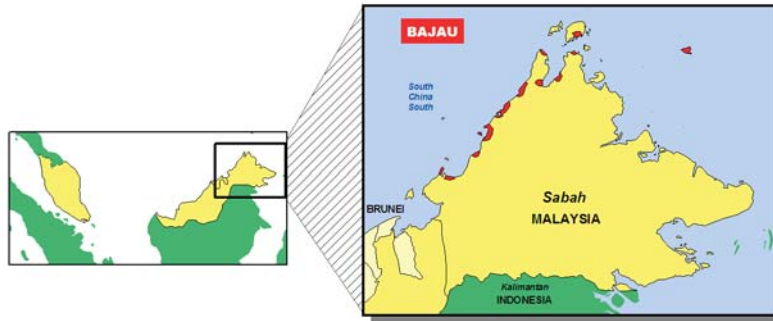


BAJAU



Population	Major Religion	Language
80,000	Islam	Borneo Coast Bajau

Who are the Bajau?

The Bajau peoples are classified by the government as Bajau, which is a group of predominantly Muslim people living along the west coast of Sabah. The Bajau subgroup includes the West Coast Bajau, and the Bajau Bukit (Papar).

The language of the Bajau comprises a chain of mutually intelligible dialects which has been influenced by the Malay language. It is sometimes referred to as Borneo Coast Bajau. This language is mutually unintelligible with the Sama (East Coast Bajau) languages spoken on Sabah's east coast and in the region of the Sulu Sea.

The origin of the Bajau peoples is not certain, however, there is a documented report of their presence in the Kota Belud district in the 1850s and 1860s. Today their settlements spread along Sabah's coastal regions from Kuala Penyu of the Kuala Penyu district in the southwest to Terusan of the Beluran district in the northeast. The Tempasuk plain in Kota Belud, where the largest group of Bajau live, is their cultural heartland.

What are their lives like?

The Bajau were once sea-nomads dwelling in boats, harvesting fish and other marine resources. These days, they have increasingly become land-dwellers and have become proficient in wet rice cultivation and livestock rearing. Some have developed into excellent horsemen. They grow small crops for personal consumption or for supplemental income as well as for engaging in trade. Businesses are growing in number but tend to be small and mostly related to food selling.

Increased opportunity for and appreciation of education has helped some Bajau to secure positions in a variety of wage-earning jobs. Improved

transportation has enabled many of them to work in other parts of Sabah and Peninsular Malaysia. Work opportunities are scarce for those remaining in the villages.

What do they believe?

The Bajau practice Islam and their religious holidays are directly tied to the Islamic calendar. For instance, they observe the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, during which time Muslims fast from dawn until dusk. Many Bajau have merged Islamic practices with their own local traditions, such as the reading of Arabic prayers at the beginning of a traditional celebration.

One such celebration is called the *kenduri arwah*, which is a feast practiced in honor of deceased family members. At such feasts, *sedekah* 'alms' are given to the *pakir* (the prayer leader); those who are remembered during the prayers accrue merit for the afterlife.

They also observe celebrations that are not related to the Islamic calendar. For instance, feasts may be given at a baby's hair-cutting ceremony, and to celebrate a boy's circumcision. Smaller feasts are held to honor the fulfillment of a vow, or to request divine protection in the warding off of sickness or other danger.

What are their needs?

The Bajau communities need infrastructure development in the areas of health and education. More medical workers, facilities, and services are needed. Many of their youth do not complete their schooling. Pray that God would send people to help them with these health and education needs. Pray, too, that their spiritual needs would not be neglected.