

History of the First Australians 75

The Macassans

Visitors from the North

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Did you know that Australia's First Nations People had contact long ago with people from other countries? This happened long before the First Fleet arrived. Sailing boats came from Asia and Europe. Very old Chinese and African coins have been found in Northern Australia.







Boats came from Indonesia to Australia. They came hundreds of years before Captain Cook arrived. These people were from an island called Sulawesi. They were called the Macassan people. They traded with our First Nations People.







The Macassans were very good sailors and fishers. They sailed to Australia in December to follow the winds. They returned to their island when the winds blew back towards Sulawesi.





The Macassans traded with the First Peoples for the sea slug and use of their waters. The Macassans called the sea slug trepang. The trepang are used for food and medicine. They were smoked and dried by the Macassans and sold to people from China. Trepang is still a common food in China today.



The Macassans – Visitors from the North

The story of the Macassans discusses the First Peoples' early encounters with other peoples, including the early Dutch and Portuguese explorers who visited Australia long before Captain James Cook. The trepang trade continues today with direct links to China. The memory of the Macassan trade with the First Peoples lives on in some of the dances and rock paintings in Northern Australia.



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