

Summary: Ancient Crossroads

Crossroads of Culture

Southeast Asia was a crossroads of the ancient world, a place where people, goods, and ideas from many areas came together. The central position of Southeast Asia made it a likely crossroads of trade. Southeast Asian goods reached India and China. From there, the goods traveled to East Africa and Southwest Asia.

Religious ideas and knowledge spread, too. Skills such as farming and metalworking, as well as art forms, crossed to and from Southeast Asia. Around A.D. 100, traders, Hindu priests, and Buddhist monks brought Indian art, architecture, and religion to Southeast Asia.

Buddhism in Southeast Asia

Buddhism is a major world religion. Its founder was Siddhartha Gautama. He decided to find the causes of human suffering. He began to meditate and gained enlightenment, or religious awakening. He felt he knew the reasons for human suffering and how to escape it. People called him the Buddha, or the Enlightened One.

The basic teachings of Buddhism are the Four Noble Truths: Life is full of pain; suffering comes from the desire for possessions; people won't suffer if they stop desiring possessions; and people can escape suffering by following the Eightfold Path. The Eightfold Path involves striving for the right understanding, purpose, speech, conduct, livelihood, effort, awareness, and meditation.

After the Buddha's death, his followers spread the faith through southern India, Sri Lanka, Southeast Asia, Tibet, central Asia, China, Korea, and Japan.

Indian Influence in Southeast Asia

As the influence of India spread, new images and religious art became part of Southeast Asian culture. Empires were founded on the beliefs of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam.

In the 6th century A.D., the Khmer people established a Hindu kingdom in Cambodia. This kingdom spread through Southeast Asia. Then Buddhism from India began to spread to Southeast Asia. In the 11th century A.D., King Anawrahta established a kingdom in Myanmar.

Before You Read

Find and circle the vocabulary word.

meditate *verb*, to contemplate peacefully to achieve enlightenment

After You Read

REVIEW What are two important skills that were developed in ancient Southeast Asia? Highlight the section that identifies two important skills developed in ancient Southeast Asia.

REVIEW What is one of the Four Noble Truths of Buddhism? Underline the sentences that identify the Four Noble Truths of Buddhism.

REVIEW What effect did India have on Southeast Asia? Draw a box around the paragraph that tells about the effect of India on Southeast Asia.