History and Culture

If YOU lived there...
You and your friends are strolling through the market in Jakarta, Indonesia, looking for a snack. You have many choices—tents along the street, carts called gerobak, and vendors on bicycles all sell food. You might choose satay, strips of chicken or lamb grilled on a stick. Or you might pick one of many rice dishes. For dessert, you can buy fruit or order an ice cream cone.

What do you like about living in Jakarta?

Building Background Colonial rule helped shape Southeast Asia’s history and culture—including foods. Throughout the region you can see not only a blend of different Asian influences but also a blend of American, Dutch, French, and Spanish influences.

Early History
Southeast Asia lies south of China and east of India, and both countries have played a strong role in the region’s history. Over time, many people from China and India settled in Southeast Asia. As settlements grew, trade developed with China and India.

Early Civilization
The region’s most advanced early civilization was the Khmer (kuh-MER). From the AD 800s to the mid-1200s the Khmer controlled a large empire in what is now Cambodia. The remains of Angkor Wat, a huge temple complex the Khmer built in the 1100s, reflects their advanced civilization and Hindu religion.

In the 1200s the Thai (TY) from southern China settled in the Khmer area. Around the same time, Buddhism, introduced earlier from India and Sri Lanka, began replacing Hinduism in the region.
**Colonial Rule and Independence**

As in many parts of the world, European powers started colonizing Southeast Asia during the 1500s. Led by Portugal, European powers came to the region in search of spices and other trade goods.

In 1521 explorer Ferdinand Magellan reached the Philippines and claimed the islands for Spain. The Spaniards who followed came to colonize, trade, and spread Roman Catholicism. This religion remains the main faith in the Philippines today.

In the 1600s and 1700s Dutch traders drove the Portuguese out of much of the region. Portugal kept only the small island of Timor. The Dutch gained control of the tea and spice trade on what became the Dutch East Indies, now Indonesia.

In the 1800s the British and French set up colonies with plantations, railroads, and mines. Many people from China and India came to work in the colonies. The British and French spread Christianity as well.

In 1898 the United States entered the region when it won the Philippines from Spain after the Spanish-American War. By the early 1900s, colonial powers ruled most of the region, as the map on the next page shows. Only Siam (sy-AM), now Thailand, was never colonized, although it lost land.

In World War II (1939–1945), Japan invaded and occupied most of Southeast Asia. After Japan lost the war, the United States gave the Philippines independence. Soon, other people in the region began to fight for their independence.

One of the bloodiest wars for independence was in French Indochina. In 1954 the French left. Indochina then split into the independent countries of Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam. By 1970, most of Southeast Asia had thrown off colonial rule.

**Reading Check**

**Identifying Cause and Effect** What reasons led other countries to set up colonies across most of Southeast Asia?
Years of war caused millions of deaths and terrible destruction. In the end, North and South Vietnam reunited as one Communist country. As the Communists took over, about 1 million refugees fled South Vietnam. Many went to the United States.

Civil wars also raged in Cambodia and Laos. In 1975 Communist forces took over both countries. The government in Cambodia was brutal, causing the deaths of more than 1 million people there. Then in 1978 Vietnam helped to overthrow Cambodia’s government. This event sparked further fighting, which continued off and on until the mid-1990s. The United Nations then helped Cambodia achieve peace.

**Reading Check** Summarizing What are some key events in the region’s modern history?

**Culture**
The many groups that influenced Southeast Asia’s history also shaped its culture. This diverse culture blends native, Chinese, Indian, and European ways of life.

**People and Languages**
The countries in Southeast Asia have many ethnic groups. As an example, Indonesia has more than 300 ethnic groups. Most of the countries have one main ethnic group plus many smaller ethnic groups.

Not surprisingly, many languages are spoken in Southeast Asia. These languages include native languages and dialects as well as Chinese and European languages.

**Religions**
The main religions in Southeast Asia are Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, and Islam. Buddhism is the main faith on the mainland. This area features many beautiful *wats*, Buddhist temples that also serve as monasteries.
Islam is the main religion in Malaysia, Brunei, and Indonesia. In fact, Indonesia has more Muslims than any other country. In the Philippines, most people are Roman Catholic. Hinduism is practiced in Indian communities and on the island of Bali.

**Customs**

Customs differ widely across the region, but some similarities exist. For example, religion often shapes life, and people celebrate many religious festivals. Some people continue to practice traditional customs, such as dances and music. These customs are especially popular in rural areas. In addition, many people wear traditional clothing, such as sarongs, strips of cloth worn wrapped around the body.

**Reading Check**

**Generalizing** How has Southeast Asia’s history influenced its culture?

**Summary and Preview**

Southeast Asia has a long history that has helped shape its diverse culture. Next, you will read about Mainland Southeast Asia.

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**Section 2 Assessment**

**Reviewing Ideas, Terms, and Places**

1. a. **Describe** What was the significance of the Khmer Empire?
   b. **Identify Cause and Effect** What was the result of the war for independence in French Indochina?
   c. **Elaborate** How did European colonization shape Southeast Asia’s history?

2. a. **Define** What was the domino theory?
   b. **Summarize** What role has communism played in Southeast Asia’s modern history?

3. a. **Define** What is a wat?
   b. **Contrast** How does religion in the mainland and island countries differ?
   c. **Elaborate** How has the history of Southeast Asia shaped the region’s culture?

**Critical Thinking**

4. **Sequencing** Copy the time line shown below. Using your notes, identify on the time line the important people, periods, events, and years in Southeast Asia’s history.

   ![Time Line](image)

5. **Writing Questions about History and Culture** What interesting questions could you ask about the history and culture of Southeast Asia? Write two questions and their answers to add to your notes.