

Warm welcome for Muslim visitors

WHEN it comes to taking an Asian break, Muslims from the Arabian Peninsula may be surprised to find how well they are catered for in Hong Kong.

The territory is home to around 80,000 Muslims, around half of whom are Chinese. As far back as 1922, a major body representing them in Hong Kong was established – the Chinese Muslim Cultural & Fraternal Association, based in the Wan Chai district, which manages and maintains six non profit making schools including a college, two primary schools and three kindergartens.

There are four mosques in Hong Kong which are used for daily prayers. The oldest, Jamia Masjid in Shelley Street, which was first built in 1849 and rebuilt in 1915, can hold 400 worshippers. In Wan Chai, the Osman Ramju Sadick Islamic Centre opened in 1981 and houses a masjid on two floors catering for 700 people.

The largest is in Nathan Road in Tsim Sha Tsui at the southern end of the Kowloon peninsula. Opened in 1984 (replacing the original built in 1896) it can hold 2,000 worshippers and offers three prayer halls, a community hall, a medical clinic and a library.

The fourth masjid can be found in one of Hong Kong's two Muslim cemeteries – at Cape Collinson in Wan Chai – the other being at Happy Valley.



The co-ordinating body for Islamic religious affairs is the Incorporated Trustees of the Islamic Community Fund of Hong Kong. A board of trustees is responsible for organising the celebration of Muslim festivals and other religious events.

Halal restaurants can be found across Hong Kong, with some major hotels also importing Muslim chefs during Ramadan to cater specifically for their Middle Eastern clientele. Details of 12 of the most popular halal eateries can be picked up from information outlets of the Hong Kong Tourism Board.

A number of hotels also routinely cater for Muslim guests with the likes of the Island Shangri-La displaying the Kibla in each of its rooms, and leaving copies of the Holy Qu'ran and prayer mats in rooms booked by visitors originating from the Middle East.

Around one per cent of the Island Shangri-La's visitors are from GCC countries, the most famous of whom was King Abdullah ibn Abdulaziz of Saudi Arabia who, two years ago, stayed there for three days with a retinue of 300 people, taking up a half of the available floors. ■