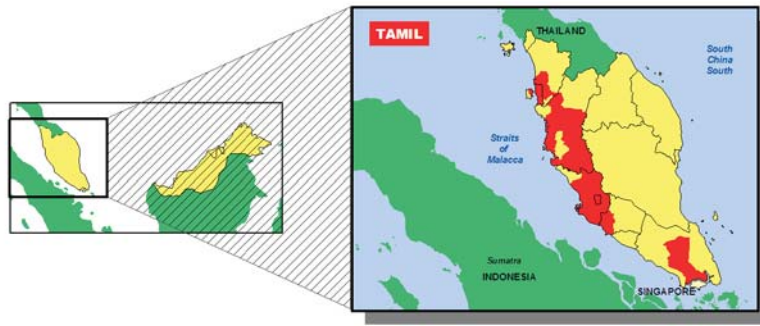


TAMIL



Population	Major Religion	Language
1,500,000	Hinduism	Tamil

Who are the Tamil?

The Tamil Indians first arrived on the Malay Peninsula in the 15th century and were successful as textile and spice merchants. Of these earliest Indian communities, only a small minority survived. They have adopted many Malay customs over the years, including the Malay language, food, and dress. Under the British rule in Malaysia during the 18th century, the great migration started. At first, Tamil laborers from Tamil Nadu and neighboring states in South India were brought in to build roads and railways or to work on tea plantations. Later on, they were recruited to work in the rubber and palm oil industries.

What are their lives like?

Today, Tamil Indians comprise six and one half percent of the Malaysia population and four percent of the Singapore population. Like other Indians, Malaysian Tamil communities proudly continue with their traditional customs, language, and religions. Tamil Indians live in both rural areas and urban centers. Many have successfully ventured into all walks of Malaysian life. Some Tamils are professionals, but the majority have remained manual laborers. What Tamil Indians lack in opportunity, they overcome through creativity. Tamils often speak three to four dialects, cook a variety of curries, wear vibrantly colored materials, and have a lively culture.

What do they believe?

The Tamil in Malaysia are predominantly Hindu. Although many are devout Hindus, many simply follow worship practices without a full understanding their Hindu beliefs.

The Tamil Indians of Malaysia participate in many

Hindu festivals, rituals, and ceremonies. However, there is one festival that has been uniquely adapted in Malaysia and Singapore—Thaipusam (a demonstration of human endurance, self-sacrifice, and the power of mind over matter). It is very different from the original Thaipusam practiced in India. The Festival is held in honor of Lord Murugan (Hindu deity, the son of Shiva). Thaipusam is a time of purification and atonement, where devotees by the thousands fulfill their vows made to the deities for prayers answered.

Thousands of men express their loyalty by putting *vel* (metal skewers) through the skin of their foreheads, cheeks, and tongues. They also pierce their chests and backs with hooks hung with offerings of leaves, limes, or metal containers holding milk. All devotees will walk barefoot for many miles and then ascend hundreds of steps up the temple to bear offerings to Lord Murugan. Year after year, they strive in vain to find purification and atonement.

What are their needs?

Tamil Indians would state their needs in terms of educational, social, and economic opportunities. The Tamil Indians have been reported to have Malaysia's highest school drop out rate, unemployment, illiteracy, alcoholism, criminal activity, and number of squatters. There is some underlying bias against the Tamils of Malaysia that is subtly expressed by the other major people groups. Pray for local believers of other ethnicities to abandon any such prejudices and work to build relationships with Tamil Indians and support them in their struggles. Pray for local believers to relate and respond to all the needs of Tamil Indians.