyana.

The choice of French Guyana was not neutral. Most settlement attempts conducted in the eighteenth century with a free population resulted in failure. Very soon, because of its distance from the metropolis, the colony began to receive political opponents: refractory priests to the Civil Constitution of the Clergy and deportees following the coup d'état of *Thermidor* and *Fructidor*. *In addition, French Guyana lacked a sufficient workforce due to the abolition of slavery in 1848.* On 10 May 1852, 301 *transportés* landed in French Guyana, in the *Îles du Salut*, located opposite the city of Kourou. From there, the convicts reached the “*Grande Terre*” and colonized eastern French Guyana, settling in camps or on floating pontoons located mainly in Cayenne, *La Montagne d'Argent*, *La Comté* and Kourou. Then, in 1857, the convicts colonized the west of French Guyana and founded the town of *Saint-Laurent-du-Maroni*, in tribute to the governor of the colony Laurent Baudin. Following this, different sub-camps were set up on the periphery of the city including *Les Hattes*, *Saint-Pierre*, *Saint-Louis*, *Saint-Maurice*, *Sainte-Marguerite* and *Saint-Jean*. By a decree dated 30 May 1860, this carceral complex located along the Maroni River officially became the prison territory of Maroni (*territoire pénitentiaire du Maroni*) and *Saint-Laurent* officially became a prison town (*commune pénitentiaire*) in 1880.

The *transportés* were employed to “the heaviest work” of the colony, as well as public works. Those observing good behavior were eligible for assignment; that is to say to be employed by individuals, businesses and public services in the colony, or were able to benefit from an agricultural or industrial concession. *Transportés* were divided into three classes: those of the first class could get interesting jobs like *garçons de famille*, that is to say assigned in private households, nurses, employed in the kitchens, employee to the scriptures, boatmen, *porte-clef*, that is to say auxiliary supervisors, etc. Those in third class were subject to the toughest jobs – logging, farming, mining, digging, etc.

In case of misconduct, the convicts could be sent to disciplinary camps, like Charvein, and could also be tried by a special court, the *Tribunal Maritime Spécial*. Besides the death penalty, this court could sentence them to a maximum of five years in solitary confinement (especially in case of escape) they had to undergo on the *Île Saint Joseph (Îles du Salut)*. The convicts considered most dangerous or that the prison administration wanted in particular to monitor were imprisoned on the *Île Royale (Îles du Salut)*. **In all, 52,905 transportés were sent to colonial prison of French Guyana...**

Concurrently, following the insurrectionary events of 1848 and 1851 in France, the decree of 8 December 1851 organized deportation (*déportés*) to Algeria and French Guyana: 2,816 individuals were sent to French Guyana. After an amnesty in 1859, deportation for political motives to French

Guyana continued with the law of 9 February 1895 which designated the penitentiary of the *Îles du Salut* as the receiving site for those condemned to deportation and confinement in a fortified enclosure in accordance with the law of 8 June 1850... But unlike the *transportés*, they were not subjected to forced labor.

**Alongside *transportés*, a new category of convicts appeared in French Guyana in 1887: the *relégués*.** Sentenced under the law of 27 May 1885 regarding the relegation of repeat offenders (*loi sur la relégation des récidivistes*), convicts were mostly petty repeat offenders guilty of simple theft or vagrancy offenses. Those who could provide for their own needs on site benefited from the regime of **individual relegation** (*relégation individuelle*): they were relatively free and could contract work commitments or could get industrial or agricultural concessions. But those who were too poor – the vast majority – were classified to the regime of **collective relegation** (*relégation collective*) and were interned in the penitentiary of *Saint-Jean-du-Maroni* and its sub-camps (*La Forestiere, Tollinche, Saint-Louis, Nouveau Camp* and *Tigre*), where they were subjected to forced labor. **Relegation, unlike transportation, was perpetual and 17,372 *relégués* were sent to French Guyana.**

**Addition to these three categories** (*transportés, déportés* and *relégués*), we must also add 1,000 men sentenced to reclusion from Martinique, Guadeloupe, and French Guyana known as “colonial *réclusionnaires*” or “second category of transportation,” and who were incarcerated in the colonial prison of French Guyana. **Alongside these men, there were also women** – *transportées* and *reléguées*. The *transportées* had the choice of serving their forced labor sentence in prisons (*maisons centrales de détention*) located in France or in the colonial penal colony: 394 women made the choice to go to French Guyana. But the *reléguées* were required to serve their sentence in a colony: 519 women were sent to French Guyana. On site, the *reléguées* were incarcerated in a “convent-penitentiary” under the custody of the Sisters of *Saint-Joseph-de-Cluny*. They were primarily intended to become wives for convicts and their living conditions were very difficult. Because of their very high mortality rate, the government decided to put an end to the relegation of women in French Guyana in 1907.

**In 1931, 535 Indochinese people** convicted for essentially political reasons were sent to French Guyana. They were installed in camps located on the territory of the Inini, specially created in 1930, and placed under the sole authority of the governor.

From 1923, the colonial prison of French Guyana appeared as a failing institution following a report on French Guyana by the French reporter Albert Londres. Similarly, the French Parliament regularly denounced the cost of this institution, which never achieved agricultural self-sufficiency and had to be constantly supplied with food and credit by the metropolis.

In 1933, **the Salvation Army**, led by Captain Charles Péan, arrived in French Guyana to help convicts released from colonial prison who were often subjected to a miserable regime after their release because of “*doublage*”. *At the same time, the Salvation Army led a public campaign in the metropolis for the abolition of the colonial prison in French Guyana as did the deputy of French Guyana, Gaston Monnerville.* These factors pushed the French government to abolish transportation to French Guyana by a decree law (*décret-loi*) on 17 June 1938. But it was not until 1945 that the same decision was taken for relegation. The Doctor Lieutenant-Colonel Sainz was appointed Director of the Colonial Prison Service in May 1944 and was commissioned by the Colonial Office to liquidate the colonial prison. He organized repatriation convoys to France and Algeria of convicts, released volunteers, and those still under sentence. The last convoy traveled [to France] in August 1953.

Source: Jean-Lucien Sanchez. “French Guiana. The Penal Colonization of French Guyana 1852-1953” (2016), available at: <https://halshs.archives-ouvertes.fr/halshs-01409186/document>

**Albert Londres** (1884-1932), a French journalist and writer and one of the inventors of investigative journalism, started writing investigative stories for *Le Petit Parisien* (a prominent French newspaper) in 1922. In 1923, he went to the penal colony of Cayenne in Guyana to see for himself what was happening there. Describing the horrors, his reports produced strong reactions in public opinion and in the French Establishment.

It must be said that we in France have erred. When someone – sometimes with our knowledge – is sent into forced labour, we say "He has gone to Cayenne". The penal colony is no longer at Cayenne, but at *Saint-Laurent-du-Maroni* first of all and later at the *Îles du Salut*. I ask, by the way, that these isles be debaptised, for they are not the Isles of Salvation, but the Isles of Punishment. The law allows us to behead murderers, not to employ them. Cayenne is nevertheless the capital of the penal colony. (...) Finally, I arrived at the camp. The labour camp. Not a machine for producing well defined, regulated, uniform punishment. A factory churning out misery without rhyme or reason. One would search in vain for any mould to shape the prisoners. It crushes them, that's all, and the pieces go where they may. (*Au bagne*, 1923) And the article continued: "I was taken to these places. I was taken aback by the novelty of the fact. I had never before seen fifty men in a cage. [...] They were getting ready for night. The place was swarming with them. They were free from five in the evening until five in the morning – inside their cage."

Londres also denounced "doubling". "When a man is sentenced to five to seven years forced labour, once the sentence is completed, he must stay in Guyana for the same number of years. If the sentence is more than seven years, he must stay there for the rest of his life. How many jurors know that? The penal colony starts with freedom. During their sentence they are fed (badly), they are housed (badly), they are clothed (badly). A brilliant minimum when one considers what happens afterwards. Their five to seven years complete, they are shown the door, and that's it."

Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Albert\\_Londres](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Albert_Londres)

In 1901, the population of French Guiana was 32,908, including 4,097 convicts at hard labor and 2,193 "on ticket of leave" – a permit allowing a convict to leave prison, under certain restrictions, and go to work before having served a full term, somewhat similar to a certificate of parole. The capital city, Cayenne, had a population of over 12,000. The chief industry was placer gold-mining.

In 1900, the colonial government, appointed from Paris, was assisted by a council of five members, in addition to which there was an elective assembly; the colony was represented in the Paris chamber by one deputy.

In 1905, France acquires a 965 square mile territory lying between the upper Maroni and the Itany through an agreement with the Dutch government. The question of the exploitation of gold in the Maroni is settled by attributing alternate reaches of the river to France and the Netherlands. France obtains the principal islands in the lower Maroni.

In 1918, the worldwide influenza pandemic, known as the "Spanish Flu," strikes French Guiana, but the number of casualties is unknown.

In 1919, Governor Henri Lejeune appoints Arsène Thémire to head the colony's postal service. Thémire's tenure brings vast improvements. Post offices are established in nearly all communities. Wireless stations are installed at offices in Saint-Laurent, Sinnamary, Régina, St-Georges and the Iles du Salut. The Post Office takes over the telegraph line built by the prison authorities and uses

it to restore communications with Tonate, Kourou, Malmanoury, Sinnamary and Iracoubo. Telegraphy courses are instituted at the College of Cayenne and the Loubère Barracks.

In 1920, Jean Galmont founded French Guiana's first airline *La Société des Transports Aériens Guyanais*. STAG's 3 Bréguet seaplanes connect Cayenne to Saint Laurent via Sinnamary and Mana. Another regular route connects the towns of Saint Laurent to Inini via Abounamey and occasional flights are made to Paramaribo, Suriname.

In 1945, Resistance leader Vermont Polycarpe is elected General Councilor of Cayenne, and Constant Chlore defeats Gaston Monnerville in the election for Mayor of Cayenne.

In 1946, the penal colony in French Guiana was abolished and the Territory of Inini, consisting of most of the interior of French Guiana, was administratively reunited with French Guiana. The Territory of Inini was administered separately between 6 June 1930 and 19 March 1946, after which all of French Guiana became a department of France. The territory remained governed as a special entity until 17 March 1969, when it was dissolved into communes, and became subject to regular government administration.

In 1964, Kourou was chosen to be a launch site for rockets, largely due to its favorable location near the equator. The Guiana Space Center was built and became operational in 1968. This has provided limited local employment, and the mainly foreign technicians and hundreds of troops stationed in the region to prevent sabotage bring income to the local economy.

The 1970s saw the settlement of Hmong refugees from Laos in the county, primarily to the towns of Javouhuy and Cacao. The Green Plan of 1976 aimed to improve production, though it had only limited success. A movement for increased autonomy from France gained momentum in the 1970s and 1980s, along with the increasing success of the *Parti Socialiste Guyanais*. Protests by those calling for more autonomy from France became increasingly vocal, which produced violent protests in 1996, 1997, and 2000. While many Guianese wanted to have more autonomy, support for complete independence was low due to the large economic support provided by France.

Sources: "French Guiana Timeline 1604-1946," available at:

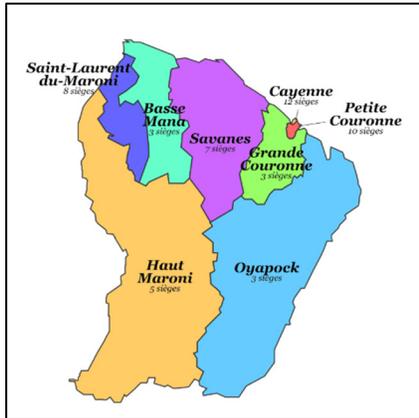
<http://www.schudak.de/timelines/frenchguiana1604-1946.html> and "French Guiana" in the *New World Encyclopedia*: [https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/French\\_Guiana](https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/French_Guiana)

Currently, French Guiana is an integral part of France; its head of State is the President of the French Republic, and its head of Government is the Prime Minister of France. The French Government and its agencies have responsibility for a wide range of issues that are under the National Executive, such as defense and external relations.

The President of France appoints a **Prefect** (resident at the Prefecture building in Cayenne) as his representative to head the local government of French Guiana. There are two legislative bodies, the 19-member General Council and the 34-member Regional Council, both elected. The former Prefect was Daniel Ferey (2009-2011), the President of the General Council was Alain Tien-Liong, and the President of the Regional Council was Antoine Karam. Daniel Ferey was followed as Prefect by Denis Labbé (2011-2013), Eric Spitz (2013-2016) and Martin Jaeger (2016-2019). Guiana's current Prefect is Marc Del Grande (since August 2019).

French Guiana sends two deputies to the French National Assembly, one representing the communes of Cayenne and Macouria, and the other representing the rest of French Guiana. This latter constituency is the largest in the French Republic by land area. French Guiana also sends one senator to the French Senate.

*Map of current electoral districts.*



Most of the French political parties are active in French Guiana. In addition to these there are a number of regional political parties:

- Decolonization and Social Emancipation Movement (*Mouvement de Décolonisation et d'Émancipation Sociale*, MDES)
- Guianese Socialist Party (*Parti Socialiste Guyanais*, PSG)
- Democratic Forces of Guiana (*Forces démocratiques de Guyane*, FDG)
- To the Left in Guiana (*À gauche en Guyane*, AGEG)
- Walwari

French Guiana has traditionally been conservative, although the **Guianese Socialist Party (GSP)**, founded in 1956, dominated the country's politics until 2010. The **Union for a Popular Movement (UMP)** is a center-right political party in France and French Guiana. The UMP's leader, Nicolas Sarkozy, was elected President of France in 2007 and served until 2012, when François Gérard Georges Nicolas Hollande (French Socialist Party) became President (2012-2017). Another principal minority faction is the **Walwari party** (Democratic Socialist ideology) that previously had seven seats in the Regional Council and one seat in the General Council. However, the Regional Council ceased to exist on 1 January 2016. The 51-member Assembly of Guyana (led by president **Rodolphe Alexandre** of the Guianese Socialist Party) is the deliberative assembly of the single territorial community of Guyana. It replaced the Regional Council and the General Council of Guyana since the territorial elections that were held on 6 and 13 December 2015. The Guyana Assembly is composed of 51 members who are elected for six years at the same time as the regional councilors and are eligible for re-election.

## Roman Catholicism

The history of Roman Catholicism in what is now French Guiana begins with the Portuguese missionary effort after the Treaty of Tordesillas between Spain and Portugal in 1494, which gave this territory to Portugal. However, no important success was achieved in the conversion of the aborigines until the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Between 1624 and 1643, the French occupied the Guiana coast, established the first settlements, and brought Catholicism with them. Efforts were made to convert the indigenous population, and most immigrants were of a Catholic background. Accompanying colonists of the *French East India Company (Compagnie Française des Indes Orientales, 1664-1789)* to Cayenne were some Dominican friars, who were followed by the Capuchin friars of St. Francis. In 1666, the proprietary company brought the Jesuits to Cayenne, where they ministered among the Negro slaves and the Amerindians.

Among the most remarkable Jesuits in this missionary field were the priests Fathers De Creully, Lombard, d'Ayma, Fauque, Dausillac, and d'Huberland. Father De Creully spent 33 years in the mission (1685-1718), and during a large part of the time he travelled by boat along the coast and preached to the natives. Other Jesuits established settlements among the Amerindian “converts” based on the model of the Jesuit Mission in Paraguay, known as “reductions.” The Jesuit Mission in Cayenne continued until the anti-Jesuit movement in continental Europe brought about the expulsion of the Jesuits from this field in 1768. *The French Revolution* (1787-1799) limited the efforts of the secular clergy to continue what the Jesuits had begun in Cayenne.

*The Congregation of the Holy Spirit, C.S.Sp.* (known as *Spiritans*), after having been put in pastoral charge of Guyane, sent four priests from its seminary in 1775. In 1868, Père Olivier Hervé became the first Spiritan to be appointed Prefect Apostolic of Guyane. The future Superior General, Père Ambroise Emonet, will succeed him 4 years later. In an 1875 letter to the Minister in Paris, the Governor of Guyane, Delacroix, insisted that the Spiritans be put in charge of the pastoral care of the island. Père Emonet, Prefect Apostolic and future Superior General, consecrated Guyane to the Sacred Heart of Jesus in 1876. The Spiritans were expelled from the mission of Guyane in 1893. In 1912, the Congregation of the Holy Spirit assumed responsibility for the old colonial dioceses of Martinique, Guadeloupe and Reunion, as well as the Apostolic Prefectures of St. Pierre & Miquelon and French Guiana. From 1923 until 1998 (a period of 75 years), the five bishops of this ecclesiastical jurisdiction belonged to the Congregation of the Holy Spirit and the Immaculate Heart of Mary (*Congregatio Sancti Spiritus, C.S.Sp.*).

Sources: <https://spiritanroma.org/french-guyana/>

<http://www.synod.va/content/sinodoamazonico/en/the-pan-amazonian-region/the-amazon-in-french-guiana.html>

Between 1818 and 1900, the *Sisters of Saint-Paul de Chartres* – a missionary Congregation, founded in 1696, by Fr. Louis Chauvet, parish priest of Levesville-la-Chenard, a little village in the region of Beauce, some 80 kilometers southeast of Paris – administered the hospital at Cayenne. In 1900, there were about 20,000 Catholics, 27 churches or chapels, 18 mission stations, 22 priests, and five schools with about 900 pupils in French Guiana.

The Guiana mission was the scene of the heroic labors of *Mother Anne-Marie de Javouhey* (1779-1851), founder of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Cluny in 1807 in Cluny, France.

The government of France contacted her to try to establish a colony in the interior of the country of the South American colony of Guiana. After receiving full approval for her plans, Javouhey left with 36 nuns and 50 emigrants. Over time New Angoulême turned out not to be a success, and after five years work, she returned to France.

In 1828, she returned to the area, at the request of the French government to assist in preparing a group of African slaves for emancipation. The settlement, known as Mana, became quite prosperous and attracted the jealousy of colonists at the mouth of the Acarouany River. A plot was hatched to kill her, but the boatman who was to tip her into the crocodile-infested water could not bring himself to kill her. There were no scenes or other troubles at the emancipation and liberation of this group of slaves as marked similar occasions in other French colonies. By 1841, 400 slaves had been emancipated.

She returned to France again in 1843, facing several difficulties, including ecclesiastical opposition. During the Revolution of 1848, Javouhey organized the sisters into a sort of ambulance-brigade to care

for the wounded. She and her order continued to establish new mission houses of her order all over the world, including in India, Tahiti, Madagascar, and over 30 foundations in France.

Source: Rudge, F.M. "Venerable Anne-Marie Javouhey" in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 8. New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1910: <https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08326a.htm>

She died in Paris in 1851. The cause (justification) for her beatification was introduced on 11 February 1908, and she was beatified on 15 October 1950 as "Blessed Anne Marie Javouhey" in Rome by Pope Pius XII. Source: <https://sj-cluny.org/History-of-Anne-Marie-Javouhey?lang=fr>

**The Prefecture Apostolic of French Guiana-Cayenne** was established in 1651 and was separated from Martinique in 1731. It remained a Prefecture Apostolic until elevated to a Vicariate Apostolic in January 1933, and finally became the **Diocese of Cayenne** in February 1956. In 1972, the population of the French colony was 44,392 inhabitants, of which 42,062 were Catholics (about 95 percent). These were distributed for pastoral care in 21 parishes and 15 quasi-parishes governed by seven secular diocesan priests and 21 religious priests. There were also two senior seminarians, 24 religious brothers and 91 nuns. All these ecclesiastics were in charge of maintaining 18 charities and 12 teaching centers.

**The Diocese of Cayenne** is currently a suffragan of the *Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Saint-Pierre and Fort-de-France* on the island of Martinique. The church authorities were very slow in creating indigenous leadership, and no native Guianese was ordained as a priest until 1971. The current bishop is Msg. Emmanuel Marie Philippe Louis Lafont, appointed in June 2004. About 77 percent of the population was Catholic in 2010. In 2016, there were seven diocesan priests and 24 religious priests (total of 31), seven permanent deacons, 29 religious brothers and 23 nuns who served the 26 parishes in French Guiana.

Source: <https://www.catholic-hierarchy.org/diocese/dcaye.html>

## **The Protestantism Movement**

Protestant families began to arrive after 1624 and remained, despite having, unlike the Roman Catholic Church, no governmental support. No indigenous Protestant church was started until the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the early 1900s, a member of the **Christian Brethren / Frères chrétiens** (Open Plymouth Brethren branch from Ireland and England) came to French Guiana from Barbados to begin church work. In 2000, Brierly estimated that there were 12 local assemblies with a church community of about 780 people (Brierly 1997:325). Newton (2015: XVIII) reported 15 local assemblies in 2005 and 22 in 2014.

**Note:** statistics below for the year 2000 were estimated by Dr. Peter Brierly, in *World Churches Handbook* (London, England: Christian Research, 1997).

**The Seventh-Day Adventist Church.** Mission work began in 1940 and the French Guiana Mission was organized in 1945. In March 2003, there were 1,936 Adventist church members and 16 congregations. The latest statistics (30 June 2019) are 11 churches with 3,052 members:

<https://www.adventistyearbook.org/entity?EntityID=14087>

**The Church of God (7<sup>th</sup> Day)** is related historically to the Church of God (Seventh Day), which split into two factions in 1933: the Church of God (Seventh Day) in Stanberry, MO (later moved

to Denver, CO) and the Church of God (7<sup>th</sup> Day) in Salem, WV. Elder Dugger was affiliated with the Salem, WV, and moved to Israel in 1953 to establish its world headquarters and publish the *Mount Zion Reporter*. Many of the churches affiliated with this movement use the name “Mt. Zion Church of God (7<sup>th</sup> Day).” This denomination (headquarters in Jerusalem, Israel) reports affiliated churches in the USA, Canada, Mexico, the Caribbean (USVI, Antigua, Dominica, **French Guiana**, Grenada, Jamaica, St. Lucia, St. Martin, Trinidad-Tobago, St. Vincent), Central and South America, Africa, Australia, New Zealand, England and India.

Source: <http://www.cog7day.org/>

**Foreign Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention.** It began mission work in 1982 and had planted five churches with 380 members by 2000.

**Evangelical Churches of the West Indies (ECWI, 1986).** This denomination was founded by a U.S.-based evangelical mission agency, World Team (formerly known as West Indies Mission in the Caribbean). It reported five affiliated churches with 470 members in 2000 in French Guiana.

**The Church of the Nazarene** began its missionary work in 1988. In 2000, this denomination reported three affiliated churches with 570 members.

**The Church of Christ** (*a capella*) was planted in the capital city of Cayenne in 1990 as a result of the work of Don Starks, Boyd Williams and Bill McDonough.

**The Church of God of Prophecy** arrived in 1991. There was only one church with 46 members in 2000.

**The Evangelical Church of French Guiana / *Eglise Evangelique de la Guyane Francaise*.** This Reformed denomination was officially created in summer of 1997 to serve an ethnic group of French military and civilians coming mostly from France (also called “metropolitains”). One of the congregations meets in the military fort in Cayenne, and it maintains a chaplaincy within the French Army stationed in this country. The denomination is a member of the CEEFE (Commission of French-speaking Evangelical Churches Abroad) and thus has close relationships with the *Fédération Protestante de France*, which incorporates 14 Protestant denominations and missions within France: <http://www.reformiert-online.net/adressen/detail.php?id=12190&lg=fra>

**The Christian Church of French Guiana** (founded in 1997). This organization is related to the independent Christian Churches & Churches of Christ (instrumental) in the USA, which are related to the North American Christian Convention, with offices in Cincinnati, Ohio. The work in French Guiana was begun by Dr. Wesley Stepp, director of the Bible Institute of Christian Missions in Jacksonville, Florida. The Christian Church of French Guiana became incorporated in 2005.

**Other Protestant denominations exist but some of their founding dates are unknown:** The Anglican Church / *Église Anglican* (one church with 60 members), The Salvation Army / *Armée du Salut - District de la Guyane* (1933, 1980, now several churches with 190 members), “Streams of Power” / *Stromen van kracht* (a Dutch Pentecostal group, led by Karel Hoekendijk who held an evangelistic crusade in 1960-1961, now three churches with 350 members), Gospel Crusade (a Pentecostal-Charismatic mission from Haiti, one church with 130 members), the Assemblies of

God (Pentecostal, five churches with about 900 members), and the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel (one church).

Notable among this list of denominations is the work of the **Salvation Army** in French Guiana, which began in 1933 among freed (*liberes*) convicts from the Cayenne prison on Devil's Island. The Salvation Army reopened its work there in Cayenne in 1980:

Commissioner Albin Peyron of France obtained permission to send Salvation Army officers to aid the *liberes* by creating hostels, workshops, and a farm, to enable the men to earn their fare home. Adjutant Charles Pean, after reporting back about conditions, departed with the first group of officers in July 1933.

In August the first Army flag flew on *Montjoly* (Mount Beautiful), where a remarkable farm colony was to develop. Here the first converts were made. By the end of the first year, 78 men had knelt at the mercy seat. In January 1934, Adjutant Pean returned to France, where he continued his efforts on behalf of the *liberes*, working with the government on penal reform and supervising the repatriation of prisoners.

In February 1936, the mail boat arrived with the first group of repatriated men. Once begun, the work picked up speed, and each month a party returned from France, sent off from French Guiana by Salvation Army officers and lovingly received by others at French ports.

At last, on 17 June 1938, came the announcement of the abolition of *La Bagne* (as the colony came to be called). No more were to be sent there, and eventually all prisoners were to be repatriated. All did not go smoothly, as the beginning of the war in 1939 caused suspension of transportation to France. French Guiana was placed under the Central America and West Indies Territory [of the Salvation Army], and Salvationists once again came to encourage and care for the remaining prisoners and other people in the area.

Repatriation renewed in 1946. In November, Adjutant and Mrs. Charles Palpant and Major and Mrs. Wally were tremendously encouraged when General Albert Orsborn landed at Cayenne *en route* for Brazil. The General was deeply moved when he saw the conditions under which the officers toiled there. In 1949, Adjutant and Mrs. Palpant spent an unforgettable Christmas at sea with a group of almost 100 men whom they were accompanying to France. One faithful employee remained until the final repatriation in 1952.

And now...In 1980, reports filtered to the headquarters in Jamaica of a revival work. A Haitian Salvationist, moving to Guiana to find work, had begun holding meetings. Territorial Commander Colonel Orval Taylor, with his wife, visited the Guiana and were met by jubilant Salvationists. On October 1, the newly opened work was recognized. A message from General Arnold Brown was read, saying in part, "May the Christlike service which marked the Army's presence in earlier years have a glad rebirth and all future achievements be to the glory of God."

Growth there is reminiscent of the Army's early days, with faithful soldiers who rely on the power of prayer, even for the material needs of the corps. The result is spiritual riches. Devil's Island is gone forever. The work in French Guiana is now synonymous with the "Isles of Salvation."

Source: <https://www.newfrontierchronicle.org/sa-opens-work-on-dreaded-devils-island/>

The last repatriated convicts left French Guiana on 1 August 1953. In total, more than 3,000 returnees left Guiana between 1946 and 1953 in groups of 200 to 300 on a ship chartered by the Salvation Army: <https://journals.openedition.org/criminocorpus/2727>

The website of the *Annuaire Électronique des Églises Évangéliques* / Electronic Directory of Evangelical Churches of France provides a list of the following denominations and independent churches (a total of 43 local congregations): <https://www.eglises.org/guyane/types/>

- *Alliance des Églises Chrétiennes Missionnaires* (AECM) / Christian & Missionary Alliance Churches - 3 churches
- *Assemblées de Dieu de la Guyane* (ADD-Gy) / Assemblies of God of Guyana– 5 churches
- *Communautés et Assemblées Évangéliques de France* (CAEF) / Evangelical Communities and Assemblies of France – 9 churches
- *Églises Indépendantes* / independent churches – 21 churches
  1. Église Évangélique Pentecôte Oui Seigneur, Route de Mana
  2. La Maison du Potier, Zone artisanale, Mana
  3. Merci Seigneur pour Ta Grâce, Chez Dawse, Croisée Mana Chez Dawse, Croisée Mana
  4. Église Évangélique Hmong, Saint-Laurent-du-Maroni
  5. Actes, rue des Chutes Voltaire, Paul Isnard
  6. Assemblée de Dieu Langue Portugaise, 7 rue des Orchidées, Cité Acacias
  7. Dieu Eben Ezer, Gaston Monnerville, Suite Malgaches
  8. Dieu Restaure, Sis quartier charbonnière
  9. Eau de Vie, 20 rue Comou, Sables blancs
  10. Église Biblique Baptiste, 14 lotissement de la pépinière
  11. La Lumiere, 21 allée des Goyaves
  12. La Puissance de Dieu, 260 chemin des Chutes Voltaire
  13. Les Combattants de la Foi, 17 allée des Roses
  14. Lumiere du Monde, 14 allée des Pompiers, Cité Maripa
  15. Mission du Reveil (International), 11b allée des Paganis, St Maurice 2
  16. Mission Grâce de la Guyane, 3289 Avenu Jean Galmot
  17. Mission Pentecôtiste de la Guyane, 171 rue Jean de la Fontaine
  18. Nouvelle Vie (Charbonnière), 1 bis rue Edgard Milien
  19. Nouvelle Vie (Sables Blancs), 3 rue Prolongées des Comous
  20. Parole Vivante, 550 avenue Gaston Monnerville
  21. Source de Vie, Avenue Gaston Monnerville, Suite Malgaches
- *Mission Chrétienne Évangélique de la Martinique* (MCEM) / Evangelical Christian Mission of Martinique – 3 churches
- *Union des Églises Protestantes du Nazaréen* (UEPN) / Union of Nazarene Protestant Churches – 1 church
- *Union des Églises Protestantes Foursquare France* (UEPFF) / French Foursquare Gospel Protestant Churches – 1 church

**In summary**, there are an estimated 80 local Protestant churches in French Guiana, compared to 26 parishes of the Roman Catholic Church. The Protestant denominations with the largest number of local congregations are the Christian Brethren (22 assemblies some of which are “house churches”), the Seventh-Day Adventist Church (11 churches), Evangelical Communities and

Assemblies of France (9 churches), Assemblies of God (5 churches), Evangelical Churches of the West Indies (5 churches), and the Southern Baptists (5 churches). These six denominations have a total of about 57 local churches, which is about 71 percent of the total number of Protestant congregations in the country, which include several Hmong-speaking congregations and at least one Portuguese-speaking Baptist congregation.

The various **Pentecostal denominations** in French Guiana include the Assemblies of God, the Church of God of Prophecy, and the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel from the USA; the Gospel Crusade from Haiti, the “Streams of Power” / *Stromen van kracht* from The Netherlands, and several independent Pentecostal churches.

## Other Religions

**Marginal Christian groups include:** the **Jehovah’s Witnesses** (Watch Tower Bible & Tract Society, founded in the USA in 1872), which arrived in French Guiana in 1945 and reported 34 churches with 1,950 members in 2008; and the **Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons)**, founded in the USA in 1832) arrived in 1981, now with two congregations and 316 members.

According to according to the Pew-Templeton Global Religious Futures Project, religious affiliation in 2010 was 3.1 percent “other religions,” including 1.6 percent Hindu and 0.9 percent Muslim. Also, there were a small number of Jewish families.

**Jewish settlers and Judaism.** First settled by the French between 1624 and 1643, the colony of French Guiana was captured several years later by Dutch authorities. Jews arrived in French Guiana by way of the *Dutch West India Company* (DWIC). The Dutch relied on the Jewish settlers to carry out their plans and settle the newly claimed colony. Their objective was to attract Jewish farmers and merchants experienced in managing tropical products. On 12 September 1659, a group of Portuguese Jews first arrived in French Guiana from Brazil. The DWIC appointed David Nassy, a Brazilian refugee, patron of an exclusive Jewish settlement on the eastside of the town of Cayenne, an area called Remire or Irmire.

During 1658 and 1659, Paulo Jacomo Pinto began negotiating with the Dutch authorities in Amsterdam to allow a group of Jews from Leghorn, Italy, to settle in the Americas. On 20 July 1660, more than 150 *Sephardic Jews* left Leghorn and settled in Cayenne. The Jewish settlers negotiated with the Dutch authorities a grant of liberties and exemptions from laws placed on other colonizers. The Jews established sugarcane plantations, a sugarcane mill, and indigo dye workshops. The Jews also improved relations with the local natives and utilized their knowledge of the country. The Jewish community isolated itself from other inhabitants of the island by constructing a protective fort. The community developed an organized communal life with its own rules based around Jewish tradition. By the early 1660s, the Jewish population in Cayenne had grown to approximately 450 people.

On 26 February 1664, a French fleet of five vessels and 1,200 settlers arrived in Cayenne. The Dutch Jews surrendered without a fight, *so long as they could continue to freely practice Judaism*. The French agreed to those terms, an exceptional policy that was not common among the French

colonies. Nevertheless, nearly two-thirds of the population left for the English colony of Suriname. Over the decades, the Leghorn Jews of Cayenne immigrated to Suriname. In 1667, the remaining Jewish community was captured by the occupying British forces and moved the population to either Suriname or Barbados to work in sugarcane production.

Since the late 1600s, few Jews have lived in French Guiana. In 1992, 20 Jewish families from Suriname and North Africa attempted to re-establish the community in Cayenne. A Chabad organization exists in the country and maintains Jewish life within the community. Now, about 80 Jews live in French Guiana, predominately in Cayenne.

Adapted from: <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/french-guiana-virtual-jewish-history-tour>

**African and Asian-origin religions.** Through the centuries, numerous people have moved into French Guiana from other lands, especially the West Indies, Haiti, Brazil and Suriname. There is also a measurable community of Asians, mostly of Chinese, Asian Indian and Hmong from Laos. The massive movement of immigrants into French Guiana has led to the establishment of a variety of different religions, including the beliefs and practices of **Myal-Obeah** among the Creoles from the British West Antilles, the **Vodou** among Creoles from Haiti, **Afro-Brazilian groups** that practice “spirit possession” (spiritism), **Buddhism** among the Chinese and “traditional animistic religions” among the Chinese and Hmong, and **Hinduism** and **Sikhism** among the Asian Indians. Also, there are about 2,000 **Muslims** (0.9 percent of the population), mostly of Javanese or Syrian-Lebanese extraction, and a small community of the **Baha’i Faith**.

**Folk Religions.** In 2010, according to the “Pew-Templeton Global Religious Futures Project,” 9.1 percent of the population were practitioners of “folk religions” (animistic beliefs and practices among the Amerindians, Creoles, Maroons, and Hmong).

**Amerindian religions** (animist) are present in the interior among the various tribal groups: the Kali’na Tîleuyu (carib), Pahikweneh, Wayãpi, Wayana (carib), Teko (Emerillon), and Lokono (Arawak). In many **animistic worldviews** found in hunter-gatherer cultures, such as the Amerindians of French Guiana who dwell in remote areas of the interior, the human being is often regarded as on a roughly equal footing with other animals, plants, and natural forces. Therefore, it is morally imperative to treat these agents with respect. In this worldview, humans are considered a part of nature, rather than superior to, or separate from it. In such societies, ritual is considered essential for survival, as it wins the favor of the spirits of one’s source of food, shelter and fertility, and wards off malevolent spirits. *Curanderos* use herbal medicine to cure physical, mental and spiritual ailments, while the *shamans* use occult practices to manipulate the spirit world for good or evil purposes.

**Animism** (from Latin *anima* "soul, life") is a philosophical, religious or spiritual idea that souls or spirits exist not only in humans but also in animals, plants, rocks, natural phenomena such as thunder, geographic features such as mountains or rivers, or other entities of the natural environment. See: <https://www.anthroencyclopedia.com/entry/animism>

**Curanderismo.** During the long and complex process of the construction of modern society, indigenous, mestizo and Afro-descendant populations have built the most diverse rural and urban settlements and towns, and have historically given rise to curative and preventive practices, to treatments and medications as a result of their relationship with the ecosystems of their respective

territories in response to diseases, epidemics and, in general, to pathologies that in the medium and long duration have arisen in their territories.

The *curandero* is the traditional healer who uses natural elements to heal both by the physical and the spiritual means. His or her functions range from providing healing to mental, emotional, physical and spiritual illnesses through herbal treatments and massages, to purifying the spirit and healing magical ills with the help of disembodied spirits or deities, according to anthropologists. See: [http://www.scielo.org.mx/scielo.php?script=sci\\_arttext&pid=S0185-33252012000200005](http://www.scielo.org.mx/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S0185-33252012000200005)

**Shamanism** is an anthropological term referencing a range of beliefs and practices regarding communication with the spiritual world in indigenous societies. The shaman, a religious specialist who enters into states of ecstasy, holds a prominent place in society. A shaman, it is believed, learns to control the passage of the soul out of and back into the body. According to tradition, the shaman not only controls the ecstasy of his or her own soul but also is devoted to the knowledge and care of the souls of others.

See: <https://sites.google.com/site/shamangroups/shamanism/> / <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Native-American-religion/Forms-of-religious-authority>

**West Indian Creole religions:** among French Guianese Creoles (36 percent of the population), Haitian Creoles (26 percent) and British Guyanese (1.7 percent), in French Guiana in 2017.

**Many French Guianese Creoles and British Guyanese Creoles in French Guiana practice Myal-Obeah**, an animistic system of spiritual healing and justice-making practices developed among enslaved West Africans in the British West Indies during the XIII and early XIX centuries. **Obeah** is similar to other African diaspora religions such as Palo Monte (also known as *Las Reglas de Congo* in Cuba), Haitian Vodou, and Santería (in Cuba and Puerto Rico) in that it includes communication with ancestors and spirits in healing rituals. *Obeah is a body of mystical practices, popularly known as magic; it is synonymous with black magic, sorcery and witchcraft.* Nevertheless, it differs from religions like Vodou and Santería in that there is no explicit canon of gods or deities that are worshipped, and the practice is generally an individual action rather than part of a collective ceremony or offering, such as among **Myal** practitioners (Glazier 2001:165-166, 216-217).

According to some early colonial accounts, *Obeah differed from Myal in that Obeah* was viewed as nefarious (“black magic”) while Myal was a more positive influence (“white magic”). **Myal** is folk religion focused on the power of ancestors, typically involving drumming, dancing, spirit possession, ritual sacrifice, and herbalism. Unlike Obeah, its practices focus more on the connection of spirits with humans. Over time, Myal began to meld with Christian practices and created the religious tradition known as *Revivalism* in Jamaica. Today, the term “myal” is commonly used to describe the state of “spirit possession” in the religion’s ritualistic practices.

**Myal** is an African-derived religion that evolved in Jamaica among West African slaves. Myal is a form of divination and a ritual dance by which spirit mediums drew on the power of ancestors to heal and to alleviate misfortune ascribed to the jealousy, greed, and enmity of others. **Obeah**, another type of divination, inspired terror during periods of insecurity when people believed that evil Obeah-men endangered them. To counteract the danger, they called on Myal mediums to exorcize the magic spells and evil spirits.

See: <https://www.encyclopedia.com/history/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/myal>

Some of the French Guianese Creoles, influenced by Haitian Creole immigrants, practice the rituals of **Vodou**, an African diasporic religion that developed in Haiti among descendants of Dahomean, Kongo, Yoruba, and other African ethnic groups between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. It arose through a process of syncretism between the traditional religions of West Africa and Roman Catholicism. Adherents are known as *Vodouists* or "servants of the spirits." The word *Vodou* means "spirit" or "deity" in the Fon language of the African kingdom of Dahomey (now known as Benin).

**Vodou** is a worldview that encompasses philosophy, medicine, justice, and religion. Its fundamental principle is that everything is spirit. Humans are spirits who inhabit the visible world. The unseen world is populated by *lwa* (spirits), *mystè* (mysteries), *anvizib* (the invisibles), *zanj* (angels) and the spirits of ancestors and the recently deceased. All these spirits are believed to live in a mythic land called *Ginen*, a cosmic "Africa." The God of the Christian Bible is understood to be the creator of both the universe and the spirits; the spirits were made by God to help him govern humanity and the natural world (Glazier 2001-361-368).

The primary goal and activity of Vodou is to *sevi lwa* ("serve the spirits")—to offer prayers and perform various devotional rites directed at God and particular spirits in return for health, protection, and favour. *Spirit possession* plays an important role in Afro-Haitian religion, as it does in many other world religions. During religious rites, believers sometimes enter a trancelike state in which the devotee may eat and drink, perform stylized dances, give supernaturally inspired advice to people, or perform medical cures or special physical feats; these acts exhibit the incarnate presence of the *lwa* within the entranced devotee. Vodou ritual activity (e.g., prayer, song, dance, and gesture) is aimed at refining and restoring balance and energy in relationships between people and between people and the spirits of the unseen world.

Source: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Vodou>

For more information about the Haitian immigration to French Guiana, see:

[https://www.persee.fr/doc/espos\\_0755-7809\\_1993\\_num\\_11\\_2\\_1604](https://www.persee.fr/doc/espos_0755-7809_1993_num_11_2_1604)

**Maroons.** Between the mid-17<sup>th</sup> and late 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, large numbers of African slaves escaped from coastal plantations in Suriname and French Guiana and fled into the remote interior. The **Maroon religion** exists among these former African slaves and their descendants (called "Bush Negroes" or *Bushinengues*) in the interior of French Guiana and Suriname (where maroons account for about 15 percent of the population). Many of the escaped slaves joined with indigenous peoples and created several independent tribes, among them the Saramaka, the Paramaka, the Ndyuka (Aukan), the Kwinti, the Aluku (Boni), and the Matawai. The Ndyuka were the first to sign a peace treaty that offered them territorial autonomy in 1760. In the 1770s, the Aluku also desired a peace treaty, however, the Society of Suriname started a war against them, which resulted in their flight into French Guiana. The other tribes signed peace treaties with the Surinamese government, the Kwinti being the last in 1887. On 25 May 1891, the Aluku officially became French citizens. Adapted from: <https://www.culturalsurvival.org/publications/cultural-survival-quarterly/maroons-under-assault-suriname-and-french-guiana>

In 1986, an anti-government rebellion of the Maroons began in the interior of Suriname, calling themselves the Jungle Commando and led by Ronnie Brunswijk (historical note: On 13 June 2020, Ronnie Brunswijk was elected Vice President of Suriname by acclamation in an uncontested election; he was inaugurated on 16 July as the first Maroon in Suriname to serve as Vice President).

The Surinamese government violently tried to suppress the insurgency by burning villages and killing or capturing rebels and their relatives. Maroon men and boys, often armed with shotguns, confronted the army's automatic weapons, tanks, and helicopter gunships dropping napalm. Whole villages, particularly in the Cottica Ndyuka region, were razed as soldiers killed scores of women and children with machetes and bullets. More than 10,000 Maroons fled to French Guiana and were recognized refugees. The number of illegal Maroon refugees in French Guiana is unknown.

Adapted from: <https://www.culturalsurvival.org/publications/cultural-survival-quarterly/maroons-under-assault-suriname-and-french-guiana>

In 2001, there were six politically distinct Maroon peoples in Suriname and French Guiana: the Ndyuka and Saramaka each have a population of about 49,000, the Matawai about 4,000, the Aluku (Boni) and Paramaka each have about 6000, and the Kwinti only about 500. Now, large numbers of Maroons live outside of their traditional tribal areas, mainly in the coastal towns of French Guiana. About 30 percent of all Maroons reside in French Guiana and the remainder in Suriname or elsewhere. Although the various Maroon societies were formed under broadly similar historical and ecological conditions, they vary in everything from language, diet, and dress to patterns of marriage, residence, and migratory wage labor. The greatest cultural differences are between the Maroons of central Suriname (Saramaka, Matawai, and Kwinti) and those of eastern Suriname and western French Guiana (Ndyuka, Aluku, and Paramaka). Languages divide similarly, with variants of Saramaccan spoken by Saramakas, Matawais, and Kwintis, and variants of Ndyuka spoken by Ndyukas, Alukus, and Paramakas.

In the 1960s, all six groups were still being referred to by anthropologists as "tribes," which functioned as "states within a state." Running their own political and judicial affairs under the authority of paramount chiefs and village captains, they were known to outsiders for such exotic practices as polygyny, oracular divination, spirit possession, body scarification, and ancestor worship, as well as distinctive styles of music, dance, and plastic arts, and countless other aspects of daily life that reflected their uncompromised heritage of independence and their radical difference from the other populations of Suriname and French Guiana. Maroons' dealings with the outside world were largely limited to the men's wage-labor trips, which provided the cash needed to buy soap, salt, tools, cloth, kerosene, kitchenware, and other necessities for life back in the villages of the rainforest. Maroons felt tremendous pride in the accomplishments of their heroic ancestors and, on the whole, remained masters of their forest realm.

Meanwhile, those Maroons who are officially French citizens by virtue of having been born east of the Maroni and Lawa Rivers, have been adapting to an aggressive program of *francisation*. This assimilationist program disseminates the language and culture of the French state, provides generous welfare benefits, redefines the nature of Maroon political leadership and land ownership, encourages consumerism both in the stores of French Guiana and through European mail order catalogues, and redefines Maroon visual and performative arts as part of the cultural patrimony of overseas France.

Source: <https://www.culturalsurvival.org/publications/cultural-survival-quarterly/maroons-under-assault-suriname-and-french-guiana>

The Maroons in Suriname and French Guiana in general are acquainted with a polytheistic and animistic form of worship. Polytheism coexists with monotheism. A portion of the Maroon societies adhere to Christian beliefs. The **Roman Catholic Church** and a number of Protestant churches, particularly the **Moravian Church**, have carried out missionary work among them. But, as already

mentioned, people believe in a variety of divinities. They believe in a Supreme God known as *Keeydi Amua Keeydi Anpon*, or *Gaan Gadu a Tapu*, meaning "the great God above." The deity named *Gaan Gadu* is believed to be the most powerful of all gods. *Gaan Gadu* rules the world by delegating tasks to his lower gods, who in turn exert influence on humankind. He does not use human beings as mediums through which to manifest himself directly; only the lower gods manifest themselves through mediums. (Source: Polimé, no date)

Also, in French Guiana, there may be some **African-derived religions from Brazil** that include, most prominently, Candomblé and Umbanda, as well as Xango, Batuque, Cantimbo, and Macumba:

- **Candomblé** is the Afro-Brazilian religious cult of Bahia state, with origins in Yoruban religious ritual and belief, created by African slaves and their descendants; the ceremonies honor the Yoruban orixás; and the temple or cult center where the ceremonies are held.
- **Umbanda** is a cult that emerged in Rio de Janeiro state in the 1930s and combines African spirit possession with Catholicism, occultism, and Allan Kardec spiritualism; it has many regional manifestations.

Source: <https://rlp.hds.harvard.edu/faq/african-derived-religions-brazil>

**Hmong refugees.** The Laotian Civil War was fought between the Communist Pathet Lao and the Royal Lao Government supported by USA-CIA forces between May 1959 and December 1975. Following the formal cessation of the CIA's "Secret War in Laos" in 1975, the Hmong diaspora, once exclusive to Asia (China, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Viet Nam), was extended to Australia, Europe (France and Germany), North America (Canada and the USA) and South America (Argentina and French Guiana). The resettlement of Hmong villagers from Laos to French Guiana began in 1977.

Within the Hmong refugee diaspora, the Hmong of French Guiana are fairly unique in that many have achieved economic autonomy through market farming while also residing in rural, ethnically homogeneous villages that help to preserve their cultural, religious and linguistic traditions. "Because of living in homogenous villages, a relatively high standard of living, and abundant food, and most importantly, the freedom to make their own decisions, most Hmong are content with the *status quo* ... because of this, there is little incentive for things to change." The Hmong comprises approximately 1.5 percent of the population of French Guiana but they supply the country with 60-90 percent of all fruits and vegetables. The Hmong in Laos traditionally are animists, but in French Guiana some have become Christians, either Roman Catholics or Protestants. In general, Hmong Catholics are more likely than Hmong Protestants to accommodate some forms of traditional animist practices within their new faith framework. Traditional animists may be more willing to attend Christian rituals than their Christian counterparts are willing to attend animist rituals. The *Hmong* language is a member of the *Miao-Yao (Hmong-Mien)* language family, which is considered unrelated to other languages.

Sources: <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/d14cc20c836c4c549c4c1a5759599f14/> / <http://hmongstudies.org/ClarkinHSJ6.pdf>

**The Hmong religion** is traditionally *animist* (animism is the belief in the spirit world and in the interconnectedness of all living things). At the center of Hmong culture is the Txiv Neeb, the

*shaman* (literally, "father/master of spirits"). According to Hmong cosmology, the human body is the host for a number of souls. The isolation and separation of one or more of these souls from the body can cause disease, depression and death. Curing rites are therefore referred to as "soul-calling rituals". Whether the soul became separated from the body because it was frightened away or kidnapped by an evil force, it must return in order to restore the integrity of life. A shaman is transported to another world via a "flying horse," a wooden bench usually no wider than the human body. The bench acts as a form of transportation to the other world. Buffalo horn tips are thrown to the ground to determine which way the soul has gone. The shaman wears a cloth mask while he or she is reaching a trance state. The mask not only blocks out the real world, so the shaman can concentrate, but also acts as a disguise from evil spirits in the spirit world. During episodes when shamans leap onto the flying horse bench, assistants will often help them to balance. It is believed that if a shaman falls down before his soul returns to his body, he or she will die.

Sources: <https://ethnomed.org/culture/hmong/> /

[https://www.pbs.org/splithorn/shamanism1.html#:~:text=The%20Hmong%20religion%20is%20traditionally,%2Fmaster%20of%20spirits%22\).](https://www.pbs.org/splithorn/shamanism1.html#:~:text=The%20Hmong%20religion%20is%20traditionally,%2Fmaster%20of%20spirits%22).)

Shamanism is a way to maintain communication with the spiritual world. Spirits of nature are believed to possibly cause physical and mental harm to Hmong in the disguise of illness, nightmares, and even death. To figure out the illness shamans perform rituals so they can find a proper treatment. "While there is no standardization in Hmong religious rituals and practices, Hmong rituals usually revolve around the practices that their ancestors passed onto them. Clan and lineage variations also are prevalent between and within individual clans as practices are traditional passed down from generation to generation through oral tradition." The Hmong also believe in an afterlife. With proper guidance from Hmong musical performers during the funeral rituals, the souls of the deceased will come back to their ancestors for reincarnation.

Source: <https://depts.washington.edu/triolive/quest/2007/TTQ07085/pages/religion.htm>

### **Ancient Wisdom Traditions**

**Freemasonry.** Three Lodges appear to have been constituted at Cayenne, the capital of the colony, which was scarcely anything more than a penal settlement of the French Government during the XVIII century. The first, L'Anglaise, was established in 1755 by the Mother Lodge of the same name—No. 30-1—at Bordeaux, France; the second, La Parfaite Union, in 1829, by the Grand Orient of France; and the third, La France Equinoxiale, in 1844, by the Supreme Council 33°. Source: Gould 1906:191.

French immigrants brought the esoteric **Rosicrucian movement** and founded the Pythagore Lodge in Cayenne, affiliated with the **Ancient and Mystical Order of the Rosae Crucis (AMORC)**, founded in the USA in 1915.

### **Psychic-Spiritualist (Spiritist)-New Age-Ufology Traditions**

**The Center Spirite Adriana Bron**, located in French Guiana, aims to develop the spiritual and moral elevation of man in society. Its main goal is that you can find the fundamental answers to inexplicable situations and know that there is connectivity and consistency between living things and the dead. Based on the foundations of *traditional Cuban spiritism*, the Center organizes meetings with clients led by the spiritist guide (medium), Adriana Bron from Cuba.

Source: <http://www.centrespirite.com/>

## Those with no religious affiliation

In 2010, 3.4 percent of the national population were not affiliated with any religious group.

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