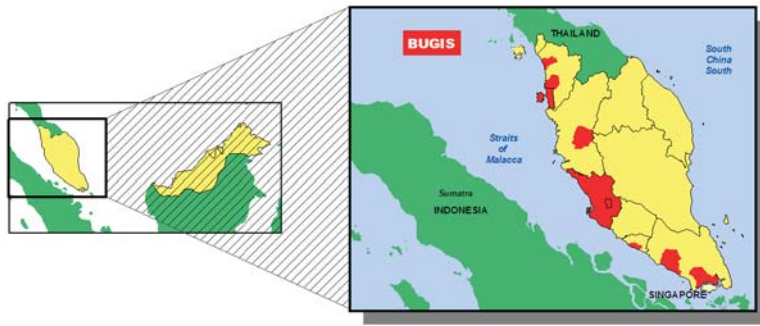


BUGIS



Population	Major Religion	Language
20,000	Islam	Bahasa Malaysia

Who are the Bugis?

The Bugis people are acclaimed sea traders and legendary warriors from Indonesia. They first came to Malaysia in the 16th century and settled in various parts of Malaysia in the states of Johor, Selangor, and Pulau Pinang. Francis Light once called them “the best merchants” among the eastern islands. By the 1700s, they dominated Selangor’s politics and economy and eventually established the Sultanate of Selangor; the current Sultan traces his roots back to the Bugis Empire. The 18th century has been called, the “Age of the Bugis.” There are several Bugis communities scattered along Sabah’s southeast coast.

What are their lives like?

The Bugis people are cultured and well-mannered, but acknowledged also as aggressive warriors. In the past, Malay princes hired them as mercenaries due to their renowned war dances and chants. In Johor today, many Bugis are landlords of large coconut and coffee plantations, while some are smallholders and fishermen. Bugis people are also known to be excellent craftsmen, for example, building houses without using nails. Their architectural influence is evident in some of today’s Malay houses.

Being proud of their self-image, many Bugis people are active in reviving their culture, language, and heritage, though many younger Bugis cannot speak the language anymore due to assimilation into the Malay community through intermarriage. However, some customs remain highly esteemed; for example, those who serve should not turn their backs to those who eat, and no one should leave the dining area until the entire meal is finished.

In marriages, courtship begins through subtle overtures by the potential groom’s family. To woo her, they will send her family a tepak sirih (a gift box with

food or betel nut) as a sign of interest. Eating this food means acceptance; otherwise, they need more time to consider. Once the match is agreed upon, the girl will live in the loft area of her house to preserve her chastity until the wedding day. The groom is blindfolded on the eve of the wedding and must find his bride among the women in the room. After the ceremony, he grabs her and brings her into the bridal chamber. This signifies the warrior instinct of the Bugis. This practice is still carried out today, especially among traditional families.

What do they believe?

The Bugis were among the early converts to Buddhism, but later converted to Islam in the early 1600s. Superstition is strong in daily life: there are many do’s and don’ts associated with pregnancy, childbirth, eating, fishing, planting, and opening windows. For instance, the whole skeleton of the fish must be removed and thrown away before they can eat the other side of it. Not to do so brings bad luck. When dressing, buttons are fastened beginning at the bottom, but unfastened from the top to the bottom, signifying a proper ordering of events. Windows are likewise opened with the bottom latches undone first while praying to drive away evil and bad luck.

What are their needs?

The Bugis have a rich cultural heritage in the region that is under pressure to conform to the majority Malay culture. Pray for doors of opportunity to bless the Bugis people by helping them preserve their unique culture designed by their Creator.