

Bugis of Indonesia

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Who are the Bugis?

The Bugis, also known as the Buginese, *To Bugi* and *To Ugi*, are the dominant ethnic group in southwestern Sulawesi, Indonesia. They are of Malay stock. Some 4 million Bugis live on Sulawesi Island while an estimated 1 million more have migrated to other parts of Indonesia and Southeast Asia, including Borneo, eastern Sumatra, the Riau islands, Buru, Ambon, Flores, Malaysia, Singapore and Papua New Guinea.

Languages

The Bugis have their own language, a Malay dialect. Linguistically and culturally, the Bugis are closely related to the neighboring Makasar people, and both languages are written using the *Lontara* script. *Lontara* is named after the *lontar* palm on whose leaves many ancient Bugis texts were written. The Bugis have enjoyed literature for centuries. Their great 5-part epic, *La Galigo*, records myths of the origins of humankind.

Culture

The Bugis have long been known as fearless sailors. Often likened to the Vikings, the ancient Bugis established trade routes throughout Indonesia and conquered numerous small states. At one time, the appearance of an elegant Bugis schooner offshore would strike fear into coastal communities. During the Dutch colonial era, the Bugis gained a reputation as smugglers and pirates.

When the first Europeans arrived in the 1500's, South Sulawesi was a patchwork of petty kingdoms, each ruled by a prince claiming descent from the legendary "first couple" sent from heaven to pacify the earth. In the 1660's, the Dutch helped the Bugis consolidate their power, gaining the upper hand over the Makasar, their neighbors and rivals to the south. Bugis princes continued to rule in Sulawesi throughout the Dutch colonial era. Although local rulers lost their power following Indonesia's independence in 1945, "royal blood" still gives high status to the descendents of former ruling families and a two-tier social structure reflects the traditional division of society into nobility and commoners.

Traditional beliefs and practices are woven into the Bugis social fabric. According to the Bugis social value of *siri*, family honor must be protected at all cost, even the shedding of blood.



Population: 5 million
Location: Sulawesi, Indonesia
Languages: Bugis, Bahasa Indonesia



a people loved



Thank God for His marvelous work among the Bugis, 1930-1950. Pray that the descendants of the first believers would be inspired to live holy lives and to show God's love to their Muslim neighbors and relatives.

Thank God for sending a growing number of Indonesian followers of Jesus to live among the Bugis. Pray that they would find jobs in Bugis communities, and develop culturally sensitive ways of sharing the Good News.

Pray that merchants of Chinese descent who live among the Bugis would model lifestyles of love and forgiveness to their Bugis employees and customers.

Pray that the Bugis who follow Jesus would form house fellowships to worship God and study the Scriptures.

Pray that God would send linguists to revise the Bugis Bible translation and to prepare other culturally sensitive religious literature in the Bugis language.

Shamans preside at family rituals and offer their services to the sick, the infertile and those seeking spouses or jobs. Their curses fuel feuds. Special transvestite shamans known as *bissu* formerly advised Bugis kings.

Today, Bugis culture is changing as people seek a better life. Education is valued as a means of advancement. Mobile phones have become a universal means of communication, and television and other media are driving consumerism.

Livelihood

Despite their seafaring history, the Bugis economy is overwhelmingly agricultural. Most Bugis farm rice or cacao in Sulawesi's fertile soil. Sulawesi rice is eaten throughout eastern Indonesia and much cacao is exported. Other Bugis products include coconuts, coffee, cloves, copra and timber.

For three centuries the Bugis have dominated inter-island trade, taking their surplus rice, dried fish and livestock to the surrounding food-deficient provinces. Some men remain at sea for as long as a year, returning home only long enough to clean their boats and restock. Women generally manage the home and harvest the rice. Some women have also become skilled traders and professionals.

Beliefs

Almost all Bugis adhere to Islam. However, offerings to ancestor spirits and spirits associated with houses, objects and sacred sites are not uncommon.

Between 1930-1950, an amazing 10,000 Bugis people in one district decided to follow Jesus. Sadly, conflict in the area later decimated the number of Bugis believers. The remaining Bugis followers adopted a survival mentality, and quit reaching out to their Muslim neighbors. Most joined a small denomination now dominated by non-Bugis members.

Followers of Jesus have been reaching out to the Bugis for many years, yet less than 0.1% of the Bugis follow Jesus. Due to ethnic rivalry, most Bugis are unwilling to listen to followers of Jesus from other local ethnic groups and few of these groups have a desire to share God's love with their Bugis neighbors. A Bugis translation of the Bible was published in 1997, but the text is hard to understand and needs revision.