

**OUR SINGAPORE.**  
ONE PEOPLE, MANY CULTURES

A Peranakan gift shop

The kebaya is a Peranakan blouse made of thin cloth with elaborate embroidery.

Peranakans have a mixed culture that is unique to this part of the world. More than a century ago, some of the foreign traders who came here married local women. Their mixed-race descendants came to be known as "peranakan", which is Malay for "locally born". Most of them have Chinese roots and speak Baba Malay, which mixes Malay and Hokkien. The women are called Nonya and the men, Baba.

Colourful batik prints are popular in Peranakan fashion. Just like the Peranakan community itself, these clothes are a mix of Malay, Chinese, Indian and European influences.

Peranakan beadwork is greatly admired. Peranakan women create the designs on a wooden frame and then attach them to a pair of kasut manek, or beaded slippers. In the past, it wasn't just women who liked such beautiful footwear; men used to wear them as well. Beadwork is also used to decorate bags and other items.

Fancy furniture like this could

be found in some Peranakan houses in old Singapore. Peranakans were quite well-off because they could speak English. They could act as go-betweens for the Europeans and the Chinese-speaking people in Singapore.

Peranakans take food seriously and their highly decorated kitchenware shows it. The green jar is a kam cheng – or Hokkien for covered jar – for containing food. The yellow pot is a spittoon, for spitting betel into. Chewing betel was a popular practice among Peranakans, as well as Indians and other Southeast Asians.

This series by **WHAT'S UP** – Singapore's newspaper for students – takes a closer look at our country's many colourful cultures. Also online at <http://www.whatsup.sg> **'ONE PEOPLE'**.

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