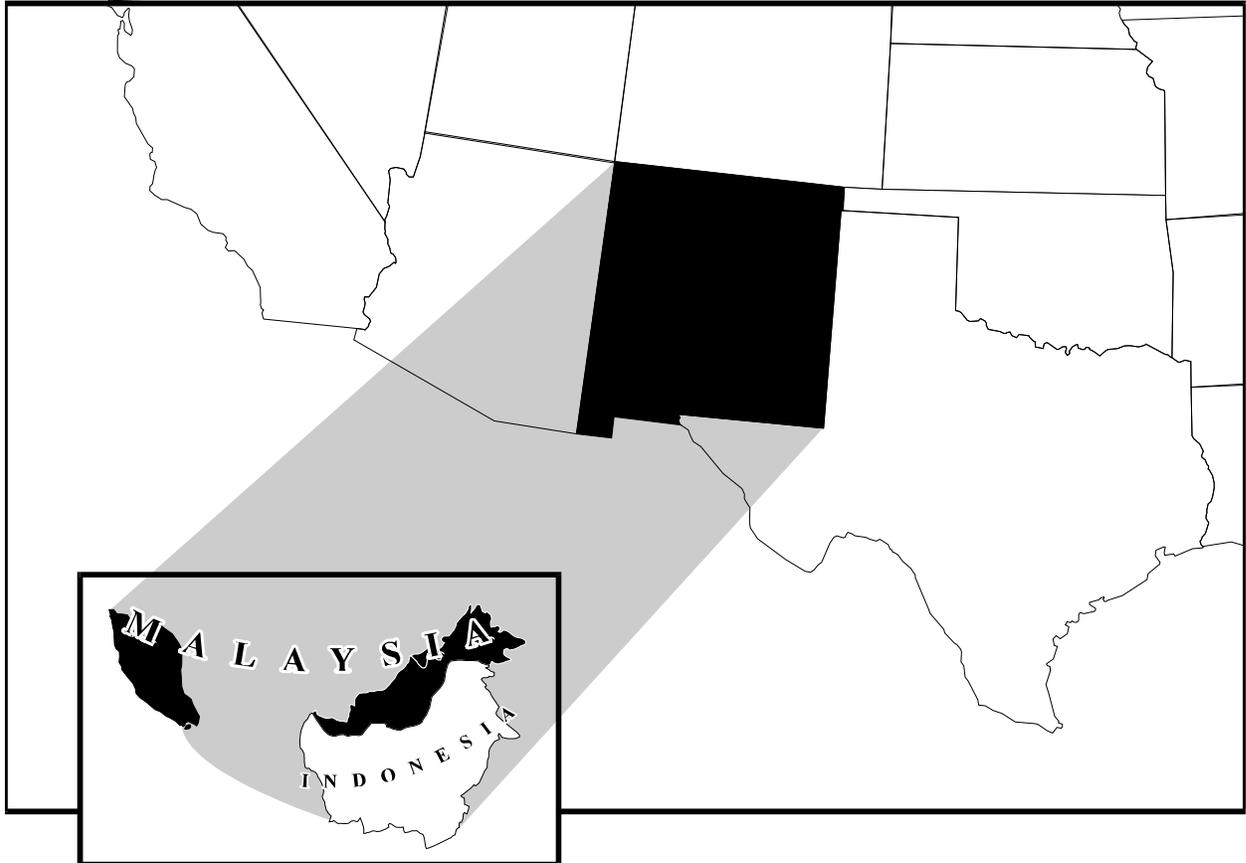


Malaysia (mah-LAY-zhah)



<u>Population</u>	19,723,587
% under 15 years	36%
<u>Commo</u>	
TV	1:9.5
Radio	1:5
Phone	1:9
Newspaper	140:1,000
<u>Health</u>	
Life Expectancy	Male 67/Female 73
Hospitals	1:482
Doctors	1:2,412
IMR	25:1,000
<u>Income</u>	\$7,500.00 per cap
<u>Literacy Rate</u>	78%

1. Religious Groups *"Islam is the official religion of the country, but Article 11 of the Constitution provides that every person has the right to profess and practice his or her own religion. The propagation of any other religion to Muslims is forbidden by state laws.*

According to the 1980 census, 53 percent of the population is Muslim, 17 percent Buddhist, 12 percent Confucian, 7 percent Hindu, 7 percent Christian, and the balance (about 4 percent) adhere to another or to no religion. These figures differed according to geographical area and ethnic composition. For instance, 56 percent of Peninsular Malaysia's population is Muslim, 51 percent of that of Sabah, and 26 percent of that of Sarawak. Only 2 percent of the population of Peninsular Malaysia is Christian, but the corresponding figures for Sabah and Sarawak are 27 percent and 29 percent, respectively.



Religion correlates closely with ethnicity in that in varying degrees of religiosity, all Malays adhere to Islam; Chinese embrace elements of Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism; and nearly all Indians adhere to Hinduism. About 4 percent of the Chinese and about 8 percent of the Indian communities profess Christianity." (Unless stated otherwise, all quotations are from the Library of Congress Country Studies/Area Handbooks--Malaysia.)

a. Muslim (53%) *"Islam spread throughout the Malay world during the Malacca sultanate of the fifteenth century. Adapting to and being modified by its local environment, indigenous beliefs and the earlier influence of Hinduism shaped its structure and evolution in Malaysia.*

Under the Constitution the ruler of each state (with certain exceptions) is the highest ranking Islamic authority in that state. Religious questions pertaining to the entire country are decided by the Conference of Rulers.

Among several religious festivals, the two most important are the Pilgrimage Festival (Hari Raya Haji) and the Fast-Ending Festival (Hari Raja Puasa). The former celebrates the time when pilgrimages to Mecca are customarily made and the latter, the end of the month of fasting (Ramadan). These festivals and the celebration of the Prophet Mohammed's birthday are national holidays."

b. Hindu (7%) *"The Indians who migrated to Malaysia brought a religion connected with the cultivation of the land, the welfare of the family and kin group, and the deification of the place of family or kin group residence. Migration weakened this pattern, if only because of the impersonal nature of employment on the large rubber estates and the lack of familiar deities associated with the land.*

An attempt has been made to continue some of the old forms in the new setting. Each estate has at least one temple dedicated to a god--usually derived from the Hindu pantheon--who serves as a guardian for the estate workers. However, if one of the gods seems unpropitious, the workers have no hesitancy in turning to another deity. The temple is regarded not as a place for communal worship but as the abode of a deity.



The worshippers take no part in the temple ceremonies and merely enter the temple to attain spiritual uplift and blessing and to give offerings to the gods through its priests."

c. Buddhist and Taoist (29%)

"The three great religious streams among the Chinese--Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism--are not sharply differentiated, and the religious life of most Chinese is likely to embrace elements of all three, the emphasis depending in part on the area of China from which the family originally came.

Confucianism strengthens and sanctifies family life; Taoism seeks freedom from social constraints and personal power through the use of ritual exercises and potions; and Buddhism preaches a doctrine of reincarnation, promising salvation for all beings.

Although they offer enlightenment, spiritual guidance, and--in Buddhism and Taoism--such institutions as temples and monasteries, the three traditions are practical rather than mystical and are oriented to the problems of everyday life rather than to cosmic or metaphysical concerns.



The ancestor cult was based on the assumption that the living can communicate with the dead and that the dead are affected by and can influence events in the world of the living. The eclectic character of Chinese religion includes belief in spirits and the worship of numerous deities and saints, some of whom are taken from ancient Chinese mythology and others who are drawn from Buddhist and Taoist pantheons.

An ancestral tablet (or a substitute, such as a photograph) is still kept in a special shrine or on a shelf, which may also house certain deities and is the object of ritual attention in domestic worship. However, more elaborate beliefs relating to the division of the soul after death, fixing part of the soul in the ancestral tablet, and requirements for periodic rituals of kinship solidarity, have been simplified.



Just as it is unthinkable to neglect one's parents or grandparents while they live, so it is unthinkable to neglect and forget them after death. As an expression of filial piety for deceased parents, children pay their respects and provide for their welfare in the afterlife through the medium of ritual.

The Chinese express their piety by a quiet adherence to the positive virtues sanctioned by the spirit world. More overt manifestations of religious feeling appear in the domestic rites before the household gods and ancestors. Traditionally, ceremonies take place before the tablets on the first and fifteenth days of the lunar calendar month, during which incense is burned or candles lit.

Special rites are observed at certain times of the year--New Year, Feast of Tombs, Dragon Boat Festival, Month of Good Brothers, Birthday of the Kitchen God, Winter Festival, and the times of death or marriage. Some of the calendar observations such as the Dragon Boat Festival, are occasions for large-scale public celebrations, but these are not of primary importance from a religious viewpoint.

Chinese ritual is essentially family centered, and the family or household rites have the greatest significance. This is true even in the death ceremonies although the community offers support to the bereaved family in its attempt to carry out the duties of filial piety."

d. Christian (7%)

e. Traditional indigenous or no preference (4%)

2. Ethnic/Racial groups

a. Malay (MAY-lay) and other indigenous (66%)

"Together with the Orang Asli and the indigenous peoples of Sabah and Sarawak, the Malay population is identified as Bumiputra--literally, sons of the soil. The connotation is that, as the indigenous peoples of the modern states, they possess an entitlement to represent the social and cultural core of the national identity.

Perhaps the one universal element of Malay culture is the Muslim faith. Although all Malays are not equally devout in their behavior, there are practically no Malays who deny Islam.



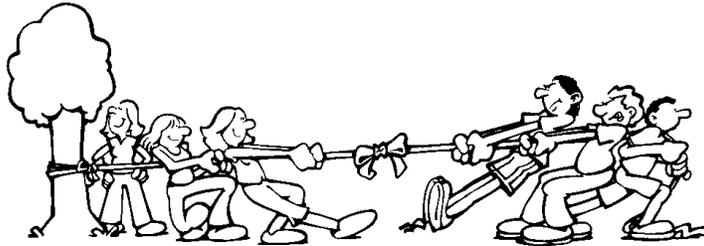
There are some Javanese who are unorthodox Muslims and a few who are Christians. Historically, becoming a Muslim has often meant acceptance within the Malay community. The line between Indian Muslims and Malays is often a narrow one, and there has been considerable intermarriage as well as shifts in ethnic identity."

b. Chinese (26%)

c. Indian (7%) *"The Malaysian Indian community is the most heterogeneous of the three primary ethnic groups of Peninsular Malaysia. The overwhelming majority of Indians (over 80 percent) are descendants of Tamils from the Indian state of Madras (now Tamil Nadu) and of the Hindu faith."*

d. Other (1%)

3. Gender Issues



a. Government concern *"Government leaders have identified domestic violence as a continuing social ill. Between January and August, there were 514 reported cases of domestic violence. In a development welcomed by women's organizations, the Government began to implement the 1994 Domestic Violence Act. It offers a broad definition of domestic violence, gives powers to the courts to protect victims, and provides for compensation and counseling for victims. Those covered under the bill include a spouse, a former spouse, a child, an incapacitated adult, or any other member of the family. Cases of wife beating or child abuse, which had been tried under provisions of the Penal Code governing assault and battery, are now expected to come under the Domestic Violence Act." (U.S. Department of State Human Rights Report 1996--Malaysia.)*

b. Status of women

"NGO's concerned about women's issues advocate legislative and social reforms to improve the status of women. These groups raise issues such as violence against women, trafficking in women and young girls, employment opportunities with equal pay, and greater participation by women in decisionmaking positions."

Women's issues continued to receive prominent coverage in public seminars and the media."

c. Cultural/religious influences *"The cultural and religious traditions of the major ethnic groups heavily influence the condition of women in society. In family and religious matters, Muslim women are subject to Islamic law. Polygyny is allowed and practiced to a limited degree, and inheritance law favors male offspring and relatives. The Islamic Family Law was revised in 1989 to provide better protection for the property rights of married Muslim women and to make more equitable a Muslim woman's right to divorce."*

Non-Muslim women are subject to civil law. Changes in the Civil Marriage and Divorce Act in the early 1980's increased protection of married women's rights, especially those married under customary rites."

d. Equality *"Government policy supports women's full and equal participation in education and the work force. Women are represented in growing numbers in the professions, but women's groups argue that the level of participation is still disproportionately low. According to various studies, only about 1.4 percent of women currently hold decisionmaking posts. The studies also estimate that only about 5 percent of political decisionmakers are women."*

In the opposition-controlled state of Kelantan, the state government has imposed restrictions on all female workers, including non-Muslims. Female workers cannot work at night and are restricted in the dress they may wear in the workplace. The state government justifies these restrictions as reflecting Islamic values."

4. Conflicts *"International disputes: involved in a complex dispute over the Spratley Islands with China, Philippines, Taiwan, Vietnam, and possibly Brunei; State of Sabah claimed by the Philippines; Brunei may wish to purchase the Malaysian salient that divides Brunei into two parts; two islands in dispute with Singapore; two islands in dispute with Indonesia."*
(1996 CIA World Factbook--Malaysia)



5. Holidays/Observances (The following material, adapted from Holidays, Festivals and Celebrations of the World Dictionary, compiled by Sue Thompson and Barbar Carlson, [Detroit: Omnigrpahics, 1994], is instructive.

a. Dewali (deh-WAHL-ee, first half of November)

- "A row or cluster of lights"--week-long festivities illuminated by lamps, fireworks, and bonfires.
- Malaysia families clean and whitewash homes and draw elaborate designs on floors with colored powder to welcome Lakshmi, Hindu goddess of wealth and prosperity.

b. Birthday of the Goddess of Mercy (19th day of the third moon and 19th day of the tenth moon)

- Celebration of Kuan Yin (gwahn-yin), the *Bodhisattva* 'Buddha-to-be' of infinite compassion and mercy.
- Devotees bearing joss sticks, fresh fruits, flowers, and sweet cakes gather twice a year at temples dedicated to Kuan Yin in Kuala Lumpur and Panang to pray for her benevolence.

c. Hari Raya Puasa (hahr-ee RYE-yah POO-ah-sah, first day of Shawwal)

- Another name for Idul-Fitr, the three day feast marking the end of Ramadan.

- Muslim Malaysians hold open houses, inviting non-Muslim friends, fostering more understanding
- Muslims in turn visit the Chinese during Lunar New Year, the Hindus during Dewali, and the Christians during Christmas

d. Mandi Safar (mahn-dee SAH-fahr, Safar, the second Moslem month)

- Muslim bathing festival unique to Malaysia.
- Originally believed to commemorate the last time Mohammed was able to bathe before his death.
- Participants wear bright colors, visit beaches, and clean body and soul with water.
- Many orthodox Muslims consider day as little more than a picnic.

e. Meenakshi Kalyanam (mee-nahk-shee kahl-yah-NAHM, April; full moon of Phalguna)

- Also called *Panguni Uttiram*.
 - Celebrates the marriage of Subramanya to Theivani, adopted daughter of Indra. Food is free to anyone all day.

f. Merdeka Day (mehr-DAY-kah, 31 August)

- National holiday to commemorate Malaysian *merdeka*, or "independence", from British sovereignty in 1957.
- Parts of Malaysia were under various foreign powers for centuries. By the 1920s all the states were ruled by Britain.
- Federation of Malaya founded in 1957 and Malaysia in 1963.



g. Padi Harvest Festival (pah-dee, 30-31 May)

- Holiday in Labuan Territory and state of Sabah.
 - Celebrated by the Kadazan people (also known as Dusun), the largest indigenous ethnic group in Sabah. Harvest is a ritual dedicated to the *Bambaazon*, or rice spirit.

h. Thaipusam (tai-POO-sahm, 3-12 days; January-February)

- Hindu festival marking the birthday and victory of the Hindu god Lord Subramaniam, also known as Lord Murugar, over the demons.
 - Public holiday in Malaysian states of Perak, Penang, and Selangor.

i. Other Malaysian holidays:

(1) Birthday of the *Yang di-Pertuan Agong* (first Wednesday in June)

(2) Christmas Day (25 December)

(3) International New Year's Day (1 January)

(4) Labor Day (1 May)

(5) National Day (31 August)

6. Customs

a. Gestures

- **Smile** Smiles may mask a variety of feelings, from good humor to embarrassment, irritation or upset.
- **Subjectivity** Truth is often seen in subjective feelings rather than concrete facts.
 - **Silence** Many Malaysian peoples are comfortable with long periods of silence. (See Kiss, Bow or Shake Hands, pp. 217, 219, 222.)

- **Variety** Three cultures impact gestures and manners in Malaysia--Malay, Chinese and Indian. Observe your host and others around you, following their example.



- **Elderly** Show respect for the elderly.

b. Freedom of Religion *"Islam is the official religion. Religious minorities, which include large Hindu, Buddhist, Sikh, and Christian communities, generally are permitted to worship freely but are subject to some restrictions.*

Adherence to Islam is considered intrinsic to Malay ethnic identity, and therefore Islamic religious laws administered by state authorities through Islamic courts bind all ethnic Malays in some civil matters, such as family relations and diet.

Government funds support an Islamic religious establishment, and it is official policy to 'infuse Islamic values' into the administration of the country. At the same time, the Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government has refused to accede to pressures to impose Islamic religious law beyond the Muslim community.



The Government opposes what it considers extremist or deviant interpretations of Islam. In the past, the Government has imposed restrictions on certain Islamic sects. In August 1995, the Government banned the Al Arqam religious movement for what it termed 'deviationist teachings,' and it remained banned at year's end. The Government continues to monitor the activities of the Shi'ite minority.

Government authorities continued to emphasize the importance of controlling deviationist groups, and arrested followers of the banned Al Arqam movement for attempting to revive the deviationist sect. The Government announced that the authorities were investigating another 50 or so "deviationist" groups.

In most cases, the Government expected to provide 'counselling and hold dialogs' to encourage them to return to 'the right path.' The authorities have warned that such groups would not be allowed to take advantage of freedom of religion to spread discord among the people.



There continued to be allegations that some state governments are slow in approving building permits for non-Muslim places of worship or land for cemeteries for non-Muslims.

The Government discourages the circulation of a popular Malay-language translation of the Bible. Some states have laws prohibiting the use of Malay-language religious terms by Christians, but the authorities do not actively enforce them.

The Government permits but discourages conversion to religions other than Islam. Some states have long proscribed by law proselytizing of Muslims, and other parts of the country strongly discourage it as well.

In a March 1990 decision, the Supreme Court upheld the primacy of the Constitution over inconsistent state laws by ruling that parents have the right to determine the religion of their minor children under the age of 18. The decision eased fears in the non-Muslim community over state laws that in religious conversion cases set the age of majority at puberty based on Islamic law."

c. People with disabilities "The Government does not discriminate against physically disabled persons in employment, education, and provision of other state services. However, public transportation, public buildings, and other facilities are not adapted to the needs of the disabled, and

the Government has not mandated accessibility for the disabled, through legislation or otherwise. Special education schools exist, but they are not sufficient to meet needs.

Nevertheless, the Government as well as the general public are becoming more sensitive to the needs of the physically disabled. New commuter trains are being made wheelchair accessible. The Government also provides incentives for employers to offer employment opportunities for the disabled. The Health Minister announced plans to restructure the health care system to place greater emphasis on rehabilitation of the disabled.

Disabled persons work in all sectors of the economy, but the prevalent feeling in society remains that disabled people cannot work. The Government continued its effort to register those with disabilities under four categories--blind, deaf, physical, and mental."

d. Treatment of minorities *"The Government implements extensive affirmative action programs designed to boost the economic position of the ethnic Malay majority, which remains poorer on average, than the Chinese minority despite the former's political dominance. Such government affirmative action programs and policies do, however, limit opportunities for non-Malays in higher education, government employment, business permits and licenses, and ownership of newly developed agricultural lands. Indian Malaysians continue to lag behind in the country's economic development, although the national economic policies target less advantaged populations regardless of ethnicity. According to the Government, these programs have been instrumental in ensuring ethnic harmony and political stability."*



7. Resources for Further Study

a. Cross-cultural resources

Eu, Geoffrey. Insight Guides--Malaysia. Singapore: APA Publications, 1992. AISO 915.951 M239

Aesthetically pleasing presentations of history, peoples, places, foods and travel tips. The beautiful photographs, in National Geographic manner, make this a visually appealing series.

Munan, Heidi. Culture Shock! Malaysia. (ISBN 1-55868-076-4), Portland, Oregon: Graphic Arts Center Publishing, 1991.

Beg, borrow, or purchase any book in this series. Highly recommended by the Overseas Briefing Center, U.S. Department of State. Detailed, in-depth treatment of issues.

Wheeler, Tone. Lonely Planet Travel Survival Kit--Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei. AISO 915.9504 M239

The best, by far, of readily accessible travel guides. Highly recommended by the Overseas Briefing Center, U.S. Department of State. Detailed, in-depth treatment of issues.

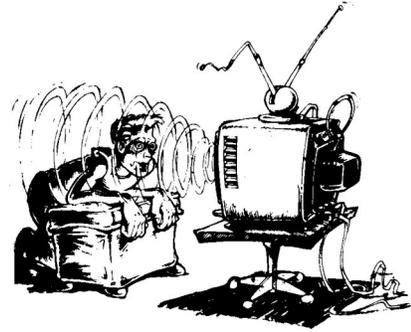
**b. Biography, novels, literature,
poetry**



Purcell, Victor. The Memoirs of a Malayan Official. Cassell, [1965].
⇒ Bosun Library: General CT16.U8 A1

Accounts of the author's experiences in the army for two World Wars, his civil service in Malaysia (1921-1946), United Nations consultant on Malaysia (1946-48), and final position at Cambridge (1949-). Emphasis placed on his time in Malaysia.

c. News articles



"104 Are Held in Malaysia After East Timor Meeting." New York Times, 10 Nov 1996.

"The Malaysian police detained 104 participants, including two Roman Catholic bishops...at the second Asia Pacific Conference on East Timor..."

Gargan, Edward A. "The Master Builder of Malaysia: He Thrives With a little Help From His Friends." New York Times, 27 Mar 1996.

"As the head of the YTL Corporation, one of Malaysia's largest project-development conglomerates, 42-year-old Francis Yeoh Sock Ping has interests in projects ranging from power plants to hotels and resorts."

Mydans, Seth. "Its Mood Dark as the Haze, Southeast Asia Aches." New York Times, 26 Oct 1997, p. A3.

"Kuala Lumpur, like the entire region, endures the effects of a giant haze, a calamity caused by forest fires in Indonesia to clear land for crops."



"Get rid of excess baggage."