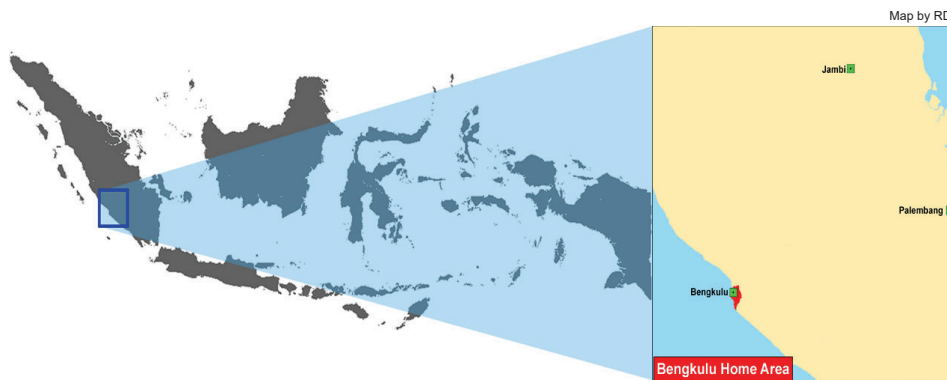


BENGKULU



Photo by TK



Demography	Bengkulu Language	Status
Location: Bengkulu Population: 66.000 Major Religion: Islam	Bible: No Jesus Film: No Online Media: No	Believers: < 25 (832) Engaged: Yes Indigenous Church: 0

Identity and Location

The Bengkulu are descended from a mixture of multiple ethnic groups who have migrated to the area, including the Malay, Minangkabau, Aceh, Bugis, Banten, and Jawa. The Bengkulu language is part of the Malay language cluster. Nowadays, many people from other ethnic groups live among the Bengkulu. The Bengkulu people live in the city of Bengkulu, the capital of the province of Bengkulu in the southwestern portion of the island of Sumatra. More Bengkulu live in the city than in the villages. Historically, the Bengkulu people called themselves *Bangkahulu* (Bengkulu), as that name testifies to a great military victory in which their ancestors successfully expelled a superior military force of Acehnese invaders.

Society and Culture

Bengkulu people most commonly earn their living as fishermen. Others work as store clerks, ship builders, mechanics, construction contractors, and government workers. There are now fewer Bengkulu people than immigrants living in the city of Bengkulu. It is actually hard to meet a Bengkulu person in the city of Bengkulu.

Male relatives are called meghanai and female relatives are called kelewai.

Family members are responsible for each other's activities, which makes them *sepanka* (bound together). During the time of colonization, the Bengkulu were known as people having a harsh character. This is very different from most other Malay groups, who normally have a softer nature. Those who move from other areas have a difficult time living among the Bengkulu because they have to defeat 3 or 4 original Bengkulu people before they can be accepted in the Bengkulu area. At present, many people from other ethnic groups live among the Bengkulu, such as Minangkabau, Rejang, Serawai, Bugis, and Jawa.

In the city of Bengkulu, there are very few Bengkulu people, compared with the number from other groups, of which there are far more. It can be said that it's very difficult to find Bengkulu people in their own home area, the city of Bengkulu. An influential group among the Bengkulu is called the *menengkalak* which is made up of the clan's intellectuals, wealthy, and high ranking government officials. If there is conflict, they try to resolve it by seeking consensus through discussion. In general, the Bengkulu live in wooden homes, raised on stilts and painted and decorated with special Bengkulu motifs. The staircase is in the front of the house and the vacant space under the house is usually enclosed. Their arts are very similar to those found in other Malay groups. For instance, the Bengkulu Malay sing and perform the *randai* dance, the umbrella dance, the candle dance, the plate dance, and the handkerchief dance.

Beliefs

The majority of the Bengkulu are Muslim. However, they still hold certain traditional ceremonies and rituals according to their older animistic beliefs. These animistic ceremonies are focused on seeking protection from spirits by defeating them and driving them out, both good and evil spirits. They hold a ceremony at harvest time called *Tabot*, held from the first to tenth day of the first month of the Muslim calendar called *Muharam*. This festival is held to pay respect to the Sea Dragon so that the fisherman will not suffer misfortune while at sea.

Needs

Although the Bengkulu people's economy is better than that of other Sumatran groups, they need better technology and increased investment to better manage their fishing and boat making. They also need better knowledge on how to better build and maintain their homes so that they can endure the harsh coastal storms. (E-RD)