



Sea People Southeast Asia



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Breath-hold Diving
The sea nomads breath-hold dive to collect food and catch fish on the seabed using very little equipment, usually homemade spearguns, wooden goggles and sometimes swimming feet. A fishing tour can last for up to nine hours, with only short breaks for food and water.

Three ethnic groups in Southeast Asia which traditionally live on the sea are Moken, Orang Laut and Bajau Laut. They are known for their seafaring, diving and fishing skills. Today the numbers of sea nomads are dwindling, and the estimated number of houseboats is just over a thousand. Nowadays most people live in small coastal settlements but their lifestyle is still based on marine resources



In 1988 Erika Schagatay visited the village Topa located on the sea in Indonesia. Registrations revealed that these people display a powerful and efficient diving response. Erik Abrahamsson returned to the village in 2011 and found that little had changed. Measurements in the best Bajau fishermen revealed that they spend 60% of the fishing time submerged, and thereby stay up to five hours a day under water (2).



Underwater vision

Some children were observed to dive well at 2-3 years of age, and to collect even small clams without goggles (Schagatay 1991). Anna Gislén studied the underwater vision of Moken children in Thailand, and found the explanation; they can constrict their pupils



much more efficiently than others, thereby obtaining a superior underwater vision (3)



References

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- Gislén, A. et al. (2003) "Superior Underwater Vision in a Human Population of Sea Gypsies" Current Biology 13(10): pp. 833-836

Conclusion

We conclude from our observations in the sea nomads that modern humans possess the necessary adaptations for living an efficient lifestyle based on marine resources largely obtained by diving.

