

INTRODUCTION

In 1860 indentured labourers from India were introduced to the British colony of Natal to work in the sugarcane industry. They were followed by waves of immigrants from the subcontinent, eventually forming the largest Indian community outside of India. Today Durban is heir to a rich legacy of Indian culture, including more than 40 Hindu temples.

hindu temples in durban

HINDUISM

Hinduism was born thousands of years ago along the banks of India’s Indus River. Also known as ‘the eternal religion’, it comprises a blend of various intellectual and philosophical perspectives, rather than a common set of rigid beliefs. It is the world’s third largest religion and also the oldest living religion.

The theology consists largely of interwoven layers of ideas originating from the indigenous Dravidians and subsequent Aryan invaders who came from over the Himalayas. This dual cultural origin has resulted in two distinct styles of Hindu temples, both of which are represented in this brochure. Within these two styles, a large degree of variation is evident.

Due to the wide variety of Hindu traditions, tolerance towards different systems of belief and practice are notable features of Hinduism, a fact which is reflected in the diversity of temple designs.

CATO MANOR AREA	
1. UMBILO SHREE AMBALWANAR ALAYAM TEMPLE 820 Bellair Rd, Durban. 1947.	
2. GENGAIMMAN SHRINE 21 Nigella Rd, Berea. 1909.	
3. CATO MANOR HINDU TEMPLE 762 Bellair Rd, Durban. SP Chetty, 1918-32.	
4. SHREE POONGAVANA AMMAN TEMPLE 446 Vusi Mzimela Rd, Durban. 1900.	NORTHERN DURBAN AREA
5. GANESA TEMPLE & SHIVA TEMPLE (WAYSIDE SHRINE) 119 Marshall Dr, Mount Edgecombe. Kristappa Reddy, 1898.	
6. JUGGERNATH PURI TEMPLE 12 Catherine St, Tongaat. 1901.	
7. TINLEY MANOR SHIVA TEMPLE Tinley Manor Rd. 1913.	

cato manor area

1. UMBILO SHREE AMBALVANAR ALAYAM TEMPLE (ALSO KNOWN AS SECOND RIVER TEMPLE)

This major temple was built in 1947 to replace the original structure which had been destroyed by flooding. It is elevated above the Umbilo River and overlooks a fire-walking pit located on the same site. The deities were crafted by sculptors from India and are truly magnificent, although recent renovations detract from their original splendour. The impression of horizontal stratification, required for South Indian temples, was achieved by using two different tones of face brick. The temple usually has a priest in attendance who is very willing to assist visitors.



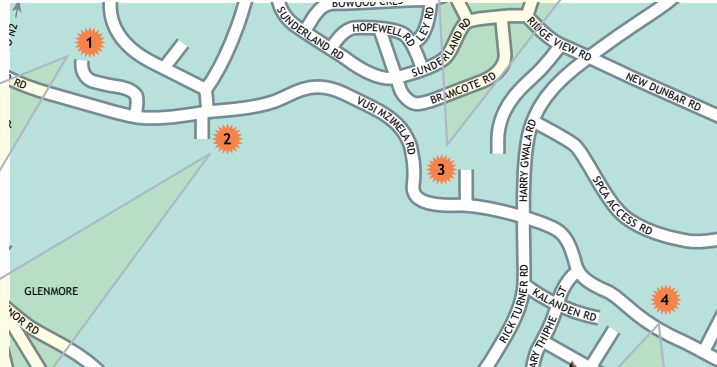
2. GENGAIMMAN TEMPLE

Built in 1909, this small wood-and-iron shrine is symbolically dwarfed by huge ficus trees, including a ficus religiosa that is bound with string for ritual circumambulation, the practice of moving around a sacred object. Circumambulation is common to many religions, although the use of string is more specific to Hinduism. Gengaimman is a river goddess, and you’ll notice that the Temple Group at Cato Manor also has a Gengaimman temple. Both temples are located along the course of the Umkumbaan River. The temple was built over a sacred anthill which still forms the major focus of the temple and is clothed, washed and worshipped as a natural manifestation of Shiva.



3. CATO MANOR HINDU TEMPLE GROUP

This group of temples was first constructed in 1918 and is still actively attended by devotees. The original wood-and-iron Gengaimman temple was built among mango trees, and has since been walled off from the adjacent Umkumbaan River. Note how the use of industrial materials illustrates the scope for versatility in interpreting Hindu architecture. The main temple, which is painted white, was built in 1932 by SP Chetty, its three towers skilfully sculpted in low relief in order to integrate the deities into the structure. The design is enhanced by the use of contrasting plain surfaces and reflected light.

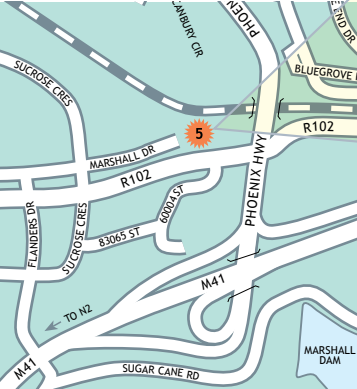


4. SHREE POONGAVANA AMMAN TEMPLE

Built in 1900, this is the oldest temple in Cato Manor. While the richly embellished building has retained its original form, it has unfortunately been neglected. Dedicated to the warlike god Durga, the temple has a barrel-vaulted interior and a profusely decorated tower adorned with primitive sculptures. It is privately owned.



northern durban area



5. GANESA TEMPLE AND SHIVA TEMPLE (WAYSIDE SHRINE)

Believed to be the oldest surviving ‘solid’ temple in Africa and one of the finest examples of temple architecture in South Africa, the Ganesa Temple was built in 1898 by indentured bricklayer and temple architect Kristappa Reddy. Situated on the road to KwaZulu-Natal’s wild North Coast, the temple is a classical arrangement enclosed within a walled courtyard, with Nandi the bull guarding its corners. The temple has an axial entrance through a low gopirum (entrance tower) which leads past a kodi pole (an external altar and flagpole) to the central cella, the domed structure which houses the elephant-like deity Ganesh.



THE SHIVA TEMPLE was built in 1912 by master temple builder Kothanar Ramsamy Pillay. Crowned by a deeply modulated barrel vault, the temple’s design shows a strong appreciation of architectural elements, although these are now diffused by arbitrary use of colour. The recent addition of the hall has been insensitively executed, with little integration of the deities into its structure.



6. JUGGERNATH PURI TEMPLE

This temple, together with its surrounding mango trees, originally lay behind a moat, forming a circular walkway around the tower in order to facilitate the ritual practice of circumambulation. (The nearby Vishnu and Shiva temples have verandas to serve the same purpose.) Visible from the main road in Tongaat, the temple’s 23-metre-high tower is crowned by primitive sculptures of Vishnu. The North Indian vertical cella (shrine) was built in 1901 with local shale by Pundit Shree Maharaj. The temple is still owned by the Maharaj family but has unfortunately been modernised, despite its status as a National Monument. Nonetheless, its dimly lit interior offers a unique experience. Look out for the grotesque and warlike deity Juggernathi, who gives the site its name.



7. TINLEY MANOR SHIVA TEMPLE

This vibrant example of community-built architecture dates back to 1913 and is home to more than 150 loosely interpreted and idiosyncratically rendered

sculptures of deities, all produced under the leadership of local sculptor Ellapa Govender, who also helped to design and build the temple. The entire community contributed to making the bricks and mixing and casting the concrete. The sense of love and devotion embedded into the site is still clearly evident today. The site is one of the finest examples of folk architecture in South Africa.

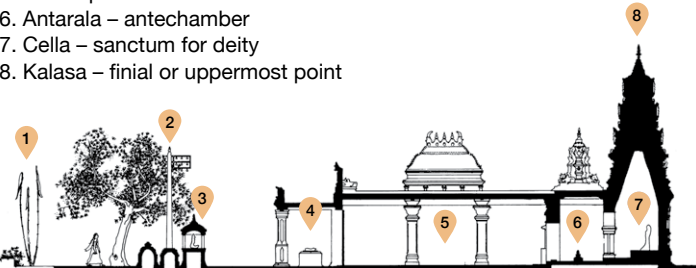
THE NORTH INDIAN STYLE was influenced by the Buddhist need to walk around the circumference of the temple in ritual meditation, and always includes a central tower and some form of encircling ambulatory or walkway. Both North and South Indian styles are represented in this brochure.

- Details of a North Indian temple**
(This example is the Shree Gopala Temple in Verulam)
1. Ambulatory – walkway which encircles the temple
 2. Cella – sanctum for deity
 3. Kalasa – finial or uppermost point



THE SOUTH INDIAN STYLE includes a horizontal layout, loosely representing the Ganges flood plain, with an elevated square shrine (or cella) symbolising the Himalayas, where the deity is housed in a cave.

- Details of a South Indian temple**
(This example is the Emperumal Temple in Canelands)
1. Prayer flags – to announce devotion
 2. Kodi pole – external altar and flagpole, symbolising the three natural elements
 3. Consort – for the main deity after whom the temple is named.
 4. Veranda – covered entrance
 5. Mandapa – enclosed hall for visitors
 6. Antarala – antechamber
 7. Cella – sanctum for deity
 8. Kalasa – finial or uppermost point



SYMBOLS IN HINDUISM
Although there is one Absolute God in Hinduism, the theology has evolved a hierarchy of consorts and vehicles through which the supreme being communicates. These deities are in turn accompanied by a variety of symbols.

Every element of a Hindu temple is symbolic. Fire is the carrier of all sacrifices. The bell represents divine awakening. The conch shell, creation. The beads, a spiritual journey. The nail shoes, penitence. The lion symbolises power. The bull, strength and tenderness, and so on.

A Shiva temple is denoted by Nandi, the bull on whose back Shiva rides, while the presence of the eagle-like Garuda denotes a Vishnu Temple. As well as Shiva and Vishnu temples, there are many other kinds of Hindu temples, each corresponding to a particular deity.



THE SCULPTURES
The sculptures on these sites are made from a steel-and-wire armature with a cement-rich finish. While strict rules are traditionally applied in their construction, these rules have become more loosely interpreted over time, as can be seen in the different versions of the eagle-like Garuda in the Second River and Tinley Manor temple sites. The relationship between the architecture and the sculptures also varies. The Cato Manor Hindu Temple, for example, perfectly integrates the sculptures into the plasterwork, while in Tinley Manor Temple the deities are like toys sitting on a shelf.



THE MULTICULTURAL CITY OF DURBAN IS HOME TO A LARGE INDIAN COMMUNITY AND MORE THAN 40 HINDU TEMPLES, WHOSE DETAILED STRUCTURES ADD A UNIQUE CHARACTER AND INFLUENCE TO THE CITY'S DIVERSE ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE

hindu temples



Emperumal Temple, Canelands



PEACE AND RESPECT All are welcome in Hindu temples, but please dress modestly and remove your shoes before entering. Certain areas, such as the cella, are out of bounds for non-believers, and other areas are the exclusive domain of priests or temple staff. Tread with care, and ask if you're unsure.

FIND OUT MORE Traditional Hindu Temples in South Africa. Paul Mikula, Brian Kearney, Rodney Harber. Hindu Temples Publications, 1982.
Or go to: <http://bit.ly/dbn-ht>

Brochure Produced by the City Architecture
Department eThekweni Municipality
166 KE Masinga Road, Durban 4001
Tel: 031 311 7098

Photography: Angela Buckland
Research and Illustration: Rodney Harber
Editing: Peter Machen & Siobhan Gunning
Design and Art Direction: THB Disturbance