

Sundanese of Indonesia

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Who are the Sundanese?

The Sunda are the largest unreached people group in Indonesia. Around 34 million Sundanese people live in Indonesia, mostly in West Java, which they call *Pasundan* (Sundaland), or *Parahyangan* (Land of the gods). The Sunda can trace their history in the region back to AD 415 and can claim to be the original inhabitants of West Java.

Languages

The Sunda have their own language. Most Sundanese people also speak *Bahasa Indonesia*, the Indonesian national language.

Livelihood

The land of West Java is well-watered and extremely fertile, producing a rich harvest of rice as well as a variety of vegetables. The mountains of Pasundan are also home to vast tea plantations. However, Pasundan is seriously overcrowded so family farmland is often very limited (average size 1.5 acres). To supplement their income, many Sunda take seasonal employment on larger plantations as well as working their own farms. Despite these efforts, many Sunda are very poor.

As Java becomes increasingly industrial and urban, many Sunda are leaving their farms. They find work as drivers, mechanics, maids, shop assistants or factory-workers in the large cities of Jakarta (14 million) and Bandung (5 million). Some Sunda have influential government jobs. For the vast majority, though, poverty is a daily struggle.

Culture

Family and community are important to the Sunda. They are reluctant to leave the community of their birth and do not like to live far from Pasundan. For this reason most of Indonesia's 34 million Sundanese still live in West Java.

Sunda culture is rich in the performing arts. Specialty instruments include the lute, the hauntingly beautiful *suling* flute, and a reverberating bamboo xylophone called the *angklung*. Colorful wooden puppet shows called *wayang golek* bring ancient Hindu legends to life.



Population:	34 million
Location:	West Java, Indonesia
Languages:	Sundanese, Bahasa Indonesia



a people loved



Praise God for the local and international groups whose efforts have begun to produce fruit among the Sunda.

Pray for harmony and togetherness among Sunda followers of Jesus who express their Muslim background in different ways.

Pray for Indonesian followers of Jesus and Sunda messengers as they share the Good News among this people group.

Pray for community leaders to develop workable solutions to the poverty that traps many Sunda people. Pray that followers of Jesus would find ways to assist locally-initiated community development projects rather than imposing plans of their own.

Pray for Sunda and Indonesian leaders to govern justly, rather than using power for their own gain.

Pray that Sunda fellowships would reach out in love to their own people group, and send members to share the Good News with other peoples as well.

The Sunda are very friendly. They especially enjoy people who like to make jokes, a trait they refer to as *ngabodor*. They also make a concerted effort to maintain peaceful relationships and to avoid conflict, rarely expressing differences of opinion that could hurt another's feelings.

Beliefs

Over the centuries, the Sunda have welcomed religious input from many sources. Hinduism has been especially influential. The traditional name for their homeland, *Parahyangan* (Land of the gods), reflects this Hindu heritage.

Islam was first introduced by Indian traders in the 13th century. The Sunda welcomed Islam, as they had other religious input in the past. In 1579, an invading sultan effectively imposed Islam throughout Pasundan. Later, their Muslim identity helped the Sunda distinguish themselves from their Dutch colonial masters and became a source of unity against Western European "immorality."

While almost all Sunda are outwardly committed to Islam (99.95%), privately they often have a complex mix of beliefs. Many Sunda combine Muslim practices with traditions concerning taboos, spirits, curses and healings. For example, the evening *maghrib* prayers are well-attended at Sunda mosques because many Sunda believe these prayers will protect them from the evil spirits of the night. The Sunda often highly revere their ancestors and visit ancestral graves on Muslim feast days such as *Eid ul-Fitr* or *Eid al-Adha*. Sundanese people who have made several pilgrimages to Mecca sometimes use the prestige acquired to give authority to healing and other spiritual practices.

A number of groups are reaching out to the Sunda, sponsoring community development projects and sharing the Good News. We give thanks that today, more than 30,000 Sunda people call themselves followers of Jesus. Yet this is only a fraction (0.01%) of the 34 million Sunda who have yet to know how much God loves them.