

## [IRAIVAN TEMPLE](#)

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ISLAND TEMPLE SPECIAL

## IRAIVAN TEMPLE

One God. One World. One Gorgeous Island

Join us as Hinduism Today explores the fascinating processes and the talented people who are constructing an ancient temple in a modern age - an historic project, breathtaking in scope and vision, spanning generations, cultures and nations.

With little fanfare, the first hand-carved, all-stone Hindu temple ever erected in the Western Hemisphere is slowly taking shape on a Hawaiian island in the mid-Pacific Ocean. It began, as Hindu temples traditionally do, with a vision. Early morning on February 15, 1975, Lord Siva appeared in an ethereal vision to Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami (Gurudeva) at his ashram on the island of Kauai. Gurudeva resolved to permanently capture the immense spiritual power of that vision. Thus was born the Iraivan Temple, its riverside site already sacred to the ancient Hawaiian people. Iraivan, "He who is worshiped," is one of the oldest words for God in the ancient Tamil language. From the beginning, the temple, located at the foot of an extinct volcano on the northernmost of the Hawaiian Islands, was conceived to be as rare as the vision that birthed it. Already the Americas had Hindu temples, but this was destined to be unique, a hand-carved white-granite edifice to be brought stone by stone from India, to reflect the ultimate in craftsmanship and design and to be

surrounded with as beautiful a setting as the paradise island could allow. He directed that all aspects of the construction were to be engineered to last more than one thousand years--an ambitious goal by Western standards, though many temples of such age and older exist in India today.

Nearly every recent temple--and thousands have resulted from the last few decades' explosion of Hindu devotion--has adapted modern methods of brick and concrete, steel and wood to the ancient designs. Cost and the time required to build were thus reduced, but at the expense of longevity and beauty, for plaster--no matter how skillfully applied--never equals the power or permanence of stone. In August, 1987, Subramuniaswami acquired a giant quartz crystal--a sphatika Sivalingam--to enshrine in the Chola-style temple. At 700-plus pounds and 39 inches tall, it is the largest six-sided, single-pointed crystal ever found. Natural stones are used in Siva temples to "mark" the presence of God beyond all forms and qualities. Scriptures decree that, of all possible kinds of stone, crystal makes the supreme Sivalingam. The temple's Tamil architect, who visits the island site regularly, believes the crystal Lingam to be the greatest wonderment of this temple--"If all the crystal lingams in India were put together into one, they would still not equal the power of this one crystal."

Master builder: Architect Thiru V. Ganapati Sthapati, former principal of the Government College of Architecture in Tamil Nadu, arguably India's greatest living builder, was hired. Gurudeva decided to have the stones carved, all 3.2 million pounds, in Bangalore. He directed builders to follow and preserve the old methods, shaping the stone with simple

chisels and hammers, and not to use any modern rock-cutting equipment. Even the quarrying was to be done by hand, for the architect explained that rock blasted out with dynamite is subtly shattered and loses the pure "tone" of hand-quarried stone. To him, rock is a living element, not inert, and the sound of the granite, which he terms "its song," is a key part of the spiritual integrity of the temple.

Help from India: Two eminent swamis with hundreds of thousands of followers--Sri Sri Sri Sivaratnapuri Mahaswamigal (popularly known as Tiruchi Swami) and Sri Sri Sri Balagangadharanathaswami--came forward to assist with the project, and in 1990 provided eleven acres of land outside Bangalore [see page 17]. There, a village was built, and 75 silpis, traditional stone carvers, were hired, and their families moved to the San Marga Iraivan Temple carving site, the only facility in the nation with Internet access and a retirement program.

Financial strategy: By the late 1980s, the extraordinary 51-acre temple lands on Kauai were paid off and sufficient money raised to begin construction. From the beginning it has been a "pay as you go" project. Gurudeva's edict is as simple as it is unusual: build this temple with no loans and no debts.

It was Gurudeva's intention from the beginning to not only construct this unique temple, but to simultaneously endow it. Thus, of the <sup>us</sup>\$16-million-dollar fundraising goal, approximately half is for building the temple and related facilities, landscaping, etc., and half provides a yearly income to maintain and improve the temple regardless of future

economic conditions. So far, \$2 million has been contributed by devotees in 45 countries. When asked when the temple will be completed, the monks reply, "Progress depends on contributions. There is no completion deadline. Realistically, the temple will take another decade, and only when the full \$16 million is raised will our San Marga Iraivan Temple be formally dedicated." The building of Iraivan is equal to its completion.

Why on a remote island? "Why not build this beautiful and not inexpensive edifice in a more convenient location--say Sacramento, California," one critic asked, "rather than in the middle of nowhere?" The monks explain: because that is where the vision took place. There are many pilgrimage destinations in remote places. For example, millions trek each year to the Ayyappan shrine at Sabarimala, hidden in a South Indian jungle. On the mystical side, Gurudeva explains, pilgrimage is not supposed to be easy--witness the dangers faced by hundreds of thousands of Hindus who trek annually into the desolate Himalayan mountains, facing blizzards and fearing landslides. While the greatest hazard of pilgrimage to idyllic Kauai is a serious sunburn on the beach or getting wet in the rain, the oceanic remoteness does require serious commitment

from those pursuing real spiritual progress. The public reaction from Hindus and non-Hindus alike is enthusiastic--local Kauaians are delighted to have such a masterpiece on their island, which takes pride in its cultural diversity, especially one that is close to the island's ancient Hawaiian and contemporary Buddhist religious heritage [see page 34].

What's next? Carving is 65% complete and waiting for shipment. The temple's foundation--a monolithic three-foot-thick concrete slab measuring 68 by 168 feet--is planned to be poured by July, 1999. Soon after it is in place, assembly of the temple may begin. This will be the festival of festivals for thousands of devoted temple builders who have worked so hard in so many ways.