

### Who are the Makasar?

The Makasar heartland lies at the southern reaches of the southwest peninsula of Sulawesi Island, Indonesia. The Makasar language family includes five languages: Coastal Konjo, Mountain Konjo, Bentong-Dentong, Selayar and Makasar—all distinct people groups.

Makasar sailors and fishermen are known for their outstanding navigational abilities. Like their ancestors, these seafarers navigate using experience and intuition rather than instruments like a sextant or compass. Makasar sailors use ships that Coastal Konjo craftsmen build, wooden ships up to 30 meters (90 feet) or more.

### Culture

Makasar homes are wooden, raised on stilts and clustered together in groups of twenty or more. In the late afternoon, Makasar people can often be seen sitting on the front porch or by the roadside, chatting in small groups. In good weather, young people play soccer, volleyball or badminton. On weekends, city residents and visitors from smaller towns often enjoy strolling through the modern shopping malls of Makassar, the provincial capital of South Sulawesi.

Ancient Makasar writings, the *Lontara*, are still preserved. Originally written on palm leaves, *Lontara* genealogies are consulted when planning weddings, as couples are encouraged to marry a distant relative of appropriate status. The writings also give directions for planting, harvesting and other essentials of Makasar life. Traveling storytellers keep traditional poetic hero myths alive, accompanying their recitals with a two-stringed lute.

Makasar people speak their own Makasar language as well as *Bahasa Indonesia*, the Indonesian national language.

### Livelihood

For centuries, the Makasar have engaged in seafaring. Many Makasar also fish, sadly sometimes using dynamite that damages coral ecosystems. In the district of Jeneponto coastal villagers produce salt by saltwater evaporation, and process seaweed for export. Rice, corn and cassava are cultivated in the interior regions.



Makasar from across the area work in the capital city as tailors and seamstresses, cooks, mechanics, bus and pedicab drivers, shop assistants, housemaids and construction workers. Most lower-class inhabitants of Makassar are of Makasar ethnicity.

### History



Makasar history dates back over 500 years. The seventeenth century saw the greatest expansion of the Makasar empire. It ruled from Borneo to the Maluku Islands and maintained

settlements as far away as Singapore. They traded with New Guinea, the Philippines, Burma, Cambodia, China, Madagascar, Australia and India, and were for several decades the head of the greatest Muslim trading empire in Southeast Asia.

### Beliefs

The Makasar are proud of their Muslim identity. Those who make the pilgrimage to Mecca secure religious and social status. Some Muslim brotherhoods are also influential in urban areas.

Most Makasar, though practicing Muslims, still believe that their ancestors have ongoing influence over their lives. *Sanro* (traditional healers) are commonly consulted during illnesses, which are often attributed to sorcery, witchcraft or unfulfilled vows.

Although followers of Jesus have been reaching out to the peoples of Sulawesi for a hundred fifty years, Makasar followers of Jesus are basically a hidden people. Unfortunately, there is no Makasar church where Makasar believers are a significant majority. Very few of the 150,000 followers of Jesus in the city of Makassar (population 1.3 million) are of Makasar ethnicity.

Over the last one hundred years there have been upwards of ten people movements in various locations in South Sulawesi. Whereas several of those touched on some of the other languages in the Makasar language group, unfortunately none has occurred in the area where Makasar speakers predominantly live.



Population: 1.5 million  
 Location: South Sulawesi, Indonesia  
 Languages: Makasar, Bahasa Indonesia

### Prayer Points

**Pray** that Makasar who follow Jesus would form house fellowships. May they lovingly witness to relatives who oppose them, until those relatives become followers themselves.

**Pray** that Chinese-background followers of Jesus in Makassar would reach out to their Makasar neighbors and employees.

**Pray** for the daily short-wave radio broadcast in the Makasar language to reach many.

**Pray** for more native speakers to help refine the Makasar translation, being readied for publication. May these checkers be convinced by what they read.

**Pray** for more Indonesian and international followers of Jesus to study the Makasar language and culture and to find jobs in Makasar communities. May they provide each other moral and spiritual support amidst the frustrations of reaching out. May God protect them from physical and spiritual challenges, and empower them to share the Good News.

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