

The Malay of Malaysia are not poor—at least not materially. Nearly every family has a digital camera and several mobile phones, not to mention motorcycles and cars. Well-educated, with good jobs, many Malay people enjoy the comforts of material success. But have they experienced God's true riches?

### Who are the Malay?

Over 15 million Malay live in Malaysia, forming 60% of Malaysia's population. Most live in West, or Peninsular Malaysia. The Malay speak *Bahasa Malaysia*, a Malay dialect. Many also speak English fluently.

### Livelihood

Before Malaysia's independence in 1957, most Malays were farmers or fishermen. Except for a small elite class, Malays were poor. The status of Malays changed dramatically after independence, however. Universal access to education and an aggressive affirmative action plan called the *New Economic Policy* lifted Malays into professions once closed to them and created a large Malay middle class.

Today, it is normal for Malays, both men and women, to attend university, and many pursue higher degrees. While some Malays are still farmers, they are now found in every profession, including the science and technology fields considered key to Malaysia's growing economy. Malays dominate in politics, the civil service, the armed forces and the police.

### Culture



Shopping is a favorite Malay pastime, and Malaysia boasts a large number of fancy shopping complexes. Malays also like to visit the *pasar malam*, the "night market," where they purchase a variety

of Malaysian delicacies, including aromatic durian fruit.

In the evening, Malay men enjoy sitting at coffee shops, sipping sweet *teh tarik*, Malaysia's unofficial national drink. Women gather at home, enjoying Korean soap operas and *American Idol*.

While many women still wear the traditional *baju kurung*, a brightly-colored Malay dress,

young women often prefer jeans and long-sleeved t-shirts, usually accompanied by a matching *tudung*, or headscarf.

### Beliefs

According to the Malaysian constitution: "To be Malay is to be Muslim." All Malays are, according to their national identification cards, Muslim. They have no other choice.

Malays in this region began to practice Islam around 1430 AD, when the ruler of Malacca was converted. Many of the first Muslim missionaries came on Arab merchant ships and practiced a mystical Sufi Islam tolerant of local customs and beliefs. For this reason, Malays in the past tended to practice a "soft" form of Islam that incorporated traditional animistic and Hindu elements. In recent years, however, Malays have increasingly sought to "purify" Islam in Malaysia.

Malays are proud of their Muslim identity, and many conscientiously practice the five central tenets, or Pillars of Islam. On Friday, the Muslim day of prayer, Malay men congregate at mosques in their "Friday best," wearing black velvet hats and a sarong or *baju Melayu* instead of trousers. Those who have performed the Pilgrimage to Mecca wear a white skullcap. Malays also tend to be careful to observe Muslim dietary laws, as well as the Ramadan fast.



The Good News cannot be shared openly with Malays because it is illegal to proselytize Muslims in Malaysia. The government has banned many Malay religious books, including versions of the Malay Bible. Malay followers of Jesus have suffered social ostracism and the loss of legal rights, privileges and jobs. Some have been detained and sent to "reeducation" centers. Others have received death threats and been forced to flee the country.

A few Malay followers of Jesus meet together in house groups or multi-ethnic churches, but at the present time, there are no viable Malay fellowships.

For more information about the Malays, visit: [www.apeopleloved.com/malaysia](http://www.apeopleloved.com/malaysia)



Population: 15 million  
Location: Malaysia  
Languages: Malay, English

### Prayer Points

**Praise** God for Malay followers of Jesus who persevere despite family and government opposition.

**Pray** for Chinese-background followers of Jesus in Malaysia to develop a passion for sharing the Good News with their Malay neighbors. May they set aside the fear and the long-standing ethnic tensions that keep them from reaching out.

Privileged and prosperous, Malays are not desperate for God. Many seem uninterested in religion as more than a cultural routine. **May** Malays realize their spiritual poverty and become interested in hearing the Good News.

**Pray** that Malays would decide to follow Jesus, and that vibrant indigenous communities of faith would be established, reaching out to their own people group and beyond.