

## **The Houses of the Batak**

The Batak, who live in north Sumatra, are divided into six ethnic groups. Two Batak races, the *Mandailing* and the *Angkola* Batak, became Muslim in the middle of the 19th century, and *Toba* Batak were converted to Christianity in 1864 by the German Rheinisch Missionary Society.

The others kept their native religion, though there have been converts to Islam and Christianity more recently.

The houses of the Toba and Karo are recognizable by their massive style of building construction, which is suited to the way the inhabitants settled more and less permanently.

The stilt house is an eminently practical form of architecture for life in the tropics. Unfortunately, the Toba Batak houses are no longer being built. Earlier, rice stores (*sopo*) were a part of the traditional house, the rumah adat. The *sopo* were very important as status symbols.



***Batak house - Rumah adat, Lake Toba on the Island of Samosir.***

The ornaments put onto the external walls of the house are meant to drive away evil influences. These ornaments consist of anthropomorphic and zoomorphic representations, carved decorative ornaments, and wall paintings.

The colors used are natural colors, the most important being red (from red clay), white (from chalk), and black (from charcoal), which respectively represent the three spheres of the cosmos: the human world, the world of good spirits above, and the underworld.