

Europe's biggest Buddhist temple to open outside Paris



The new temple in Bussy Saint Georges, near Disneyland Paris
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By **Angela Diffley**, 27 May 2012 <http://www.english.rfi.fr/visiting-france/20120521-europes-biggest-buddhist-temple-open-outside-paris>

With a month to go until its official opening on 22 June, workers are adding the finishing touches to the biggest Buddhist Temple in Europe, situated in a special eco-friendly zone, just outside Paris.

A church, a synagogue, and a mosque in the same environmentally-friendly complex, will eventually complete this special ecumenical venture.

The huge 8000m² construction in Bussy-Saint-Georges is built mostly in glass, wood, and unrefined concrete dotted with roof gardens. It is set amid extensive grounds filled with fruit trees.

The structure houses both a place of worship and a Buddhist cultural centre, and was designed by the Frédéric Rolland firm of architects.

An area open to the general public will include a vegetarian restaurant, and space for regular calligraphy workshops, meditation sessions and activities such as oriental tea-tasting.

There will also be four large prayer rooms with the capacity to hold a thousand worshippers, and two long cloisters leading to about forty bedrooms which can be occupied during spiritual retreats.

The building is fairly neutral in its style, with no pagoda-style architecture, and little decoration, but in the main area sits a huge Buddha, 5 metres tall, weighing 8 tonnes and made from white jade.

“The statue was hewn directly into a mountain in Burma [Myanmar] and then transported to the port of Marseilles, which at the time was on strike,” recalls architect Polly Rolland. “We had to organise a special convoy, and arrange cranes to position the Buddha inside the temple, before finishing the roof, because the statue wouldn’t fit through the doors.

Eighty per cent of the 16-million-euro project was financed by Fo Guang Shan, a Taiwanese monastic order, and the remaining funding came from donors.

Polly Rolland describes the centre as “more cultural than religious”, and notes that “usually there are always arguments on a site, but this time, everything was managed in a spirit of total zen”.