

Faces Of Indonesia

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Balinese, Sundanese, Irianese, Savunese, Sasaks, Bataks and transmigrants. Dyaks and Danis. Madurese and Torajans. The names are as exotic and enigmatic as are the individuals themselves, all blended to form a people called Indonesians.

With skins ranging in hue from creamy yellow to ebony, they have black hair that is straight and long, scalp-hugging and kinky, or somewhere in between. Some have round, cherubic faces while others sport high cheekbones and piercing eyes. In the cities and towns the people are noticeably tall and robust while in the villages they are smaller, more slender.

Their ancestors are Chinese, Arabic, mainland Asian, Indochinese, Polynesian, Papuan, Portuguese and Dutch; and even many of the simpler folk speak as many as five languages—their village dialects and Bahasa Indonesia at the least; some Javanese and

Sundanese if they live in Jakarta; and English if they've been to school.

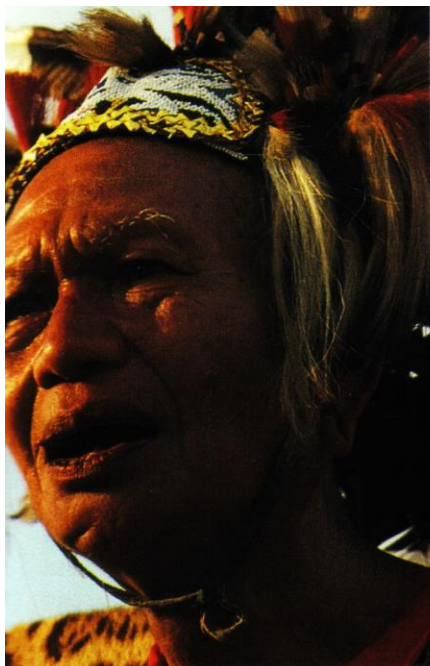
They wear textiles called songkets interwoven with golden threads, batik sarongs made from silk or cotton, and *ikat* woven from pineapple fibres; on their feet are Gucci shoes or rubber sandals. Some wear heavy brass rings in their ears, boar tusks in their noses, tattoos on their bodies, rice-flour paste on their faces; while others wear designer jewellery.

The women string beads, weave textiles, plait leaves or throw pots, while the men hunt with spears, blowpipes, dogs or mobile telephones, or they carve ornaments out of seashells, wood, bone, leather, buffalo horn or lava rock.

They are lumberjacks, rice farmers, midwives, fisherman and palm tappers. But they are also lawyers, dentists, secretaries, taxi drivers, engineers and hoteliers. They export copra, oil, coffee, tea, pepper, rattan and garlic.

They celebrate Christmas, the Muslim Idd, Lunar New Year, the Balinese Nyepi and the Buddhist Waisak Day, in mosques, temples, cathedrals, churches and places of worship, besides other traditional festivals. They

A cross-section of the people of Indonesia representing (from the left) Lombok, Bali, Sumatra, Flores, Kalimantan, Ujung Pandang, Sulawesi, Maluku and Irian Jaya



also commemorate the anniversary of their nation's independence, enjoy the finals of the annual yacht race from Darwin to Ambon, and rally to support favoured jockeys in bull races on Madura.

Most eat rice but no pork; some eat sago and no rice. They also supplement their diets with dried sea cucumber, buffalo meat simmered in coconut milk, pancakes and kebabs from Arabia, noodles normally found in China, curries first brought by Indian traders, and fruits and vegetables introduced by Europeans. And although their country is famous for its *ristaffel*, a 30–40 course Indonesian feast, few Indonesians have ever been invited to one.

They cultivate coconut palms in the west, lontar palms in the east, and papayas and bananas just about everywhere. In the hills some grow apples, grapes and berries, while in the forests durians are up for grabs.

In the east the dry season lasts up to nine months; in some places in the west the rain barely stops. While the nation straddles the equator, on one island there are glaciers; and although 60 per cent of their country is water, most Indonesians are unable to swim and only a few are seafarers.

They live in highlands, swamps, savannas, rainforests, on the slopes of volcanoes, or at the foot of a snow-capped mountain in houses made of wood, bamboo or brick, built on stilts on land, cantilevered over water, or divided into male and female sides.

The roofs are thatched or are curv-

ed upward in the shape of buffalo horns, are made of corrugated tin, or are tile.

They travel by motorcycle, foot, horse cart, BMW or pedicab by land, and traverse myriad waterways in outriggers, wooden schooners, water taxis, dugout canoes or public ferries.

Their entertainment is the Ramayana epic played out with shadow puppets or living souls, Monkey and Barong Dances, and magic shows called *debus* put on by mystical performers. But they also like the street music they call *dangdut*, jazz and rock 'n roll as well as traditional songs played on guitars, gongs, flutes or stringed instruments constructed from palm leaves.

With all their facets, extremes, contrasts, contradictions and contrarities what could these people possibly have in common? For the majority there is pride in a complex blend of each individual's culture and his country. For everyone, there is the state ideology that mandates unity and the responsibility and co-operation of each person to the whole. There is the promise of social and cultural equality. There is a common love of children and respect for the elderly. And in nearly every village, town or city, ready smiles are the reward for genuine interest. Blend them all together and the result is a complex convergence—the people called Indonesians. G

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