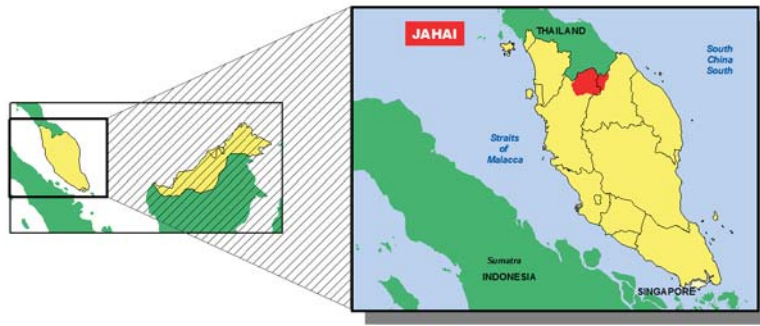


JAHAI



Population	Major Religion	Language
1,000	Animism	Jehai

Who are the Jahai?

The Jahai are one of the nineteen Orang Asli people groups living in Peninsular Malaysia. They are classified under the Semang (officially called Negrito) subgroup. They refer to themselves as Jah Jahai or Orang Semang.

The Jahai, like all other ethnic groups of the Semang, are generally of short stature with darker skin and have more curly hair.

Jahai settlements are by the rivers and lakes located in the Jeli district of Kelantan and the Hulu Perak district of Perak. One such settlement is at the edge of the Temengor Lake located in the State of Perak.

What are their lives like?

The Jahai lead a semi-nomadic life. Therefore, it is difficult to establish the number of this migratory indigenous group. Population estimates run from 750 to 1,250. The Malaysian government has tried with little success to get the Jahai people to settle down and farm, although a few of them have accepted this challenge. The government's effort was prompted by the desire to convert the traditionally Jahai animists to Islam.

The Jahai are expert hunters with blowpipes and poison darts. In fact, a pleasurable afternoon for any Jahai boy is spent practicing his blowpipe skills by shooting at tree branches. This is how, along with fish trapping, these tribal people survive as they travel through the rain forests of the peninsula.

Today they seem to enjoy medical and educational facilities and have police protection. They are less mobile than in the past due to the gradual change from shifting cultivation to semi-sedentary agricultural cultivation. Yet, they are still semi-nomadic, preferring to take advantage of the seasonal bounties

of the forest. A fair number also live in urban areas and are engaged in both waged and salaried jobs.

Their staple food is tapioca, which they cultivate around their villages. They collect fruits from the forest and hunt small mammals or fish. They also harvest rattan and bamboo, which has multiple of uses for the Jahai community.

What do they believe?

The Jahai are animists. Black magic and superstitions are very strong among the Jahai. They fear the Karei; a malevolent spirit that they believe brings death and disaster whenever taboos are broken. The headmen and witchdoctors (Tok Halaq) are an influential group of people in the tribe.

The Jahai are steeped in superstitions and taboos that have been developed and preserved for generations because of adverse circumstances. Even with the influence of technology and modern conveniences, the mindset and way of life for many have not changed. Therefore, their customs provide important clues to knowing their mindset.

What are their needs?

Many Jahai families are gripped by poverty. Community development is poor in terms of healthcare and literacy. Pray that believers will reach out to help in compassionate ways that will show them the love of their Creator. Because the Jahai live in the jungle along rivers and lakes, they are very difficult to access from the outside. Pray for individuals who are willing and able to make the sacrifice to respond to the needs of these people.