

BRUNEI



BRUNEI DARUSSALAM MEANS "BRUNEI ABODE OF PEACE." IT IS A TINY NATION OF SOME 5,270 SQUARE KILOMETERS, WEDGED BETWEEN THE EAST MALAYSIAN STATES OF SABAH AND SARAWAK ON THE NORTHWEST COAST OF THE ISLAND OF BORNEO.

population

- Population: 380,000
- Density: 72 per sq km
- 67% Malay; 15% Chinese; 6% indigenous; 12% other

(Statistics: CIA World Factbook, 2006)

Nearly 70 percent of Brunei's population are Malays. The Brunei Malays are part of a larger population of 25 million Malay people found across Southeast Asia in Peninsular Malaysia, South Thailand, Sumatra, Borneo and Singapore.

religions

- Muslim 67%
- Christian 11.25%
- Buddhist 9.09%
- Traditional ethnic 5%
- Chinese religions 5.3%
- Non-religious/other 1.22%
- Hindu 0.84%
- Baha'i 0.3%

(Statistics: CIA World Factbook, 2006)

language

Brunei's official language is Malay, although English is widely used for commerce. Dialects of the Chinese and Indian populations and of indigenous ethnic groups in the interior are also spoken.

climate

Brunei has a humid, tropical climate, with daily temperatures of 80-95°F (27-35°C). The monsoon season comes between November and March. Brunei

is not troubled by earthquakes or typhoons and generally not by industrial haze.

history

Brunei's recorded history begins with the Sultanate of Brunei in the 14th century. However, historical references in Chinese and Hindu chronicles refer to an earlier trading kingdom situated at the mouth of the Brunei River.

The first sultan, Alak Betatar, embraced Islam and changed his name and title to Sultan Muhammad Shah. He ruled from 1363-1402. Over the next 200 years Brunei gained power, controlling all Borneo and parts of the southern Philippines.

During the 17th and 18th centuries Brunei's power waned as European colonial power increased in Asia. In 1839 the English adventurer and former soldier James Brooke helped the Sultan of Brunei to put down a rebellion. As a reward he was made Rajah and Governor of Brunei (later known as the "White Rajah"). Brunei lost territory during his time in office.

In 1888 Brunei became a British protectorate and in 1946 Sarawak was ceded to the British government as a crown colony. Brunei became a self-governing state in 1959 and the fully independent state of Brunei Darussalam in 1984.

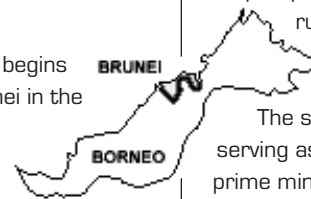
Oil was discovered in 1929 in Seria, on the northwestern coast, and the

kingdom was set on its rise to economic ascendancy. The 28th sultan, Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddin, led Brunei towards prosperity and modernity during his rule from 1950-1967. His son, Hassanal Bolkiah, is the present sultan.

The sultan is absolute monarch, serving as head of the government, prime minister, minister of home affairs, commander and chief of the armed forces and head of Islam in Brunei. He is widely respected by the people.

While there are no general elections and no criticism of the government is permitted, small democratic changes have been introduced recently. (All democratic structures were suspended in 1962 and a "state of emergency" still exists.) The legal system is based on English common law, but for Muslims, Shari'a law supersedes civil law in some areas.

The population of Brunei is considered among the wealthiest in Asia, with an average annual income in excess of US\$25,160. The kingdom's immense wealth largely results from the income from its oil and natural gas fields. For Brunei citizens, education and health care is free. There is also no income tax, and housing subsidies are readily available. There is no poverty. Large numbers of Malays are employed in government jobs, as well the oil industry. Malays are given preference when applying for government jobs. However, many are still found in traditional roles as fishermen and



10 W, Dry Creek Circle, Littleton, CO 80120-4413
Tel.: 303.730.4160 E-mail: info@omf.org
Website: www.us.omf.org

boatmen.

The Malays of Brunei value family and community life and many enjoy a traditional lifestyle. They are renowned for their generous and gracious hospitality. A strong commitment to Islam is very obvious in Brunei, but in common with Malays across Southeast Asia, they live in harmony with those of other faiths.

The pervasive concept of the “Malay Muslim Monarchy” seeks to integrate Islam, Malay language and culture, and the monarchy.

christianity

The Borneo Church Mission (later absorbed into SPG) was established in

England in 1846, with the aim of sending Anglican missionaries to Borneo. The first missionaries arrived in 1848 at the invitation of James Brooke, and Brunei was absorbed into the Diocese of Labuan (a nearby island and British crown colony). Brunei is still part of an Anglican Communion Diocese.

The Roman Catholic church has also been established in Brunei for over 100 years. However, all Catholic monks and nuns were expelled in 1991. Three Australian missionaries, Hudson Southwell, Frank Davidson and Carey Tolley, established the Borneo



Evangelical Mission in Sarawak in 1928 (a work that led to the birth of Sidang Injil Borneo, or SIB Church.) Today SIB churches are also found in Sabah and Peninsular Malaysia, but the SIB has no legal presence in Brunei. A significant number of Christians in Brunei attend one of several Anglican churches in

Brunei, while others are affiliated with a growing number of independent congregations. Evangelical Christians number 4.6 percent of the total population.

The Chinese population largely follows Chinese religions but 15 percent are Christian. Among the tribal peoples, many have converted to Islam. Others, notably in jungle villages, are Christian.

The Malay population is Sunni Muslim. Brunei is an Islamic state and Islam is obligatory for all Malays. The Religious Affairs Department actively and strictly regulates the practices of Islam, as well as monitoring the activities of other religions.

Christian witness and work by foreigners is not permitted and while Christians may convert to Islam, Muslims are forbidden to convert to another religion.

Although religious tolerance is enshrined in the constitution, Christian activities are carefully controlled. There are only a handful of Malay believers in Brunei and they face severe persecution. Witnessing to Muslims is illegal. While there are only a few officially registered churches in Brunei, many Christians from other ethnic backgrounds meet secretly.

It has often happened that Christian meetings and homes have been raided by the religious police in an effort to close down such illegal activities. Thus, the religious atmosphere in Brunei is repressive.

The Education Department is at the forefront of actively and vigorously pursuing the complete Islamization in Brunei by insisting that Islam is taught to all pupils at every level. This is something the traditional “mission” or church schools have tried to resist.

how to pray

- The Sultan of Brunei is reputed to be the world’s wealthiest man. Pray for him and his family, and all those in authority. Pray for political liberalization.
- Pray for the thousands of Muslims who go to the magnificent Hassanil Bolkiah Mosque to pray each day—that they would have a life-changing encounter with Jesus. Pray for Malays to hunger after God.
- The church in Brunei has endured some difficulties in recent years. Foreigners are not permitted to carry out Christian work in Brunei, even on a short visit. Pray for Brunei’s Christians and churches, that they may demonstrate the love of Christ.
- Pray for unity, courage and wisdom. *Operation World* says, “The pressure has increased the earnestness of many and a moving of the Holy Spirit among locals and Filipinos is reported.”
- Pray especially for St Andrew’s Church. Several congregations meet under its roof and its influence is strategic.
- Pray for Christian leaders in Brunei. Ask the Lord to provide mature leaders and Bible teachers.
- It is illegal to import Bibles and Christian literature into Brunei. Pray that existing Bibles, books and materials may be used wisely and may reach all who need them.
- Pray for the non-Christian majority of Brunei, including the Malays, the Chinese, indigenous peoples and expatriates. The Chinese are largely regarded as foreigners, even those who have been born in Brunei.
- Bruneian students attend university in countries such as Malaysia, Australia and the UK. Pray that they will be welcomed by Christians and may have the opportunity to hear the gospel. Pray for those who commit their lives to Christ abroad and return home to live and work in Brunei.