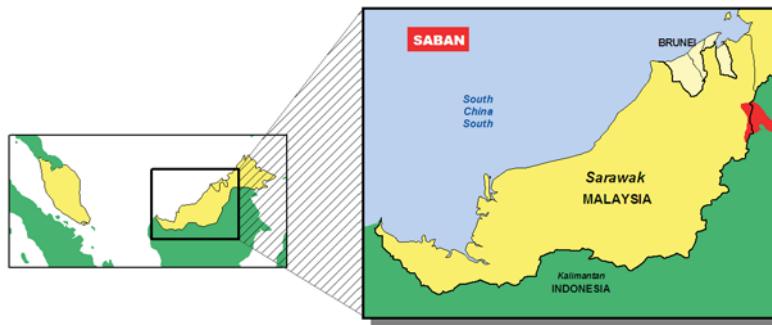


SABAN



Population

1,000

Major Religion

Christianity

Language

Sa'ban

Who are the Sa'ban?

The Sa'ban are a small people group living in the Punang Kelapang region in the remote Kelabit Highlands of northeast Sarawak. Long Banga is the main Sa'ban village in the highlands. Many Sa'ban have also moved to urban areas such as Miri for work purposes.

The Sa'ban originally lived in the upper reaches of the Bahau River in east Kalimantan. Migration to Sarawak began around 1900 and continued until the late 1960s.

Despite sharing many cultural similarities with the neighbouring Kelabit, the Sa'ban are a distinct people who even today seldom intermarry with outsiders.

Historically their warriors were renowned for their bravery and steadfastness in battle. The Sa'ban are an industrious people. A strong desire exists among them to improve their standard of living.

What are their lives like?

A typical Sa'ban village consists of houses built in an alignment similar to that of a longhouse. Nowadays, individual houses are also built in the villages. Farming is a major economic activity. They practise shifting paddy cultivation. Coffee and sugarcane are planted as cash crops.

Many Sa'ban have taken up jobs in urban areas. They also work in the logging and plantation industries.

The level of education among the Sa'ban is high. Schoolchildren normally have to finish their higher secondary school education in faraway towns. A few individuals are university and college graduates.

The Sa'ban live in extended families. The adoption of children among close relatives is common.

Sa'ban society consists of aristocrats and commoners. Formerly there was also a slave class. Village heads are usually elected from the aristocratic class.

A Sa'ban couple changes their names upon the births of their first child and first grandchild. Parents also address their children using special terms. Certain traditional practices of elongating earlobes and tattooing among both men and women have almost died out. The practice of keeping antique jars and beads as heirlooms continues even today.

What do they believe?

The Sa'ban previously practised animism. Deep in spirit-worship, they kept the skulls of their enemies in their longhouses.

In the early 1950s, the first Protestant Christian missionaries went to the Sa'ban people. The Sa'ban responded positively and the people today are predominantly Christians. Christmas and Easter celebrations are looked forward to as a time of festivities and family reunions.

What are their needs?

The migration of the younger Sa'ban generation to urban areas will doubtlessly bring drastic changes to their social structure. Efforts need to be taken to preserve their cultural identity in the future.

The geographical isolation of the Sa'ban poses a problem for more community development to be carried out. There is still a need to improve transportation links with the outside world. Pray that believers would share the hope that is within them.