

Mission Atlas Project

Cocos (Keeling) Islands

Snapshot

Country Name: Territory of Cocos (Keeling) Islands

Country Founded In: The islands are a territory of Australia and they celebrate Australia's Independence Day, January 26, 1788.

Population: 628 (as of July 2005)

Government Type: Based on the laws of Australia, however they do have some local laws.

Geography: Southeastern Asia, a group two atolls with 27 coral islands in the Indian Ocean. They are located southwest of Indonesia, about half way between Australia and Sri Lanka.

Number of People Groups: 3

Picture of Flag:



unofficial local flag

Religion Snapshot: They are 80% Sunni Muslims and 20% other

Government interaction with religion:

<http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook>

Basic Facts

Demographics: As of 2005, there were 628 people on the Cocos Islands. These inhabitants are made up of ethnic Europeans and ethnic Cocos Malays. There are an estimated 100-120 Europeans living on West Island and between 550-600 Malays living on Home Island.

Language: Both English and a Cocos dialect of Bahasa Malay are spoken.

Society/ Culture: The first people brought to the Islands were predominantly Malay with some people of Chinese, Papuan, and Indian descent. It is also believed that among

the first settlers were people from Bali, Bima, Celebes, Madura, Sumbawa, Timor, Sumatra, Pasir-Kuta, Malacca, Penang, Batavia, and Cerebon. The society that exists today has been held together for over eight generations due to isolation, shared economic dependence, family loyalty, Islam, and their unique dialect of Malay. Few outsiders have lived among them and little has been recorded of their practices and traditions. The Cocos Malay people have lived separate from the Europeans since their first generation and have had their own mosques, leaders, and ceremonies.

The cornerstone of life among the Cocos Malay people is their adherence to Islam. About 80% of those living on the Cocos Islands are Sunni Muslims. Most of the Muslims reside on Home Island. Most practice its teachings and observances.

Some of the celebrations that take place are house blessings, welcomes, farewells, boat launchings, remembrances of deceased relatives, circumcisions, Koran readings, and other family events. The most celebrated tradition among the Cocos Malay people is the celebration of *Hari Raya Puasa*, which marks the day Ramadan ends. There are, however, some foods, dances, and musical influences that can be traced back to European influence.

Food is typically Malay. Dishes include a selection of rice, noodles, curry, chili, chicken, beef, lamb, and seafood. The Cocos Malay are rural people, living together in small villages, known as *kampungs*. Most are farmers, growing coconuts, pawpaws, vegetables, and bananas.

Courtesy is very important to the Malay people. Commitments and loyalty to groups are not as important as being courteous. There are no kinship groups among the Malay. In general, they are known to be kind towards women, children, and animals. Most Malay are polite, introspective, slow to speak, and passive. When angered, however, they may lose self control and go into a frenzy.

Cleanliness is valued, and most homes are well kept. Marriage is also important to the Malay people, and every person is expected to marry. According to Islamic law, a man may take up to four wives, however, this is not commonly practiced among them. Marriages are typically arranged, however, the consent of both parties is required.

There are some cultural things to consider if visiting the Cocos Islands. Visitors should dress conservatively out of respect to the Muslim community when visiting Home Island. A visitor should cover his or her shoulders and knees. Shoes should always be removed when entering a house or mosque. Using the left hand for eating, giving, or receiving is not polite. It is best to use the right hand for most things, especially in shaking someone's hand. Also, it is disrespectful to touch someone on the head. Unless the front door of a house is open, it is more polite to go around to the back door than to knock on the front door.

Among the Anglo-Australian and British living on the islands, approximately 70% of them are Christian adherents, with about 50% of those being evangelical.

Government: The government of the Keeling Islands is based on the laws of Australia. They do, however, have some local laws. Governing of the islands is based on the Cocos (Keeling) Islands Act of 1955. The executive branch is made up of the chief of state, Queen Elizabeth II. She has been chief of state since February 6, 1952 and is represented by the Australian governor general.

The head of government, who represents the monarch and Australia, is Administrator Evan Williams. He was appointed to this office on November 1, 2003 by the governor general of Australia. Neil Lucas was appointed by the Governor General as the nonresident administrator of the Cocos Islands and Christmas Tree Island on January 30, 2006.

The legislative branch of the Cocos Islands is unique to the islands. It is made up of the unicameral Cocos Islands Shire Council, which is made up seven seats. Terms last four years, however, approximately half of the council retires every two years. Elections for the council are held every two years to replace those who retire. The judicial branch is made up of a Supreme Court and the Magistrate's Court. Australia is responsible for the defense of the islands, however, they do have a five person police force.

Economy: The economy of the Cocos Islands is mostly dependent on coconuts. This is their only cash crop and coconuts along with copra are their major exports. Some of their food supply is provided by crops from small gardens and fishing, however, most of their food supplies and necessities are imported from Australia. Some of their main crops are vegetables, bananas, and pawpaws. Some living on the islands are employed by the Cocos Islands Cooperative Society as construction workers, stevedores, and lighterage workers. Fresh water resources are limited to rainwater accumulations in natural underground reservoirs.

The tourism industry employs some of the islanders; however, it is a small, but growing industry. Currently, there are only three restaurants on the island, one serving more western dishes. Stores are limited and keep varied hours.

Literacy:

Land/Geography: The Cocos Islands are in Southeastern Asia. They are a group of two atolls with 27 coral islands in the Indian Ocean. They are located southwest of Indonesia, about half way between Australia and Sri Lanka. The islands make up an area of 14.2 km, an area about 24 times the size of the Mall in Washington DC. They are made up of flat, low lying coral atolls. Only Home Island and West Island are inhabited. There are no rivers or lakes on either of the atolls and fresh water resources are limited to rainwater accumulations in natural underground reservoirs

Brief History of the Cocos Islands

The Cocos, or Keeling, Islands were discovered by Captain William Keeling in 1609. While his discovery was in the early seventeenth century, they remained uninhabited until the 19th century, when they became the possession of the Clunies-Ross family. Slaves were brought from Indonesia and East Asia to work the coconut plantation. Alexander Hare and Captain John Clunies-Ross both set up compounds on the island and owned slaves. Hare severely mistreated the slaves he brought over and many escaped to work under Clunies-Ross, who was known to treat slaves better and provide better work conditions.

Alexander Hare brought the first people to the Islands. They were predominantly Malay with some people of Chinese, Papuan, and Indian descent. It is also believed that among the first settlers were people from Bali, Bima, Celebes, Madura, Sumbawa, Timor, Sumatra, Pasir-Kutai, Malacca, Penang, Batavia, and Cerebon.

The society that exists today has been held together for over eight generations due to isolation, shared economic dependence, family loyalty, Islam, and their unique dialect of Malay. Few outsiders have lived among them and little has been recorded of their practices and traditions. The Cocos Malay people have lived separate from the Europeans since their first generation and have had their own mosques, leaders, and ceremonies.

On April 1, 1836, Captain Robert FitzRoy arrived on the HMS Beagle to take soundings and establish the profile of the atoll. Traveling with FitzRoy was the naturalist Charles Darwin. He believed that the results of FitzRoy's findings confirmed his theory of how atolls formed. In 1857, the Islands were brought under the British Empire, and in 1867, control was given to the Straits Settlements, which later became Singapore. In 1886, Queen Victoria granted the Islands to the Clunies-Ross family.

On November 9, 1914, the Cocos Islands became the site of one of the first naval battles in World War 1, the Battle of Cocos. The SMS Emden, a German light cruiser, attacked the telegraph station on Direction Island. The Emden was destroyed within hours by the HMAS Sydney, an Australian cruiser.

In 1942, after the Fall of Singapore during World War 2, the Islands were administered under Ceylon, or Sri Lanka. West Islands and Direction Island were put under Allied military control. On May 8-9 of 1942, the Ceylon Garrison Artillery on Horsburgh Island rebelled; however, this Cocos Islands Mutiny was quickly stopped. Three of the rebels became the only British Commonwealth soldiers executed for mutiny during World War 2. In 1946, control of the islands was given back to Singapore.

The Cocos (Keeling) Islands Act of 1955 transferred the Cocos Islands to Australian control on November 23, 1955. In 1978, Australia entered a purchase agreement with the Clunies-Ross family. This gave those on the islands more autonomy and gradually lessened the position of the Clunies-Ross family.

On July 1, 1992 the Territories Law Reform Act the Cocos Islands under Western Australian laws. In 1992, the Local Government Ordinance established the Shire of the Cocos (Keeling) Islands. The Shire Council took on all the assets, liabilities, rights, and obligations that the former Cocos Islands Council had previously taken on.

Christian History

Non-Christian Religions

According to Malay law, a Malay is a person who belongs to any Malayan race who speaks Malay and professes the Muslim religion. About 80% of those living on the Cocos Islands are Sunni Muslims. Most of the Muslims reside on Home Island. The first people brought to the Islands were predominantly Malay with some people of Chinese, Papuan, and Indian descent.

The cornerstone of life among the Cocos Malay people is their adherence to Islam. Most practice its teachings and observances. Some of the celebrations that take place are house blessings, welcomes, farewells, boat launchings, remembrances of deceased relatives, circumcisions, Koran readings, and other family events. The most celebrated tradition among the Cocos Malay people is the celebration of Hari Raya Puasa, which marks the day Ramadan ends. There are, however, some foods, dances, and musical influences that can be traced back to European influence.

Atheism/ Non-religious

Christian cults and sects

Protestants/ Evangelicals/ Pentecostals

Among the Anglo-Australian and British living on the islands, approximately 70% of them are Christian adherent, with about 50% of those being evangelical. There are an estimated 100-120 Europeans living on West Island.

People Groups in the Midway Islands

8205

Anglo-Australian (100)

There may be up to 100 Anglo-Australians living on the Islands, mostly living on West Island. Their language is English and their religion as least nominally Christian.

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British (60)

Among the Anglo-Australian and British living on the islands, approximately 70% of them are Christian adherent, with about 50% of those being evangelical. There are about 60 British living on the islands, mostly on West Island. Their language is English.

8206

Cocos Malay, Cocos Islander (500-600)

The Cocos Malay are of the Malay people cluster. They can also be called Javar, Malao-Polynesian, Melaju, or Melayu. There are currently no Christian resources available to them in their heart language.

The cornerstone of life among the Cocos Malay people is their adherence to Islam.. About 80% of those living on the Cocos Islands are Sunni Muslims. Most of the Muslims reside on Home Island. It is unknown how many believers are among them and it is estimated that about 0.20% may be evangelical.

Courtesy is very important to the Malay people. Commitments and loyalty to groups are not as important as being courteous. There are no kinship groups among the Malay. In general, they are known to be kind towards women, children, and animals. Most Malay are polite, introspective, slow to speak, and passive. When angered, however, they may lose self control and go into a frenzy. Cleanliness is valued, and most homes are well kept. Marriage is also important to the Malay people, and every person is expected to marry. According to Islamic law, a man may take up to four wives; however, this is not commonly practiced among them. Marriages are typically arranged, however, the consent of both parties is required.

Missiological Implications

1. Evangelical Christians should take care to consider cultural matters if visiting the Cocos Islands. Visitors should dress conservatively out of respect to the Muslim community when visiting Home Island. A visitor should cover his or her shoulders and knees. Shoes should always be removed when entering a house or mosque. Knock around to the back door than to knock on the front door.
2. Evangelical Christians should consider the evangelization of women in this area. Workers among Muslims have recently suggested that only 6 out of 200 believers in the Muslim world are women. Obviously, Christianity should engage in efforts to reach entire families. Among the Cocos Malay, it takes women to reach women, however, just targeting Muslim women would only reverse the problem. Entire families need to be reached and disciplined. Missionaries need to work as families to model Christian families for non-believers and new believers. They need to see what a Christian husband looks like and how he honors and protects his wife and family. They need to see how a Christian wife acts and speaks respectfully to her husband. They even need to see how a Christian child respects the parents and how he or she is brought up. A Christian family will stand out on the islands, and will gain much respect. As a Muslim man is exposed to a Christian family and strong marriage, he will see a beautiful picture of Christ and the church in the wife's voluntary submission to a loving husband, who constantly lays down his life for her needs and desires. This will not only be a picture of the Gospel, but will also show him that he has nothing to fear in the liberation of women in Christ. Muslims do notice that Christian marriages are different than

their own, so living out a strong marriage in front of a Muslim can be a powerful witness. If God is in a home, He will shine through even when the family is simply going about their daily lives. Harold R. Cook says, "When a couple goes out to the mission field, its witness to Christ and the Christian life is more than that of two individuals. Something else has been added. It is their joint witness as a Christian family. Here is a place where one and one equals more than two."

With a few exceptions, Muslim women do not want to hear that Christians have come to free them from their lives that are perceived by Westerners as horrible. C.M. Amal suggests that people change their focus from thinking of challenges facing Muslim women to those facing women in today's Muslim world. Both Muslim and Christian women are concerned about the things that make up daily life. Muslim women think, act, and react like women. Women, Muslim, Christian, or other, face the same problems, only in a different setting. It is where and how the solutions are looked for that has more relevance to religion.

Of women surveyed by Debi Bartlotti, three common emotions arose repeatedly. The first is a sense of powerlessness. In reaction, some women look to the darker side of Islam, go to shrines, and buy amulets. They seek to gain power by pronouncing curses. The second common emotion that comes up is fear. Muslim women fear gossip, slander, shame, and dishonor. In addition, women in Folk Islam settings fear evil spirits, the evil eye, and death. The third common emotion is a lack of identity.

A missionary must be careful not to further isolate the women that she is trying to serve. Sometimes, going to a woman's house for a long visit can create gossip, and hurt the woman's honor. In areas where this is a possibility, it is best to ask the women to set boundaries for you. Let her decide when, where, and for how long you meet. Respect a sudden change in plan. If a missionary senses that the woman is uncomfortable, she should mention this to the woman and consider leaving. Share about religious things only with permissions and be careful when giving them religious materials to keep. If religious materials are found by a husband or other family member, this could bring the woman danger or end the missionary's privilege to have contact with the woman. Further, it is the task of Christian women to take the Gospel to Muslim women. There are very few circumstance where it would be appropriate for a man to speak alone to a woman about spiritual issues. A man speaking with a woman about such matters could dishonor both him and the Muslim woman and possibly put them in danger.

3. Evangelical Christians must seek to change and improve the way Christians are perceived by these people. One of the biggest challenges facing those seeking to work with Muslims is how Christians are perceived. Muslims believe that Christians have perverted historical data as well as their Scriptures, with a bias against Islam. Both Muslim men and women view Christian women as undesirable. Many Muslims see them as disrespectful to their husbands, immodest, treated badly by Christian men, and sexually loose. In addition, women without children are seen as not truly feminine. For the most, Muslims think all Americans are Christians. Furthermore, all Americans are like those represented by television shows like Bay Watch, MTV, or the new reality shows. If an Afghani asks if you are a Christian, it is better to ask them what they mean when they say "Christian." This will likely open a door to explain what it really means to be a follower of Christ.

Because of the western stereotype, many Muslims do not expect Christians to be able to meet the cultural requirements for decency. It is hard to get an accurate feel for what really is acceptable. For example, one may be told that a certain way of dressing is an acceptable way of dressing in public, however when pressed, the Muslim may say, "It is okay for YOU to wear that, but I never would." Therefore, Christians cannot assume that a certain behavior or dress is acceptable just because they are told by the locals that it is. All situations and behaviors must be analyzed before accepting them as suitable. Since acceptable practices vary from culture to culture, it is best for missionaries to find a local mentor to help them. Any time a question arises, ask the mentor what he or she would do and why. This will help decrease costly mistakes.

4. Evangelicals should hold up these people in prayer. The first step to removing this barrier, or any other, is prayer. The battle is a spiritual one, so missionaries need prayer to face it. Second, to help dispel these misconceptions, it is important for missionaries to live an incarnational life-style. Muslims must have contact with strong Christian families. Christians must live open and transparent lives before their Muslim friends and neighbors. The more contact a Christian has with a Muslim, the better the opportunity to share what devoted followers of Christ should look like. A Christian should study the culture and know what is offensive and avoid those behaviors. They should refrain from eating pork or drinking alcohol in the presence of a Muslim, as this is very offensive. Likewise, men or women wearing shorts or tight fitting clothing is not appropriate.
5. Evangelical Christians must come to know, understand, and respect Muslims. Christians must know and understand the individual Muslim. Muslims on the Cocos Islands, even though they are of the same people group, can be very different; therefore it is important not to generalize. In order to avoid this, each

individual must be understood. Spend time asking open ended questions in order to learn of their background. This will allow you to address the person's needs, hopes, and fears in a more specific way. Ask what they believe and why. Try to understand how their family and relationships are affected by their faith. Understand their struggles and show genuine concern. Care about them as people and friends, and not just a project or someone to convert. Since many will be suspicious about the motives of a Christian or an American, it is important to show concern for them as people. If a Christian says or implies that he or she is there to convert the Muslim or to "save their soul", the Muslim will likely be defensive. It is better to acknowledge the differences of religion and use common ground to develop trust. It is important for Christians to be honest in acknowledging that they are followers of Christ, but not to go on to say that they are there to change the Muslim's religion. While this is the hope of many missionaries, it is better to say that the reason for being there is because they are committed followers of God and they believe God has brought them to the place they are serving to love and help Muslims. This will help lower the defense of the Muslim community in which the missionary serves, but only if those words are followed by loving and helpful actions.

6. Evangelical Christians must provide a social place for converts to Christianity. If a Muslim converts to Christianity, it is important to respect local customs, or Christians will lose even more respect. For example, it may not be wise to encourage a Muslim woman who has become a believer to stop veiling. Since veiling is not in opposition to the teachings of the Bible, to encourage her to stop, would just be to make her more western and not more Christian. If the woman does unveil and her husband and family are not believers, this creates a lot of problems and confirms that Christian women disrespect their husbands. The women can be seen as morally loose and in rebellion. This is not the message Christians want to give. A new convert's testimony will have no value if the first sign of his or her faith is perceived as rebellion and immorality.

7. Evangelical Christians should develop a plan for sharing the good news with followers of Islam. In discussing religion, it is important to remember that it is better to lose the battle in order to win the war. Muslims can have a great sense of pride in themselves as well as their religion, and to damage this could be detrimental to the relationship a Christian is trying to establish.

When having theological discussions, do not focus on the difference between the religions or quickly raise issues that would cause an argument. For example, referring to Jesus as the Messiah or the Spirit of God would be acceptable to a Muslim since those are titles the Quran gives Him. Referring to Him as the Son of God, however, would be considered blasphemy and the Muslim would be offended. Starting with common ground will help to develop understanding and trust in a non-threatening way.

Another important thing to remember is to not demean Islam, Mohammed, or the *Quran* in any way. Doing either of these would lose the respect of the Muslim. It is okay to admit that you do not agree with the views of Islam, but to do something such as calling Mohammed a pedophile or the anti-Christ, as some public figures have done, will quickly shut the door to further communication. Demeaning their prophet or Holy book in any way will anger them and possibly get the missionary kicked out of the country or imprisoned.

Another critical hindrance in work among Muslims is fear. This fear can be with either the missionary or the Muslim. For a person on the Cocos Islands to convert to Christianity could be a huge step that might have severe consequences. In some areas, if someone even thinks a Muslim is considering changing religions, it could mean death or expulsion from the family. Families will kill other family members who turn from Islam to save the honor of the family. In addition, the islands are small and most Muslim only live on Home Island. News travels fast and secrets will be hard to keep. Evangelizing openly could have consequences for any national or international worker the missionary has had contact with. If one person gets caught, it is possible that the entire group that person is associated with will face consequences. For this reason, a missionary must be very careful in meeting with Muslims so as not to endanger them. For a Muslim to be persecuted because he or she converted to Christianity and is standing firm in their faith is one thing; to be persecuted because of contact with a missionary is another. As much as possible, evangelism and discipleship needs to be done through national believers. It is not wise for missionaries to attend the church services of the local believers.

8. Hospitality is another key aspect in working among Muslims. It is a common element among Muslims worldwide, whether in the Middle East or Indonesia. Usually this task falls on the woman of the house. It is important for women to observe and follow the customs of hospitality appropriate for that culture in order to build relationships with Muslims. Not knowing and practicing the customs of hospitality can lead to an appearance of being rude or cold, which could possibly shut the door to further meetings with neighbors and friends.
9. In developing a clear understanding of Muslim women and how they see themselves, Christians can begin forming relationships that will lead to an opportunity to share the gospel. Muslim women need to hear how they are viewed in God's eyes. As mentioned earlier, Muslim women are given the idea that their bodies are polluted and polluting. How refreshing it is for them to hear that Jesus, a respected prophet in Islam, did not view women in that way. Jesus, in Luke 8 reaches his hand to a woman who had been bleeding for twelve years. In fact, Jesus treats women with great care and respect. His story begins with the faith of a woman. As Jesus ministers, He talks with and commends the faith and actions of the women He encounters. He defend them and offers them relationship and undeserved forgiveness. God left His throne in Heaven, becoming the person of

Jesus Christ and served women. The widow of Nain, the Samaritan woman at the well, Peter's mother-in-law, the woman caught in adultery, Jairus's daughter, the woman with a hemorrhage of blood, and the Syro-phoenecian woman are just some of the women Jesus saw fit to love and serve. In addition, the God who created woman, and her body, looked upon it and said it was good, with all its functions.

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Pictures



Photos by Ann Murray

Links

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<http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/ck.html>

<http://www.awm.gov.au/journal/j34/cocosmutiny.htm>
<http://www.shire.cc/>