

Interesting Facts

– The name Cabécar is described by many of their elders to mean this:

Kabé: meaning (Quetzal), which is a bird of bright colors that the Cabécars have been known to eat.

Ká: meaning (place)

– Their culture has remained little changed for over 1500 years.

– To them brushing their teeth is an unknown practice.

– The word leadership and the word love are not found in the Cabécar language. They instead use the word respect for which means both leadership and love.

– When entering into their tribe through rites and certain testings, one receives a predator animals tooth when sworn into the tribe.

– The Cabécar must know what plants and fruits are edible, and what plants provide medicinal help.

The People

– The Cabécars live isolated away from society in the eastern regions of Costa Rica, in the Talamancan mountain ranges.

– They are the largest indigenous people group located in Costa Rica.

– The most recent census taken suggests that there are 20,000 Cabécars living in the jungles of Costa Rica.

Their History

– They have a rich corpus of stories and legends, some of which are written down in Spanish and the Cabécar language.

– The values of what they know and practice have been passed down to them through Cabécar traditions and not primarily through writing.

– They became citizens of Costa Rica in 1991, when they were given permission to have a cédula (identification number) with the free social security that implies.

Their Language

– The original Cabécar language is still spoken next to Spanish.

– It is estimated that more than 70% of the native people, especially the women, speak only Cabécar.

– They have been encouraged to worship God in their own language, Cabécar, rather than in Spanish.

Their Homes

– Some Cabécar homes have been seen to have three bedrooms with 25 people living in it.

– Women cook on an open fire in their kitchen.

– Tropical home gardens surround their homes.

Their Beliefs

- They have a belief in Sibó who they see as their supreme god and creator of the universe.
- The Zutkia, or shaman, plays a multifaceted role in Cabecar culture as priest, magician, metaphysician or healer.
- They celebrate what is called their ‘death feast’.
- They celebrate what is called their ‘re-unions for labor’.
- They have specific core values in their culture. ‘madre tierra’ (mother earth), fuego (fire), agua (water), and niños (children).

Mother Earth, for example, represents the environment in which the Cabecar operate and the requirement for sustainability. Fire is both security and comfort, while Water is the element that connects all communities and the ecosystem of which they are part. Children are central to all aspects of Cabecar life, making succession planning of paramount importance.

- They believe leadership is to teach and to show, and not to dictate.
- Leadership behaviors are the responsibility of all Cabécars.
- They sing their own Cabécara songs to their forest with hopes that it will lead them to understand their identity.
- The Cabécars have rejected electricity as a part of their everyday home life. They enjoy the way they live and do not want to harm their environment by inviting electricity in, thus transforming their ways of life.

Their Desire for God

- The Cabécars have a New Testament Bible that has been written in their own Cabécara language. They are waiting at this moment for the Old Testament translation to be finished.
- More than 500 Cabécars including women carrying their babies traveled for two days to gather together to receive the long awaited New Testament Bible in their own language.
- There are more than 900 genuine believers among the 20,000 Cabécars.
- Many love to read the Word of God.
- Many have turned to faith in Christ after realizing that their religion offers them no hope.
- The Cabécars have a system of purification which can help them understand the work of Christ.

Their Need To Be Reached With the Gospel of Jesus Christ and His Commission

- The Joshua Project classifies the Cabécars with more than 5% evangelicals and accelerating growth of new fellowships.
- The IMB classifies them with greater than 2% evangelicals (just above the unreached peoples status)

Their Land

- The Cabécars live upon land that the Costa Rican government (the Indians development associations) has designated as ‘reservation land’, meaning that it is protected land. Also the government took possession of this land so that squabbles and wars would cease to exist (and they have ceased) between Cabécars and all fellow indigenous groups in the Talamancan mountains.

Their Sustenance Work

- Cabécar husbands and wives and children work together to provide for their sustenance needs through farming animals and cultivating their land to bring forth crops. (The men take charge of clearing land and raising the livestock. And both men and women work together in planting, harvesting, and transporting crops.)
- They raise live stock such as pigs, chickens, turkeys, and ducks for the purpose of food.
- They cultivate crops. agriculture (coffee, cocoa, plantains, and bananas), bird hunting and fishing.
- They use a bow and arrow and a blowgun to hunt prey for food.

Their Community

- The Cabécars live in dispersed patterns throughout their land. They do not live in villages as a community. (For example: one home could be miles upon miles from another home and this is the norm for them)
- They live in family clan communities. (For instance: a husband and wife, cousins, uncles, and aunts, and grandparents, all living under one home, or in a few homes nearby each other.)

Their Image

- As an indigenous people with little contact with the outside world, the Cabécar can sometimes be shy and reclusive; this will influence the amount of time and contact visitors will have with the family. Most step aside from you, keeping their heads down, trying to avoid eye contact, and won't engage in conversations. This is due to them having been an invisible people for so long, having been isolated away from people other than themselves.

Their Physical Needs

- A Cabécar chief was found standing outside a home asking the people inside to help his community.
- The Cabécars seem to have the worst situation and greatest vulnerability when it comes to trying to meet their basic physiological human needs.
- The average amount of school years for a Cabécar is only 3.4 years.
- Life expectancy is a concern. Only 3.4 percent of the Cabécars are older than 65 years of age.
- The Cabécars that live nearest to cities experience 28 percent (a little over 1 in every 4) of their children to die and those beyond modern civilizations experience 49 percent (1 in every 2) of their children to die.

How They Are Being Helped Physically At This Very Moment

- Two men, Daniel Montoya and Hector Soto are helping the Cabécars with their need of food, building supplies, clothing, schools, and medical supplies. They seek to help the Cabécars with their poverty, help them become self sustaining for their community needs, and encourage the Costa Ricans to accept the Cabécars into their communities.
- Earth University is helping by researching their lands to determine which crops would growth best in the soil of their land.
- Groups have traveled to build a model home, having inside of it a chimney. The Cabécars burn an open fire inside their homes, which is causing them to have lung issues, such as asthma.

Challenges They Experience

- Few people make the effort to visit the Cabécars, because the experience to walk to a family clan is a challenge due to the difficult conditions of trails and because it extremely strenuous to walk up mountain ranges and for hours upon hours.
- Many hikes to the Cabécars take 4 to 5 hours and they are quite physically demanding.
- Many Cabécars experience 7 hour hikes to their nearest local store.
- 77 percent of Costa Rica’s inhabitants admitted that they did not know that 22 indigenous territories exist within the borders of their country.
- To reach the homes of the Cabécars it can take three hours of traveling over rivers, and beside them, and then finally reach a zip-line (a high wire attached to two trees across a river) that allows for a person to travel across a treacherous river.
- The smoke drifts through the house and into the children’s lungs, provoking a high incidence of asthma.
- Most communities do not have radios to call if they are in need of emergency assistance. They would need to walk hours to reach a town where there they could call for help.
- Some of the settlements that lie within the reserve are four day’s hard walking. Vehicles have no access or roads, so any movement is restricted to foot, with mule or horse support.
- The malnutrition they suffer from womb to tomb, the precarious living conditions, the restricted medical access due to the distance to the nearest medical centers and unfortunate animal encounters in the wild take their toll on their children.

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