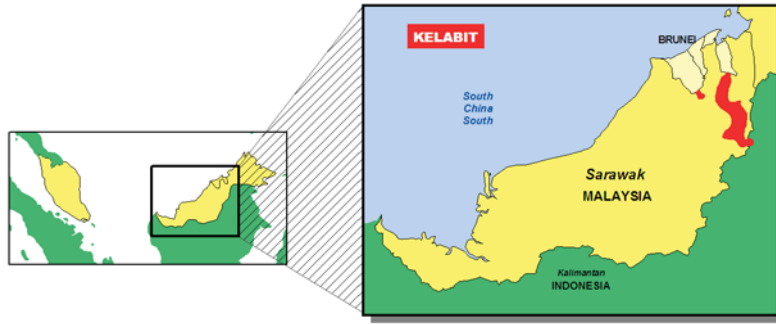


KELABIT



Population	Major Religion	Language
5,000	Christianity	Kelabit

Who are the Kelabit?

The Kelabit are a small ethnic group in northeast Sarawak. The Kelabit heartland, Bario lies 1,000 metres above sea level in the remote Kelabit Highlands. Bario is accessible only by air transport. Sixteen Kelabit villages are located within this highland plateau, while four other villages are located in the lowlands along the tributaries of the Baram River.

The Kelabit's ancestors were traditionally farmers and headhunters. The Kelabit of today live a more progressive life. Many have migrated to urban areas for work or further education.

The Kelabit are a close-knit community, noted for their cheerful, industrious and refined nature and generous hospitality. Family life and friendships are highly valued in their society.

What are their lives like?

Most Kelabit villages are longhouse settlements. The rural Kelabit plant wet-paddy, producing high quality rice commonly known as 'Bario Rice'. They also cultivate fruits and raise buffaloes, sheep and cattle. The people hunt and fish when the rice-planting season is over.

The level of education among the Kelabit is considerably high. Many work in the civil service and the private sector in major urban areas.

They used to strictly observe a social hierarchy which consists of three classes, namely the *paran* 'aristocrats', the *pupa* 'middle class' and the *anak lunian ada* 'commoners'. However with the advent of Christianity and education, such classifications are slowly diminishing.

A Kelabit couple may mark their new status as

parents and grandparents by changing their names at a special festive ceremony called *Irau Naru Ngadan*.

The Kelabit are good dancers. Well-known dances include the *Arang Papate* (The Dance of War) and the graceful *Arang Menengang* (The Dance of the Hornbill).

Singing, story-telling and joke-sharing sessions are popular traditional pastimes. Games such as football and volleyball are also popular among them.

Antique beads are highly valued by the Kelabit. These centuries-old valuable beads are not only used as body adornments but also serve as family heirlooms.

What do they believe?

The Kelabit's forefathers were fervent animists. They appeased spirits and depended on the sighting of certain animals to warn them of impending disaster. Certain taboos and bad omens required the abandonment of ripening rice crops, the dissolution of marriages and even the killing of newborn infants.

The arrival of Christianity in the 1940s saw the Kelabit discarding most of their old beliefs. Most Kelabit today are evangelical Christians. Christmas and Easter are two important festivals celebrated as a community.

What are their needs?

The large migration of the younger generation to the urban areas has resulted in a shortage of manpower in the rice fields. The remote location of the Kelabit Highlands often forces schoolchildren to complete their education in far away places. Many villages are now left with only the elderly and the very young. Pray for the living testimony of believers to other people in their area.