

Who are the Betawi?

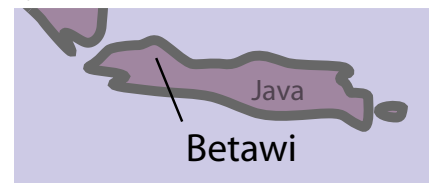
Most of Indonesia's 5 million Betawi people live on the outskirts of Jakarta, Indonesia's sprawling capital city on the island of Java. The Betawi are considered the original inhabitants of Jakarta, and are called after "Batavia," the colonial name for the city. Betawi ancestry is a mixture of Portuguese, Indian, Arab, Javanese, Sunda and Balinese, among others. Since the 16th century, these groups have intermingled in the Jakarta area. In addition to intermarrying, they also developed a unique form of the Malay language in order to communicate. Today, the Betawi are scattered throughout Jakarta, with the highest concentrations living at the outer margins of the city.

Languages

The Betawi language is a Malay dialect with two main forms: *kota* (city) Betawi, and *pinggiran* (outskirts) Betawi, each of which has several subdialects. Among non-Betawi people in Jakarta, especially among the upper class, it is often considered "cool" to be able to speak some of the Betawi language. Most Betawi people can also speak *Bahasa Indonesia*, the Indonesian national language.

Livelihood

Urban Betawi often work as merchants, laborers, craft-people, office staff or government officers. Betawi outside the city are largely involved in agriculture. Many cultivate rice or fruit. Some own fish farms. As Jakarta, a megacity of over 14 million people, grows, the Betawi are increasingly under pressure. Agricultural land has been sold for housing developments and industrial complexes, forcing many Betawi farmers to look for new occupations. This is complicated by the fact that many adult Betawi have had little formal education.



Population: 5 million
Location: Jakarta, Indonesia
Languages: Betawi,
Bahasa Indonesia





Pray that Betawi farmers who have been forced to give up their land would find new ways to support themselves.

Pray for followers of Jesus to find ways to become part of Betawi communities and to share the Good News.

Pray that the Betawi would be open to hearing about God's love.

Pray for Betawi followers of Jesus that they would grow in their faith and that they would have the courage to reach out to their own people group and beyond.

Pray for literature to be developed in each of the main Betawi subdialects. Pray that followers of Jesus would find creative ways to help the Betawi make use of these resources.

Culture

Betawi arts include the *topeng*, a mask dance, *wayang golek*, a traditional puppet show and *teater lenong*, a form of comedic drama. While Betawi arts were fairly popular until the late 1970's, interest has since dwindled. Non-profits and charitable organizations are now making deliberate attempts to preserve traditional Betawi art forms. Betawi music can still be heard, especially a somewhat modernized form of *gambang kromong*.

Traditional Betawi homes have bamboo walls with an open verandah in the front.

Beliefs

Most Betawi people are Muslim. Many faithfully practice Islam, praying five times a day and fasting in the month of Ramadan. Even those who are less diligent still find a strong identity in Islam. All Betawi use the Islamic greeting "*Assalamualaikum*" when they meet.

Despite their strong Muslim identity, many Betawi also have animistic beliefs. They believe there are spirits that live in trees, bridges and graveyards.

A number of Indonesian followers of Jesus have been reaching out to the Betawi. However, many Betawi seem indifferent to the Good News. Some audiovisual resources have been produced in the Betawi language, but are difficult to distribute openly. While portions of Scripture have been translated into Betawi, use of these resources is complicated by the diversity of Betawi subdialects. Nor is it clear how many Betawi people will be able to read these materials, as most Betawi have never seen their language in print.

Nevertheless, some Betawi have decided to follow Jesus, and there is one indigenous fellowship. The exact number of Betawi followers is unknown.